Theses and Dissertations

December 2013

Carry the Fire: Intersections of Apocalypse, Primitivism, and Masculinity in American Literature, 1945-2000

Dylan Barth
University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee

CARRY THE FIRE:

INTERSECTIONS OF APOCALYPSE, PRIMITIVISM,

AND MASCULINITY IN AMERICAN LITERATURE, 1945-2000

by

Dylan Barth

A Dissertation Submitted in

Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in English

at

The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee

December 2013

ABSTRACT

CARRY THE FIRE:
INTERSECTIONS OF APOCALYPSE, PRIMITIVISM,
AND MASCULINITY IN AMERICAN LITERATURE, 1945-2000

by

Dylan Barth

The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 2013
Under the Supervision of Professor Kristie Hamilton

This dissertation examines American apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic texts from 1945-2000 in order to consider the varying ways that masculinity has been constructed in relation to the imagined primitive. The first chapter provides an overview of studies in apocalypse, primitivism, and masculinity to lay the foundation for the in-depth, critical analyses that follow. The second chapter provides an operational definition of American post-apocalyptic fiction as well as a survey of American post-apocalyptic fiction that includes George Stewart's *Earth Abides*, Richard Matheson's *I Am Legend*, Pat Frank's *Alas, Babylon*, Robert Heinlein's *Farnham's Freehold*, Larry Niven and Jerry Pournelle's *Lucifer's Hammer*, and David Brin's *The Postman*. The remaining chapters focus on analyses of apocalyptic texts, texts that gesture toward apocalypse without explicitly depicting a catastrophic event. The third chapter, therefore, examines Edward Abbey's *Desert Solitaire*, a non-fiction work of nature writing centered on the American Southwest in which Abbey constructs the image of the ecocentric

male whose commitment to deep ecological thinking and a rugged, self-sufficient masculinity become reinforced through direct encounters with the primitive. The fourth chapter considers how William Gibson's cyberpunk novel *Neuromancer* reimagines the intersections of masculinity, primitivism, and apocalypse in the heterotopic sites of cyberspace and through the formulation of the virtual male. The fifth and final chapter analyzes Chuck Palahniuk's *Fight Club*, which employs conventions of the post-apocalyptic genre to highlight the limitations of apocalyptic fantasy and the effects it has upon contemporary men who think encounters with the primitive could allow for more "authentic" approaches to masculinity. Overall, this project highlights several key tensions between white men and men of color, between moral and savage men, and between sheer physical force and strength of mind. The intersections of apocalypse and primitivism, therefore, constitute the figurative territory in which competing constructions of American manhood have been debated in the late twentieth-century.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter One:

Introduction

In the opening scene of Edward Abbey's post-apocalyptic novel *Good News* (1980), the story's protagonist, Jack Burns, and his Harvard-educated, Native American sidekick, Sam, sit around a campfire in the desert of the American southwest, roasting an animal that is described as "part Airedale" and "part coyote." As the two discuss the origins of their meal, Sam tells Jack: "You think too much, boss. Thinking is good but you must not think too much" (7). The conversation continues and Sam decides to play a trick on Jack; he uses sleight-of-hand and hypnotism to turn his knife into what appears to be a rattlesnake: "The blade glitters, flashes; there is a hissing noise, a sudden rasping vibration, and where the knife had been, a rattlesnake appears, its body draped over Sam's shoulder" (7). Jack sees through the illusion, and the two men decide to continue on their quest; they smother the fire, pack up their things, and head towards the city to look for Jack's now-grown son. On the trail, they come across a grim scene that warns them of the dangers ahead. They "look toward the corral a hundred yards away and the tall tower—a skeleton of metal—standing within it. There they see, dangling on a rope, black in silhouette against the eastern sky, the first of the hanged men" (15). The dead men, strung up by followers loyal to the novel's primary antagonist, the Chief, are meant to discourage resistance to the oppressive, militarized regime that has flourished in the ashes of modern America.

Contrast the opening scene of *Good News* with one that appears several chapters later, where two other men—one white and one Apache—also sit near a campfire. In this scene, the two men have bound prisoners accompanying them: "On the other side of the fire, bound and trussed, lie the two young prisoners. The first moans fitfully, semideliriously, moving feebly in his bonds. Blood trickles from his lips, from his ear; his ragged clothes are soaked with sweat and blood" (73). When interrogation does not persuade the wounded prisoner to talk, Sergeant Brock, the white man, commands his Native American subordinate, Corporal Mangus Colorado, Jr., to "finish him off." When Mangus draws a pistol, Brock says: "No, no, not right here, you stupid nigger. Not with a gun. Take him out there ... and use your knife. Don't play around. Just get rid of him" (75). Mangus obeys, and after a moment, there are "a series of grunts from the darkness, a stifled scream. Then silence. The Apache comes back into the firelight, wiping knife blade on his sleeve" (75). The two men then fasten a rope around the legs of the second prisoner—a young boy—and dangle him above the fire to continue their questioning in the service of the Chief.

The contrast between these parallel scenes reveals two varying constructions of white masculinity that are situated in contrast to a racialized Other. Within the frontier-like, post-apocalyptic setting of the novel, both white men establish relationships with Native American men further configured within a wilderness environment. Jack, an aging cowboy figure whose sole purpose is to search for his long-lost son, is shown to be a wise and "thinking" (but not

overeducated) man, and his relationship with his Native American friend Sam,

who uses his knife for parlor tricks and for teaching Jack a lesson rather than for

murder, is depicted in terms of equality and guidance. Sergeant Brock, on the

other hand, who holds a key position in the Chief's military whose end is to

squash local resistance and "rebuild America, to make her once again the world's

foremost industrial, military, and ... spiritual power, an example to mankind of

what human beings, properly organized and disciplined, can accomplish," is not a

"thinking" man but is content with following orders and, in later scenes,

succumbing to his brutish impulses (95). Brock's superior position allows him to

command Mangus and speak to him in racial slurs, while Mangus himself is

characterized as "stupid" and willingly engages in primitive acts of murder and

torture. This example from *Good News* highlights the key tensions that I will

examine within the post-apocalyptic and apocalyptic texts of this study: tensions

between white men and men of color, between moral and savage men, and

between sheer physical force and strength of mind. The intersections of

apocalypse and primitivism, therefore, constitute the figurative territory in which

competing constructions of American manhood have been debated in the late

20th century by authors ranging in stature from George Stewart, Pat Frank and

David Brin to Edward Abbey, William Gibson, and Chuck Palahniuk, in genres as

seemingly unlike as the post-apocalyptic novel, American nature writing,

cyberpunk fiction, and the contemporary realist novel.

*   *   *

The end of the world seems always to be at hand. Apocalyptic thinking has been a central part of American mythology since the country's inception, and despite the regularity of doomsday warnings that inevitably fail to come true, Americans tend to be in perpetual fear (and occasional hope) that the end is near. The majority of apocalyptic warnings have grown out of the historical events, often crises, that spark enormous cultural change. In his early study of the role of apocalypse in American fiction—*Sense of an Ending* (1967)—Frank Kermode writes that in the twentieth-century, crisis was "inescapably a central element in our endeavors towards making sense of our world" (94). The invention of nuclear technology and the resulting proliferation of weapons of mass destruction had an enormous effect on American culture, and the feeling of perpetual crisis embodied in the looming threat of nuclear war naturally led to a surge in apocalyptic thinking and writing. As John R. May puts it in *Toward a New Earth: Apocalypse in the American Novel* (1972):

> even though the imagination of cosmic catastrophe is nothing new to man, it is true that the dawning of the thermonuclear age, when man has developed the literal capacity to destroy the world himself, has added something of a cutting edge to the anxiety spawned by the literary, artistic, and even religious imagination of contemporary man. (4)

May's claim that the nuclear age has created a new sense of urgency in apocalyptic thinking may be an obvious one, but it provides a clear rationale for

examining the apocalyptic narratives within the scope of my project—1945 to the present. In this study, I will examine contemporary apocalyptic texts precisely because they typify the "cutting edge" that May describes—they present a new way of conceptualizing the apocalypse and its impact on the formulation of American culture. That is, these texts make clear that the apocalyptic imagination is indeed a central element in American self-definition and in the zeitgeist of the last sixty years in American history.

Contemporary apocalyptic texts represent a cultural shift to secularization embodied in apocalyptic thinking and in response to the social changes that have occurred over the course of American history. In *Toward a New Earth*, May describes the differences among traditions of apocalyptic thinking, including primitive, Judeo-Christian, and secular variations. For example, May examines what he calls "primitive" apocalypse, in which "the cataclysm is accepted as having occurred sometime in the past of the race," and "[m]yths of future cataclysm are apparently scarce" (5-6). According to May, primitive cultures, by mythologizing past apocalyptic events and then incorporating symbols of these events into their rituals, are able to create a "periodic reenactment of the cosmogony which itself constituted contact with the sacred time, the time of the gods and of man's origin," which results in "a purifying effect" (7). May suggests that the "periodic reenactment" leads to a period of renewal drawn from a perceived "return" to cultural myths of origins.

While primitive religion "renews the present on the basis of the past," May argues that "Judaeo-Christian hope is based on the expectation of future fulfillment" (24). Although Judeo-Christian eschatology certainly incorporates symbols of re-creation, the significant difference between primitive and Judeo-Christian narratives is that the former tends to see apocalypse as part of a ritual of renewal while the latter views catastrophe as "a once for all occurrence" in which "we expect either death or universal destruction" (36). In the Judeo-Christian tradition, the Earth is destroyed, and God separates the saints from the sinners and transports them to an eternal paradise, ridding humankind of the "burden" of history. Rather than grounding patterns of renewal around a past mythic event, the Judeo-Christian imagination centers renewal around the expectation of a final, future event. The third tradition, secular apocalypse, however, "may or may not be final. Where a millenarian viewpoint is secularized, history may be imagined … as a process of transformation without end" (36). In this passage, May draws upon the American Progress metanarrative, what he calls "the myth of unlimited progress," in which we believe that social, scientific, and technological advances will continue ad infinitum (31). If, in the Judeo-Christian tradition, history ends on Judgment Day, then in the secular tradition, history cannot end but shifts ever closer towards a utopia created not by God but by Americans. The sense of crisis that dominates apocalyptic narratives and informs contemporary American culture acts dialectically with a belief in

Progress; events thought to stall the march of Progress are inevitably cast as crises in the popular imagination.

Secular apocalypse, therefore, plays with the possibilities of catastrophe, either as arguments intended to frighten us "back on track" or as a millennial nostalgia in favor of a neo-primitive future. In *Anti-Apocalypse* (1994), Lee Quinby articulates these two variations of secular apocalypse by examining what he calls "three modes of comprehending and narrating truth" in the American experience: divine apocalypse, technological apocalypse, and ironic apocalypse (xvi). Quinby's divine apocalypse and the Judeo-Christian tradition that May outlines are clear equivalents, and technological and ironic apocalypses are both part of the secular tradition. However, technological apocalypse, in Quinby's view, has been the dominant narrative in contemporary American texts. He writes:

> Of the three modes of apocalyptic practice in the United States, technological apocalypse has tended to predominate in the twentieth century. One version of technological apocalypse regards technology as a threat leading to an inevitable end, but this mode is more often accompanied by the possibility of thwarting the trajectory of destruction … While some define a desirable future as a place beyond technology (hence a return to a Golden Era of pretechnology), others posit technology as the means by which a future of abundance and comfort will be attained. (xix)

According to Quinby, technology is perceived to both cause and prevent an apocalypse; either way, technology and the economic system in America that has grown out of and sustained it—consumer capitalism—forms the center around which most apocalyptic narratives since 1945 revolve.

Despite the popularity and prominence of technological apocalyptic narratives over the last sixty years, few comprehensive scholarly examinations of these fictions exist. Most critics of the apocalypse focus on either the religious tradition or what Quinby calls "ironic apocalypse," which he describes as "absurdist or nihilistic descriptions of existence" (xvi). May himself, for instance, examines the influence of Judeo-Christian eschatology upon the secularized "national literature" of the nineteenth and early-twentieth century, while texts like Joseph Dewey's *In a Dark Time: The Apocalyptic Temper in the American Novel of the Nuclear Age* (1990), Richard Dellamora's *Postmodern Apocalypse: Theory and Cultural Practice at the End* (1995) and Elizabeth K. Rosen's *Apocalyptic Transformations: Apocalypse and the Postmodern Imagination* (2008) focus largely upon ironic incarnations of apocalypse in postmodern American fictions. While this scholarship provides a great deal of insight into the role of apocalypse in the contemporary imagination, they tend to overlook texts that attempt to realistically fictionalize catastrophic events or draw upon apocalyptic imagery as a rhetorical device. The postmodernist writers most often examined—Pynchon, Barth, DeLillo, Vonnegut, and the like—tend to use humor or satire to reveal what is perceived to be the absurdity of living with a continual fear of Armageddon; the

apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic texts that I will examine in this study do not,

which is not to say that their depictions are either overtly simplistic or shamefully

didactic.

In fact, most post-apocalyptic science fiction attempts to genuinely grapple

with the paradox of a post-holocaust world and has had arguably the greatest

impact on perceptions of apocalypse in the popular imagination. As Douglas

Robinson suggests in *American Apocalypses* (1985):

> American apocalypses—American works that adopt some interpretive
>
> stance toward the end of the world—at once undermine basic American
>
> values and definitively express those values; they essay both a rejection
>
> and a signal exploration of American ideologies of the self, of nature, of
>
> God and the supernatural, and of the community. (xi-xii)

Like all "American apocalypses," post-apocalyptic fictions explore the multi-

faceted dimensions of American life, but by delineating a framework for the

potential consequences of catastrophe, they are particularly useful in revealing

certain ideological tensions implicit within American culture. In *Arguing the*

Apocalypse: A Theory of Millennial Rhetoric (1994), Stephen D. O'Leary points to

the increased popularity of apocalyptic narratives in the twentieth-century *in*

particular: "The appeal of apocalyptic prophecy has endured through the ages;

but its popularity has undergone a remarkable resurgence in the latter half of the

twentieth century" (7). With this increased "resurgence" of prophecy comes the

increased prevalence in literature and fiction of the post-apocalypse as well. One

facet of American culture that post-apocalyptic narratives are well-suited to exploring is the problematic of white masculinity in this period, since both the protagonists and the target audience for this genre are unmistakably white men. Surprisingly, very little critical work has been done on the relationship between post-apocalyptic narratives and white masculinity, and the absence of this scholarship has led me to consider the two driving questions of this project: How is masculinity constructed in post-apocalyptic science fiction after 1945, and how have such constructions informed contemporary texts that evoke apocalyptic imagery?

My examination takes shape within the context of recent work in masculinity studies and considers the relevant conversations that have emerged in gender theory as well as current studies of apocalyptic narratives. Michael Kimmel's groundbreaking book, *Manhood in America* (1996), for example, traces the dominant archetype of the "Self-Made Man" from the eighteenth through the twentieth-century in America. Feminist theorists Judith Kegan Gardiner and Robyn Wiegman contextualize masculinity narratives in relation to contemporary gender theories derived from Judith Butler's crucial work, *Gender Trouble*; rather than studying in isolation the relationships between men and women in literary texts, these writers investigate in particular how men construct identities through interactions with one another at various public and private sites. Other scholars, like Sally Robinson in *Marked Men* and Thomas DiPiero in *White Men Aren't*, have examined recent "crises" of white masculinity, and while Robinson

concludes that white men have become marked in physical and emotional ways by the political and cultural changes that have emerged from the 1960's, DiPiero suggests that this crisis has manifested itself in the form of an hysteria most commonly attributed to women writers of the nineteenth-century. On the other hand, E. Anthony Rotundo in *American Manhood* argues that one defining characteristic of contemporary masculinities is that they all "signif[y] a turning away from women," which can best be seen in the rhetoric of the men's mythopoeic movement. As valuable as these studies are, however, they do not sufficiently examine the recurrent connection between masculinities and twentieth-century narratives depicting some stage (before, during, or after) of apocalypse. By studying post-apocalyptic fiction and its echoes in apocalyptic literature, my project unearths recurrent narrative patterns through which the crisis in masculinity described by scholars is given form and imagined redress.

One central tenet within the genre of post-apocalyptic fiction stems from the idea that modern culture, particularly consumer culture and its relation to domesticity, is to blame for the emasculation of contemporary men. The remedy for this masculinity crisis often comes in the form of neo-primitive fantasy, the idea being that if men can embrace their more primitive sides or enact encounters with the primitive, then they will be able to tap into more masculine selfhood. The genre of the post-apocalyptic American novel leverages this narrative by imagining neo-primitive landscapes that follow in the wake of cataclysmic events, and it is in these landscapes in which "men can be men."

However, what masculinity looks like under these conditions varies, and by

looking more closely at how masculinity is constructed within various post-

apocalyptic novels from 1945 to 2000, we can better examine how the

intersections of masculinity, apocalypse, and primitivism are situated within

contemporary American culture. Constructions of the primitive, therefore, provide

a lens by which various forms of masculinity emerge.

Images of the primitive have often been used as a means to

understanding the culture of the times—the literary modernists in America and

abroad attended to the primitive early in the twentieth-century to this very end. As

Marianna Torgovnick writes in *Gone Primitive*, "[t]hose who study or write about

the primitive usually begin by defining it as different from (usually opposite to) the

present. After that, reactions to the present take over" (8). Representations of the

primitive, therefore, speak to concerns of the present more than to some distant

past or differing culture, acting in apocalyptic narratives as a kind of looking-glass

for contemporary culture. In her study, Torgovnick goes on to add that "the needs

of the present determine the value and nature of the primitive. The primitive does

what we ask it to do" (9). Constructions of the primitive take on a number of forms

that carry out different and often competing kinds of cultural work. In apocalyptic

texts, for example, the primitive functions as both the means to achieving

millennial electism and the only hope for preventing apocalyptic doom. Some of

the texts I will examine evoke images and associations drawn from the

conventional representations of the primitive, while others heighten the emphasis

on a simple life which itself has been associated with the primitive. In *Primitive Passions*, Torgovnick argues that the "Fascination with the primitive thus involves a dialectic between, on the one hand, a loathing and demonizing of certain rejected parts of the Western self and, on the other, the urge to reclaim them" (8). Torgovnick's statement effectively points to a dynamic tension within post-apocalyptic novels: the primitive both "reveals" the blessings of contemporary culture and romanticizes alternatives to that culture.

In America, and especially in the American post-apocalyptic novel, the primitive often manifests itself in the Myth of the Frontier. In *Gunfighter Nation* (1993), Richard Slotkin writes that "The Myth of the Frontier is our oldest and most characteristic myth expressed in a body of literature, folklore, ritual, historiography, and polemics produced over a period of three centuries" (10). Like apocalyptic traditions, the Myth of the Frontier has been a fundamental structuring metaphor for the American experience. In *Exploding the Western* (2005), Sara L. Spurgeon draws upon the work of Slotkin to analyze the mythological significance of the West, claiming that it "has come to hold both a geographical and a mythological meaning in modern American culture" (6). The veneration of heroic frontier figures like Daniel Boone and the consequential re-imagining of them to reflect contemporary values is, according to Spurgeon, "the projection of the past onto the present," which acts as an "ongoing process of mythogenesis" (12). According to Slotkin, the Myth originated with the earliest colonial experience and has carried on, problematically, to the present. In

Regeneration through Violence (1973), Slotkin tells us that in coming to this country, "The first colonists saw in America an opportunity to regenerate their fortunes, their spirits, and the power of their church and nation" (5). Europeans came to the "New World" for a number of reasons, but one of this continent's greatest attractions was the reputation it attained as a cultural and spiritual tabula rasa. America came to symbolize a departure from the inescapable social and religious traditions across the Atlantic. However, Slotkin adds that "the means to that regeneration ultimately became the means of violence, and the myth of regeneration through violence became the structuring metaphor of the American experience" (5). If colonists viewed America as the land of opportunity, they also came to see violent conflict as the necessary process by which opportunity could be achieved.

Slotkin further outlines the primary tropes characteristic of the Myth of the Frontier—separation, regression, and regeneration. In *Gunfighter Nation*, Slotkin writes: "the Myth presented the redemption of American spirit or fortune as something to be achieved by playing through a scenario of separation, temporary regression to a more primitive or 'natural' state, and regeneration through violence" (12). According to the Myth, the hero must leave civilization behind and, in doing so, encounter the primitive in two important senses—internally and externally. The land beyond civilization comes to represent both moral temptation and physical danger, and in winning both of these battles—the former through self-control and the latter through violent conflict—the hero can return to

civilization spiritually restored. The crossing of borders, then, becomes a critical component of the Frontier Myth, as the moral depravity of urban life even in the 19th century and certainly in the 20th century prevents such rejuvenation from being possible. As Slotkin puts it:

> The moral landscape of the Frontier Myth is divided by significant borders, of which the wilderness/civilization, Indian/White border is the most basic. The American must cross the border into "Indian country" and experience a "regression" to a more primitive and natural condition of life so that the false values of the 'metropolis' can be purged and a new, purified social contract enacted. (14)

The Myth of the Frontier implies that urban culture is incompatible with the regenerative spirit upon which America was founded, and only by successfully passing into a dangerous and uncivilized world can such renewal occur. The border-crossing that leads to spiritual regeneration is perhaps no more dramatic than that which occurs in post-apocalyptic science fiction. In such works, the "false values" of urbanity are not only spectacularly purged but are often responsible for the very apocalyptic event that leads to civilization's demise. America becomes purified by fire, disease, or celestial impact, and the protagonist—usually a white male—is forced, often against his will, from a normal but often undesirable life and cast into an unfamiliar and uncivilized frontier landscape. He then enters a more primitive state of consciousness necessitated by his own survival (and that of his charges) and ultimately redefines himself

through the violent defeat of a cult of lawless tyrants. In *Frontiers Past and Future* (2006), Carl Abbott calls attention to this similarity between post-apocalyptic stories and the cultural significance of the frontier. He writes: "The common American version of postempire stories are postdisaster stories that play off the national fascination with westward pioneering" (178). Post-apocalyptic narratives are the contemporary frontier tales of a culture nostalgic for its idealized past. The American post-apocalyptic story is effective, then, because of its familiarity, because it is buttressed by the Myth of the Frontier that underlies its narrative structure; however, the hero in the post-apocalyptic genre attains not so much a spiritual regeneration as a rejuvenative masculinity by crossing the border into a post-holocaust world, and the various incarnations within this genre position masculinity in ways that reflect the socio-historical moments in which they are written.

As in post-apocalyptic fiction, rejuvenative masculinity is a fundamental aspect of the Myth of the Frontier, as many critics have pointed out. In "'O Beautiful for Spacious Guys'" (1989), Melody Graulich, for instance, calls attention to the prominence of white men in this formulation of the Frontier Myth:

> the "frontier myth" and the "American Dream" that it expresses have often been elevated into a megamyth, becoming a theoretical framework through which critics come to understand American culture. This classic American story offers boys heroism and "space" in return for rebellion and

nonconformity, but in the American literature that criticism has canonized, the West's legendary freedom is not promised to girls. (186)

Graulich explicitly condemns as short-sighted the use of the Frontier Myth as a pervasive and all-encompassing articulation of the American experience. As Graulich suggests, the stories of the American Frontier do chronicle primarily the exploits of white men whose success often comes at the expense of women and minorities. Likewise, in the introduction to *The Frontier Experience and the American Dream* (1989), Mogen, Busby, and Bryant argue that "frontier mythological is intrinsically dialectical, or, to use Mikhail Bakhtin's word, dialogic, insofar as traditionally Anglo, masculine purveyors of the American dream have called forth responses by women, minority writers, and others who write from differing perspectives" (4). Mogen, Busby, and Bryant maintain that understanding the ways in which women and non-white men have employed, critiqued, and/or undermined the symbolism of the Frontier Myth is critical for a comprehensive view of the effect of the Myth upon American culture. Graulich's point, however, is a valid one—white men are the primary inheritors of the Myth of the Frontier, and because my purpose in this project is to make visible the codes of white masculinity embedded within apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic texts, I will focus primarily on how white men are characterized in these texts and for what purposes.

In its effect upon white American men, the Frontier Myth owes much of its longevity to the consistent reclamation of two iconic figures—the hunter and the

cowboy. The former can be best exemplified by James Fenimore Cooper's character of Natty Bumppo in the *Leatherstocking Tales*, who is white but raised among the Delaware Indians. As Slotkin suggests in *Regeneration through Violence*, the hunter-hero, through wilderness encounters, "achieves communion with the powers that rule the universe beyond the frontiers and acquires a new moral character, a new set of powers or gifts, a new identity (551). Moral—as well as masculine—regeneration occurs in the landscape of the frontier and, in the case of Natty Bumppo, in the context of his relationship to his Native American companion, Chingachgook*.* In *Manhood in America* (1996), Michael Kimmel writes about the role of the second iconic figure, the cowboy, in the popular imagination of the last century: "nowhere could American men find a better exemplar of rugged outdoor masculinity than out west with the cowboy, that noble denizen of the untamed frontier. The cowboy occupies an important place in American cultural history: He is America's contribution to the world's stock of mythic heroes" (148). The cowboy personifies a version of the Frontier Myth that has been repeatedly imaged and re-imagined over the last hundred years. Owen Wister is often credited with the invention of the stereotype of the cowboy hero from his depiction of the unnamed narrator in *The Virginian* (1902), and the influence of his novel appears in a number of likely and unlikely places— spaghetti westerns, detective stories, and space operas, to name a few—and the post-apocalyptic narrative is no different. If the cowboy was, as Kimmel suggests, "fierce and brave, willing to venture into unknown territory, a 'negligent,

irrepressible wilderness,' and tame it for women, children, and emasculated civilized men" (149), then the white, male hero in the post-holocaust narrative is a derivative of that figure. Therefore, the men within post-apocalyptic texts appropriate and redefine a neo-frontier masculinity, often exemplified by the hunter and the cowboy, that is set in opposition to the contemporary culture the male protagonists must leave (and in which the male readers must live) and, in most cases, never return. The etymology of the word "apocalypse" stems from the meaning "to reveal," and in post-apocalyptic narratives, the "new world" provides the opportunity for new modes of masculinity to be revealed to men.

<p style="text-align:center">*   *   *</p>

This study is divided into five main chapters. The present chapter has provided an overview of studies in apocalypse, primitivism, and masculinity to lay the foundation for the more in-depth, critical analyses that follow. Chapter 2 provides a survey of American post-apocalyptic fiction from 1945-2000, which examines salient texts within the genre to illustrate the landscape of masculinity within post-holocaust fiction, particularly within the historical context in which they are written. Chapter 2 begins with an operational definition of American post-apocalyptic fiction in the United States, which helps to provide a multi-part framework for identifying works within the post-apocalyptic genre, a set of texts that has slippery boundaries. I then examine six American post-apocalyptic novels: George Stewart's *Earth Abides* (1949), Richard Matheson's *I Am Legend*

(1954), Pat Frank's *Alas, Babylon* (1959), Robert Heinlein's *Farnham's Freehold*

(1964), Larry Niven and Jerry Pournelle's *Lucifer's Hammer* (1978), and David

Brin's *The Postman* (1985). *Earth Abides* is the first popular post-apocalyptic

American novel to be published after the Second World War, and its theme of the

modern man being a relic in a devastated world parallels that in *I Am Legend*, a

story so popular that it has been rewritten into three film versions since its

publication. *Alas, Babylon* and *Farnham's Freehold* both bring examinations of

race to the forefront of the genre while drawing upon the main narrative of post-

apocalyptic literature of the era—men who are not, for various reasons, well-

suited to the contemporary world of consumer culture end up to thrive in the neo-

primitive, post-apocalyptic world. This theme also shows up in later works like

Lucifer's Hammer and *The Postman*, which instead focus on providing a critique

of military masculinity that is juxtaposed by the men of morality—the heroes—in

these novels.

Just as post-apocalyptic fiction repeatedly imagines idealized

masculinities, apocalyptic texts—texts that gesture toward apocalypse without

explicitly depicting a catastrophic event—do so as well. However, apocalyptic

narratives often install and subvert the conventions of the post-apocalyptic genre

in order to examine masculinity in ways that challenge post-apocalyptic fiction.

Chapter 3, therefore, examines Edward Abbey's *Desert Solitaire* (1968), a non-

fiction work of nature writing centered on the American Southwest. *Desert*

Solitaire in part details Abbey's time as a park ranger at the Arches National

Monument and develops a deep ecological perspective. As a book with an overt

environmentalist agenda, *Desert Solitaire* explores, like other books in its genre,

the impact of human beings upon the natural world, employing apocalyptic

rhetoric while doing so. Environmental rhetoric is often underpinned by an

apocalyptic perspective, with the story being that "if we don't change our ways,

we will all become extinct." Apocalyptic rhetoric is employed extensively

throughout American nature writing and environmentalist prose—such as Rachel

Carson's *Silent Spring* and Paul R. Ehrlich's *The Population Bomb*—but Abbey's

Desert Solitaire and several of his works of fiction also center on exploring

masculinity in relation to deep ecology, which makes Abbey's text an excellent

object for this study. Abbey's text brings the three components of this project into

focus: masculinity, primitivism, and apocalypse. Abbey himself, as we have seen

above, had turned to the genre of post-apocalyptic fiction to continue his

exploration of masculinity in primitive-like environments. In both *Desert Solitaire*

and *Good News*, Abbey constructs the image of the ecocentric male whose

commitment to deep ecological thinking and a rugged, self-sufficient masculinity

become reinforced through direct encounters with the primitive.

      Chapter 4 considers how William Gibson's cyberpunk novel *Neuromancer*

(1984) reimagines the intersections of masculinity, primitivism, and apocalypse

that have clearly played such a central role in late 20th-century formulations of

manhood. At first glance, *Neuromancer* may appear to be an odd choice for this

study, given that the novel takes place in a world almost completely devoid of

primitive environments. However, I make the claim that because the world of the novel has *not* been laid waste by an apocalyptic event, the rejuvenative conditions for primitive masculinity have been made impossible and irrelevant. In *Neuromancer*, Gibson builds an environment that *should have* been cleansed through an apocalyptic event, but never was. The result is that the frontier-like conditions that are necessary for rejuvenative masculinity are simply not present; therefore, the novel's protagonist, a "cyber-cowboy" whose masculinity is tied to his ability to navigate the virtual environment of the Matrix, provides an interesting spin on the popular conventions of the post-apocalyptic novel. However, the Matrix is also depicted at times as a neo-primitive frontier that acts as the proving ground for masculinity, and Case ironically represents the "virtual male" who explores primitive masculinity through highly-technological means.

Chapter 5 examines Chuck Palahniuk's *Fight Club* (1996), which most directly investigates masculinities in America at the end of the twentieth-century. In doing so, *Fight Club* employs conventions of the post-apocalyptic genre to highlight the limitations of apocalyptic fantasy and the effect it has upon contemporary men who feel emasculated by consumer culture and who think encounters with the primitive could allow for more "authentic" approaches to masculinity. In many ways, the thematic elements of *Fight Club* mirror those in conventional post-apocalyptic texts like *Lucifer's Hammer*, whereby domestic consumerism is keeping men from achieving "authentic" masculinity; however, *Fight Club* subverts such a message by revealing its limitations and providing a

veiled critique of the genre. While the protagonist in the novel, referred to as Jack

by critics and fans, begins to gain a sense of rejuvenative masculinity, by the end

of the novel, he ends up in a psychiatric hospital no better off that he was at the

start. In order to understand how Abbey, Gibson, and Palahniuk fashion

masculinity in relation to the genre of American post-apocalyptic fiction, we must

first turn to an examination of the conventions developed in post-apocalyptic

fiction itself.

Chapter Two:

American Post-Apocalyptic Fiction, 1945-2000

Post-apocalyptic fiction in the United States proliferated alongside weapons of mass destruction following World War II. Prior to 1945, few secular accounts of the post-apocalypse had been published. Jack London's *The Scarlet Plague* (1912) and Edgar Rice Burroughs's *The Lost Continent* (1916) stand out as exceptions within the genre, and interestingly, both of these writers are well-known for their examinations of primitivism in relation to modern life—London's *Call of the Wild* and Burroughs's Tarzan novels, in particular. As concerns grew following World War II about our ability as a species to destroy our planet and ourselves, so did the genre of American post-apocalyptic fiction, so much that it has influenced the apocalyptic temper in American culture as a whole. In this chapter, I will therefore define the genre of the post-apocalyptic American novel so that I can later trace the ways in which the genre has affected other forms of fiction and the conversations within them about the intersections of apocalypse, primitivism, and masculinity. Although its influence is far-reaching, post-apocalyptic fiction has been predominantly a form of male fantasy written *by* men and *for* men to explore what they are not supposed to desire: a destroyed world that "reveals" new opportunities for more authentic masculinity. This chapter argues that the nuances of those fantasies evidenced by the conventions of the genre frames masculinity in very particular ways, ways that influence the apocalyptic narratives that I will analyze in later chapters.

After I have defined the genre, I will examine six novels in the genre of American post-apocalyptic novel to see how masculinities are performed in relation to the primitive conditions developed in these works: George Stewart's *Earth Abides* (1949), Richard Matheson's *I Am Legend* (1954), Pat Frank's *Alas, Babylon* (1959), Robert Heinlein's *Farnham's Freehold* (1964), Larry Niven and Jerry Pournelle's *Lucifer's Hammer* (1978), and David Brin's *The Postman* (1985). While this list is not exhaustive, it represents a sampling of novels that provide insight into the various ways that masculinity has been constructed within the genre from an historical perspective across four decades.

Some may wonder why other well-known classics of the genre were not included in this study. For example, *A Canticle for Leibowitz* (1960) is a canonical work of post-apocalyptic American fiction popular among fans of the genre and its scholars[1]. However, *A Canticle for Leibowitz* is a Type III post-apocalyptic narrative as I outline in my operational definition below, which means that readers do not follow characters who lived through the post-apocalyptic event but instead follow those who have come after that generation is gone. As I point out, the contrast between pre- and post-apocalyptic masculinity is not dramatized directly in Type III novels, and for this reason, I have chosen to omit examination of these texts. Other novels would appear to be excellent candidates in the genre as well, such as lengthy, polyvocal works like Stephen King's *The Stand* (1978) or Robert McCannon's *Swan Song* (1985), which follow hosts of characters

---

[1] For example: Carl Abbott's *Frontiers Past and Future: Science Fiction and the American West* (2006) and David Seed's *Under the Shadow: The Atomic Bomb and Cold War Narratives* (2013).

whose stories intertwine. In these texts, men dominate the narrative and remain central to the story's structure, all within primitive, frontier-like post-apocalyptic conditions; however, while these novels have their own particularities, structures, and characters, they don't contribute anything to this study beyond the works that I am already examining.

Furthermore, I have limited my study of the genre to the year 2000 for several reasons. To start, the anticlimax surrounding the Y2K scare at the end of the millennium and the cultural shift following the events of 9/11 have produced a sea change in how the post-apocalypse genre has defined itself. Although I briefly address the future of post-apocalyptic fiction in the epilogue, further in-depth study of how events following Y2K and 9/11 affected apocalypse and masculinities is needed. Also, the genre has gained an enhanced sense of legitimacy with the publication of Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* (2006), which won a Pulitzer Prize for Fiction. Yet at the same time, post-apocalyptic fiction has also re-incorporated elements of the horror genre, most notably in the popularization of the zombie in Max Brooks's *World War Z* (2006) and Robert Kirkman, Tony Moore, and Charlie Adlard's comic series *The Walking Dead* (2003-present) and the vampire in Justin Cronin's *The Passage* (2010) trilogy. Such elements have not extensively worked their way into the genre prior to 2000 in light of my definition of the genre that follows[2].

---

[2] One text under examination in this project, *I Am Legend*, has vampire-like creatures as its antagonists; however, these humanoids figure prominently in the "moral" at the end of the story, and the novel was written when vampires had a somewhat different cultural connotation—prior to the commercialization of popular horror by writers like Stephen King, Anne Rice, and others.

American Post-Apocalyptic Fiction: A Definition

The defining characteristics of the genre of American post-apocalyptic fiction may, to a certain degree, appear to be self-evident. For example, one could argue that any American work of fiction that depicts the aftermath of an apocalyptic event would fit within that category; however, the overlap of and disparities within various types of speculative fiction, including apocalyptic, dystopian, cyberpunk, and space narratives, require that we provide a more thorough definition, particularly for the purposes of this chapter. Therefore, within the framework of this argument, I posit that in order for texts to fall within the genre of American post-apocalyptic fiction, they must meet the following four conditions[3]:

1. A cataclysmic event must occur prior to the climax of the novel

2. A cataclysmic event, or its aftereffects, must figure prominently into the discourse of the novel

3. A cataclysmic event must significantly alter underlying socio-economic structures

4. The American landscape must act as the primary setting of the novel

The first criterion for a text to fit within the genre of the post-apocalyptic novel is that a cataclysmic event must occur prior to the climax of the novel. The assumption with this condition is that the bulk of the narrative occurs after

---

[3] Aforementioned critics such as Carl Abbott, James Berger, Frederick Buell, John May, and David Seed have focused on representations of the end without comprehensively charting the narrative structures within the genre.

something catastrophic happens. All of the novels in this chapter meet this criterion. In contrast, a text with a cataclysmic event that occurs *at or after* the climax would be considered, within this project, an *apocalyptic* text. One classic example of an apocalyptic text is the Stanley Kubrick film *Dr. Strangelove; or, How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb*, which ends with the footage of a series of nuclear blasts from an exchange between the United States and the former Soviet Union. The characters in *Dr. Strangelove* are either preparing for, or trying to prevent, the apocalyptic event that occurs at the film's conclusion, and while the constructions of white masculinity within this text are ripe for analysis, they are fundamentally different from those in traditional post-apocalyptic texts, which center around narratives of separation, temporary regression in survival, and reconditioning. Such events shape masculinity in ways that may complement apocalyptic narratives but ultimately spotlight different aspects of gender constructions.

Furthermore, *when* in the narrative an apocalyptic event occurs does have an impact on how masculinity plays out in post-apocalyptic texts. Because the extent to which characters in post-apocalyptic novels have lived through a cataclysmic event impacts how they *perceive* the post-holocaust environment in relation to the "old world," identifying the structures underlying these narratives is key. Post-apocalyptic fiction, therefore, can be categorized into three types. Each of these different types is delineated by the place in the narrative where a post-apocalyptic event occurs. In a Type I post-apocalyptic novel, readers experience

the post-apocalyptic event alongside the characters. That is, the novel begins with "the world as we know it" and, somewhere in the middle, an apocalyptic event occurs. Novels such as *Earth Abides, Alas, Babylon, Farnham's Freehold*, and *Lucifer's Hammer* all fall within this category of post-apocalyptic fiction. Type II post-apocalyptic narratives follow characters who have themselves experienced an apocalyptic event firsthand, but we, the readers, do not experience that event with them. Novels like *I Am Legend*, *Damnation Alley*, *Good News*, and *The Postman* all fall within this type. These two categories of post-apocalyptic novels focus on the very different aspects of the pre-apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic worlds. In Type I novels, for example, the "old life" and the "new life" of the post-apocalypse are much better situated at the front of the narratives, since readers follow the character through the apocalyptic event. In Type II novels, characters recall apocalyptic events through flashbacks, or not at all, and as readers, we do not see firsthand how the characters interact in the "the world as we know it," the contemporary world. Type III post-apocalyptic narratives have cataclysmic events that occur before the birth of the main characters. Novels like *Star Man's Son*, *A Canticle for Leibowitz*, and *Eternity Road* all follow characters who are immersed in a post-apocalyptic environment but have not themselves lived through the event. They are inheritors of a ravaged planet. The constructions of gender in these stories are significantly different because the narrative lacks the transformative element within Type I and Type II post-apocalyptic texts.

The second characteristic of a post-apocalyptic novel is that a cataclysmic event, or its aftereffects, must figure prominently into the discourse of the novel. In other words, characters must realize, or focus on, the apocalyptic event itself. Many science fiction novels include references to past apocalyptic events that have shaped the culture in which the stories takes place; however, they are not within the genre of post-apocalyptic fiction because the catastrophic event lies at the background of the story. A recent example of this is the series of books by Suzanne Collins that begins with *The Hunger Games,* in which the story takes place in a dystopian future long after a cataclysmic event. While the event is referenced, it is not important to the narrative itself. Even dystopian classics like *Brave New World* and *1984* gesture towards prior apocalypses without centering on the impact of those events upon the story. On the other hand, post-apocalyptic novels bring cataclysmic events to the forefront and invite readers to consider the implications of the events, which is particularly important for the constructions of gender; in order to understand how authors figure masculinity in relation to an apocalyptic event, the event itself must be narratively explored on a significant level.

The third characteristic of American post-apocalyptic novels is that a cataclysmic event must significantly alter underlying socio-economic structures within the narrative. In order to explore the effect of an apocalyptic event upon the characters, the event itself must *have an impact* on the characters. A real-life event like 9/11 has been construed as apocalyptic and is often imbued with

millennial rhetoric, and while it did have a major impact on both the social and economic fabric of American life, the overall structures still exist—federal and state governments still hold power, Americans still work at jobs, use a national currency, etc. In post-apocalyptic novels, the socio-economic foundations of American culture are transformed into what are often cast as more primitive-like conditions: barter systems, pockets of decentralized enclaves of people, etc. The importance of the third characteristic for this study is that the social-economic structures of contemporary culture are often depicted as to blame for the emasculation of the modern man.

The fourth and final characteristic of American post-apocalyptic novels is that the American landscape must act as the primary setting of the novel. Because a world-ending apocalyptic event has obvious global implications, characters often find themselves in various environments. In the classic post-apocalyptic novel *On the Beach*, for example, the main character is an American naval captain who has found himself in Australia when a nuclear exchange between superpowers has all but annihilated the Northern Hemisphere. Although the main character is American, the action of the story takes place in the southern coast of Australia, which tells a perhaps interesting but certainly different story of American masculinity. A primary reason for this is that masculinity in the genre of American post-apocalyptic fiction, as we have seen, relies heavily upon frontier metaphors. More specifically, the North American Indian as well as American slavery narratives emerge as important subtexts

infused into the relationship between masculinity and the frontier-like environments of post-apocalyptic American novels. The presence of these historical contexts inform the stories of post-apocalyptic landscapes in ways that are uniquely American. For the remainder of this chapter, I will look at how masculinity is constructed in six classic American post-apocalyptic texts that fall within the criteria listed above.

Modern Relics in a Brave New World

The genre of post-apocalyptic science fiction as we know it began in earnest following the end of World War II. These stories reflect the growing conviction that the Earth, once thought immune to human meddling, could now be made uninhabitable by the escalating power of our weapon technologies. Although neither portray atomic weaponry as the direct cause of catastrophe, two of the earliest contemporary post-apocalyptic narratives, George Stewart's *Earth Abides* (1949) and Richard Matheson's *I Am Legend* (1954), draw upon the fears of the nuclear age by depicting landscapes emptied by plague of most modern Americans. In both of these texts, the protagonists struggle for survival in the post-apocalyptic landscape but fail to achieve a sense of masculine rejuvenation. Instead, these narratives suggest that contemporary men, though they may survive an apocalyptic event, could not successfully adapt to a frontier-like post-apocalyptic landscape. In doing so, Stewart and Matheson romanticize the neo-

primitive cultures that inherit the new landscapes and the "natural," frontier-like masculinity that helps secure them.

In *Earth Abides*, for example, disease wipes out the vast majority of people on the planet, and graduate student Isherwood Williams journeys across America, first from the site of his research in a California cabin, then to the high-rises of New York City, and finally back to his parents' home in San Francisco. Except for his faithful companion, a beagle named Princess, he is alone. He survives by scavenging the great surplus of canned goods and using the electricity generated by a nearby hydroelectric plant. After settling down in San Francisco, he meets an African-American woman named Emma and, later, a group of wanderers (all of whom are white), and they form a makeshift community in the now-abandoned city. The novel chronicles the fifty-some years that follow the catastrophic event and the eventual rebuilding of a larger civilization.

In the story, Stewart portrays Ish as a somewhat capable but primarily passive intellectual, and despite Ish's ability to both live through the catastrophe and lead a community to relative prosperity, he is cast as a feminized remnant of an emasculated civilization, particularly in relation to the neo-primitive culture that succeeds his own. Early in the novel, for example, Ish thinks of himself as a primarily objective observer after finding his parents' home empty and realizing that they have died:

> In spite of the horror of the situation he felt a curious spectator's sense
> about it all, as if he were watching the last act of a great drama. This, he
> realized, was characteristic of his personality. He was—had been—was
> (well, no matter)—a student, an incipient scholar, and such was
> necessarily oriented to observe, rather than to participate. (16)

Empirical observation of the "ecology" of post-apocalyptic adaptation is indeed a major theme of the novel, but Ish demonstrates a continued frustration at his inability to act—he sees it as a character flaw. Later, after Ish and Emma have sex for the first time, he thinks:

> Though so much had happened, and even though he might be deeply
> moved by that great experience, yet still he was the observer—the man
> who sat by the side, watching what happened, never quite losing himself
> in the experience. The strangeness! In the old world it might well never
> have happened. Out of destruction had come, for him, love. (105)

While it is possible to read Ish's thoughts as a simple, non-evaluative description—that he does not consider his passive nature as a character flaw—his persistent desire and consequential inability to act suggests a continued commitment to objective understanding, even about himself. Ish felt like an outcast in pre-apocalyptic America because of his intellectual detachment, and his situation changes very little after the catastrophe; he does find love, but even his relationship with Emma feels cool and uninvolved throughout the text. As in many post-apocalyptic novels, the protagonist of *Earth Abides* discovers that the

new "frontier" leads, through sexual conquest, to a renewed sense of masculinity, but he retains what he sees as a defective and emasculating aspect of his character. Try as he might, Ish does not follow the model of a mythologized frontier hero like Natty Bumppo.

The showdown with a stranger late in the novel best illustrates Ish's disappointment with his passive nature and, therefore, with his sense of masculinity. Twenty-one years after establishing their community, a man named Charlie comes to town; immediately, Ish feels threatened by the new figure, who they come to discover has an unidentified venereal disease. Charlie settles into the community, but after a few weeks, Ish learns that Charlie has been making advances towards a tabooed figure in the town, a young woman named Evie who suffers from a severe intellectual disability. When he confronts Charlie about the behavior, Ish senses hostility immediately: "Charlie looked at Ish, and Ish knew that this was the crisis of open defiance. Ish mutely accepted the challenge; he felt calmer now. This was no time to let anger disturb one's thoughts. Now that there was action, he could think more clearly" (253). In this passage, Ish has to rid an otherwise civilized town of a immoral figure by any means necessary, and he attempts to do so by becoming a man of action, something he had failed to achieve throughout the rest of the novel. Ish ultimately over-intellectualizes the process and fails; when Charlie asks why he should leave Evie alone, Ish provides a logical explanation and then immediately regrets his error:

Only when he had stopped speaking, did he realize that by speaking at all in reply to Charlie's question, he had made a mistake. Like any intellectual, he had been happy to stop commanding and begin arguing, and so he had admitted that his command was noneffective. Now, in spite of himself, he felt in second place, with Charlie the leader. (255)

Consequently, Ish feels "bitterness" and "humiliation" in this scenario, not rejuvenation. In the end, the community leaders, including Ish, decide to address the Charlie "problem" by hanging him, and Ish relies on institutional authority instead of his own virility. If he had fit the model of a frontier hero, he would have used his fists, his guns—some form of physical violence—to handle Charlie, but he doesn't. The problem is solved, but Ish feels significantly less masculine because of his lack of action.

In light of these characterizations, it may appear that the novel implicitly criticizes the genre's appropriation of the frontier narrative and that Ish symbolizes a brainy, not brawny, form of masculinity. Furthermore, Ish does not strictly follow the pattern of separation, regression, and regeneration through violence outlined in Richard Slotkin's work in *Regeneration through Violence*[4]; he is certainly separated from his former life, but he does not really "regress" to a primitive state or "regenerate" through a demonstrably violent act. Rather, it is the inheritors of this post-apocalyptic world who best portray the frontier hero. At the

---

[4] *Regeneration through Violence; the Mythology of the American Frontier, 1600-1860*. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan UP, 1973. In this text, Slotkin examines how American frontier narratives relied heavily upon depictions of violence both by and against non-white peoples, most typically Native Americans.

end of the novel, when Ish is an old man and has outlived his contemporaries, he awakens to the sight of a neo-primitive man, who ends up to be his grandson and bears the "everyman" name of Jack:

> When Ish looked up, he saw, very clearly, a young man standing in front of him. The young man wore a neat-enough pair of blue jeans with copper rivets shining brightly, and yet over his shoulders he wore a tawny hide with sharp claws dangling from it. In his hand he held a strong bow, and over his shoulder was a quiver with the feathered ends of arrows sticking from it. (317)

Jack's blue jeans and cured hide symbolize the unification of the primitive and the civilized, and it is with this character, who "stands between the opposed worlds of savagery and civilization" (Slotkin *Gunfighter Nation* 16), that Stewart provides the achievement of masculine regeneration. For example, when Ish lay dying in a cave at the end, he looks upon Jack and other male members of the community and evaluates them in comparison to the men of modern America: "Ish looked at the faces of the young men, and he saw that they were different from the faces of long ago. These faces were young, but they were also calm, and they seemed to bear on them few lines of strain and worry and fear" (330). Stewart describes these men using symbols associated with "Indian-ness" and further connects "Indian-ness"—through not an automatic but a produced association—with a primitive virility in contrast to Ish, the figure of a pre-apocalyptic intellectual cast as debilitated by modern manhood. The fact that Ish

encounters no women in this new community highlights the masculinity embodied

within it, and Stewart's purpose—in a classic post-apocalyptic sense—is to

provide a clear contrast between an idealized form of manhood and the reality

that contemporary American men face (or at least the reality that Stewart

believes they face). Stewart depicts Jack and the others as carefree and

somewhat tranquil compared to men of Ish's generation, a result of the lack of

competition that post-holocaust men encounter:

> In civilization, he thought, these young men would have all been
>
> considering one another as rivals, because in the days of civilization there
>
> were many men … But now, he thought, when men are very few, each of
>
> these young men wanders freely with his bow in hand and his dog at heel,
>
> but needs his comrade close at call. (334)

Ish overtly blames overpopulation, and by extension urbanization, for the stress

and consequent emasculation caused by contemporary life, and the

"competitiveness" embodied by consumer capitalism, at least according to

Stewart, comes from the crowded living conditions of "civilization." Stewart

therefore suggests that in the wild, where men have room to roam, masculinity

can be more easily and more wholly achieved.

Although Jack represents the epitome of natural manhood in *Earth Abides*,

it is important to note that Ish is quite responsible for the successful regeneration

of American masculinity in the new world. As I have noted, Ish's masculine

insecurities come from his inability to revise what is cast as his intellectual and

passive nature, but towards the end of the novel, Ish takes action in an uncharacteristic way, which helps to provide new opportunities for successive men to develop a sense of manly virility. After years of unsuccessful attempts at teaching the village youth traditional pedagogical subjects like reading, history, and mathematics, Ish decides to show them something simple: how to make a bow and arrow. His purpose in doing so is naturally one of utility; Ish thinks of the bow as "the greatest weapon that primitive man had ever known and the most difficult to invent. If he had saved that for the future, he had saved much. His great-grandchildren would never know civilization, but at least they would not be groveling half-apes, but would walk erect as freemen, bow in hand" (302). Knowing that the canned food of the modern world would eventually run out, Ish—to draw upon a popular adage—teaches men to fish, or in this case, to hunt. Ish does not teach them, say, new agricultural techniques, which would also be a practical means by which to produce food. Instead, Stewart draws upon the dialectical relationship between the primitive and the modern in order to reveal what he fashions as the intrinsic qualities of "true" masculinity—physical strength, social cooperation, and spiritual tranquility. Because of Ish, future men could realize their masculine potential, not as primitive "half-apes" or as modern intellectuals but as ideal amalgamations of two very different worlds.

Although Jack and the others come to stand for Stewart's vision of intrinsically genuine masculinity, Ish himself does experience a significant change while "reinventing" the bow and arrow. Instead of characteristically raiding the

library for reading materials, Ish decides to create a hunting bow using only his memory and his wits: "Of course he could have read any number of books, but his approach had changed. He would read no books on this matter. He could do well enough by himself" (279). In this scene, Ish's "approach" changes, to be sure, but so does his sense of virility. When he completes the instrument, he sees himself as a creative rather than an intellectual force, as an active initiator rather than a passive observer:

> He looked at the bow, and knew that creative force had again returned to the world. He could have gone to any sporting-goods store, and picked out a much better bow—a six-foot toy for archery. But he had not done so. He had made himself a bow from the wood itself carved with the simplest of implements, and a string from the hide of a new-killed calf. (299)

The bow in the sporting goods store symbolizes masculinity in modern America—derivative, manufactured, and inferior—while Ish's constructed bow, developed from a robust combination of intuition and natural materials, represents a masculine once lost but now rediscovered. Because he is the living relic of a past and feeble culture, Ish cannot fully embrace this new masculinity as Jack can, but by the end, he has discovered the means to rejuvenating masculinity in spite of his modern background. Ish becomes a man of wisdom not through book learning but through creative, intuitive action.

In *I Am Legend*, Richard Matheson too argues through his novel that modern, white men would be incapable of redefining themselves in ways that

would inure them to the frontier-like conditions of a post-apocalyptic landscape.

Although the novel successfully incorporates aspects of the horror genre, *I Am Legend* also contains the elements of a classic post-apocalyptic text: Robert Neville, the last human being alive, fights off the primitive, mindless vampires who attempt to kill him in the ruins of a deserted Los Angeles. In this setting, Robert tries, in vain, to find some semblance of spiritual meaning in this new way of life—his wife and daughter have died of the vampire epidemic, he spends his days killing off the undead while they sleep, and his own (former) neighbor, Ben Cortman, threatens him nightly with the precision of an atomic clock. In depicting Robert's inner struggle, *I Am Legend* explores masculine self-restraint, casting it as a modern virtue incongruent with the human devolution following an apocalyptic event.

Before the apocalyptic disease spreads (via an unidentified war, a series of bizarre weather phenomena, and plagues of mosquitoes), Robert is a content father and husband, but he faces a "scenario of separation" from this normal, modern life after his wife and daughter fall ill. For example, when his wife, Virginia, passes, Robert refuses to take her to a public crematory as the law requires; he instead buries her in a remote cemetery:

> He straightened up and looked down at her still body sewn up in the
> blanket. For the last time, he thought. No more talking, no more loving.
> Eleven wonderful years ending in a filled-in trench. He began to tremble …
> The world shimmered through endless distorting tears while he pressed

back the hot earth, patting it around her still body with nerveless fingers.

(75)

Matheson describes the scene with realistic empathy, but Robert's trauma only intensifies when Virginia returns from the grave and he is forced to destroy her. He says: "I tried to keep her with me. I tried, but she wasn't the same any more ... I put her away again … I had to do the same things to her I'd done to the others. My own wife … I had to put a stake in her. It was the only thing I knew to do" (149). Killing the animated corpse of his dead wife represents a threshold of separation from which he can never fully return. As Robert himself puts it, "With Virginia, life and the world had shuddered to a halt" (69). Her second death, then, is the apocalyptic event that propels Robert into the metaphorical frontier of the novel. While it is clear that Robert loved his wife with great intensity, Matheson omits any explicit mention of their sexual relationship; that is, his feelings for her appear genuinely loving but platonically passionless. Even her name, Virginia, speaks of chastity. By contrast, the primitive, post-apocalyptic world becomes a nightmarish scenario of sexual temptation and frustration, and in the novel, Matheson portrays sexuality as being the primary target of masculine self-regulation. For instance, when the vampires perform their nightly ritual of encircling his house (yet kept at bay by numerous strings of garlic), Robert becomes disturbed by the female vampires crowded outside: "it was the women who made it so difficult, he thought, the women posing like lewd puppets in the night" (19). While stories of vampires have long conflated vampirism with

sexuality, these vampires are not the sophisticated seductresses of Bram

Stoker's Dracula but primal, animalistic creatures. Sexuality for these female

vampires is the principle strategy for luring Robert out, and even though he can

see through their collective ruse, he survives only through powerful self-

regulation. Robert draws upon his intellect to curb his carnal lust:

> All the knowledge in those books couldn't put out the fires in him; all the
>
> words of centuries couldn't end the wordless, mindless craving of his flesh.
>
> The realization made him sick. It was an insult to man. All right, it was a
>
> natural drive, but there was no outlet for it any more. They'd forced
>
> celibacy on him; he'd have to live with it. You have a mind, don't you? he
>
> asked himself. Well, use it! (19)

Matheson develops a triad in this passage consisting of bodied desire, book

knowledge, and the mind. Curbing his primitive, sexual desires is not just a

matter of survival for Robert; it also symbolizes his distinction from the

primitivized Other. Like Ish "re-inventing" the bow in *Earth Abides*, Robert

manages to succeed not through book learning but through the strength of his

will, his mind.

Despite his best efforts, however, Robert does nearly give in to their

invitations:

> The women, the lustful, bloodthirsty, naked women flaunting their hot
>
> bodies at him. No, not hot. A shuddering whine wrenched up through his
>
> chest and throat. Goddamn them, what were they waiting for? Did they

think he was going to come out and hand himself over? Maybe I am, maybe I am. He actually found himself jerking off the crossbar from the door. Coming girls, I'm coming. Wet your lips now. Outside, they heard the bar being lifted, and a howl of anticipation sounded in the night. (33)

Matheson uses overt sexual language ("jerking off the crossbar," "I'm coming," etc.) in this passage to portray the door as a physical and metaphorical border between two worlds—the remnants of the civilized, modern world and the new primitive frontier of the apocalypse. Robert does cross the border into this new frontier, but only by day, and he defends himself against sexual temptation at night. In this way, Robert's restraint allows him to reproduce, at least in part, the frontier hero who leaves his home, the seemingly last stronghold of modern civilization, to kill vampires as they sleep, but he always returns, never becoming what the vampire women and their animal-like howls represent: the primitive Other.

However, the novel takes a significant turn when Robert meets, quite unexpectedly, a young woman who appears to be unaffected by the virus. A few years have passed since his wife died, and he has successfully conquered his sexual desires, now immune to the nightly, provocative displays that had bothered him early in the novel. When he meets Ruth for the first time, he reflects upon his enduring wish to find a companion: "For always, in spite of reason, he had clung to the hope that someday he would find someone like himself—a man, a woman, a child, it didn't matter. Sex was fast losing its meaning without the

endless prodding of mass hypnosis. Loneliness he still felt" (101). The implication

of Matheson's use of the phrase "the endless prodding of hypnosis" is unclear in

this context, but what is clear is that Robert has, by necessity, become a man

without erotic inclinations. He goes on to later add that "His sex drive had

diminished, had virtually disappeared. Salvation of the monk, he thought. The

drive had to go sooner or later, or no normal man could dedicate himself to a life

that excluded sex" (136). His sexual restraint, then, has both saved him and

emasculated him. Here, Matheson claims that sexual desire is a condition of

"normal" manhood, and because Robert has worked to eliminate this impulse, he

has emerged not rejuvenated from his experience in the metaphorical frontier but

as a kind of eunuchoid. The sudden appearance of Ruth alarms him, however,

and he considers how his more "primitive" impulses that might have prevailed

had they met years earlier:

> The most unusual feature of the entire affair, he thought, was that he felt
>
> no physical desire for her. If she had come two years before, maybe even
>
> later, he might have violated her. There had been some terrible moments
>
> in those days, moments when the most terrible of solutions to his need
>
> were considered, were often dwelt upon until they drove him half mad.
>
> (136)

Here, Matheson associates primitivism with rape, which further highlights

Robert's successful command over his sexual urges. Prior to the catastrophic

event, sexual assault would have no doubt been unthinkable to Robert, given

Matheson's portrayal of him, but the post-apocalyptic world provides a new landscape to test masculine moral character. In this light, Matheson characterizes genuine masculinity in terms of having a strong sexual ("primitive") drive while maintaining strict control ("civilized") over that drive. When Robert meets Ruth, he possesses the latter but not the former.

However, Robert's position in the liminal space between the primitive frontier landscape and the culture represented by Ruth is further complicated by the bachelor lifestyle he has taken on after the death of his wife and daughter. Bachelorhood has been obviously forced upon him—there are simply no (human) women around—but this changes, of course, when Robert finds Ruth, and he is initially quite reluctant to surrender the single life he has come to know:

> He knew that, if she were infected, he'd have to try to cure her whether it worked or not. But what if she were free of the bacillus? In a way, that was a more nerve-wracking possibility. The other way he could merely go on as before, breaking neither schedule nor standards. But if she stayed, if they had to establish a relationship, perhaps become husband and wife, have children … Yes, that was more terrifying. He suddenly realized that he had become an ill-tempered and inveterate bachelor again. He no longer thought about his wife, his child, his past life. The present was enough. And he was afraid of the possible demand that he make sacrifices and accept responsibility again. (139)

As I noted earlier, Robert craves a human relationship, but he also fears the "demand," the "sacrifices," and the "responsibility" that accompanies that relationship. Having survived the nightly and persistent onslaught of the vampires, Robert now draws upon one fundamental aspect of the frontier myth—the flight from a culture associated with domesticity.

Despite his misgivings about Ruth and the changes that she would bring to his life, Robert does begin to develop strong feelings for her. After he catches her trying to sneak out into the night, Robert convinces her to stay in the house with him, and they become moderately intimate:

> Then they were sitting in the darkness, pressing close together, as if all the heat in the world were in their bodies and they would share the warmth between them. He felt the shuddering rise and fall of her breasts as she held close to him, her arms tight around his body, her face against his neck. His big hands moved roughly through her hair, stroking and feeling the silky strands. (150)

Matheson describes the scene as an amalgamation of eager tenderness and sexual chemistry, and in doing so, he attempts to reinscribe Robert with the spark of sexuality that he had been missing. However, Robert and Ruth kiss, but go no further. Instead, he insists that she submit to a blood test to determine whether or not she is infected with the vampiric disease. She is hesitant but agrees, and Robert then substitutes his scientific procedure for their potential sexual act: "She closed her eyes as he jabbed in the needle. He could feel the pain in his own

finger as he pressed out blood and rubbed it on the slide" (152). He sticks his needle into her, and when he learns the truth about her, that she's infected, she knocks him unconscious and runs away. In the very moment when he could rejuvenate his now-controlled sexuality, Robert performs a scientific procedure, and as it turns out, he ends up not the masculine deliverer of a new world but, like Isherwood in *Earth Abides*, the remnant of an archaic civilization.

The great twist in *I Am Legend* is that Robert, once the last hope of civilization, learns that groups of diseased men and women have banded together into an organized society. These people, unlike the mindless, primitive vampires who terrorize Robert every night, are methodical and like-minded. Plus, they seek revenge—Robert has been killing these people off in their sleep throughout the entire novel, and Ruth had been sent to find his weakness and expose it. So when the "new" men arrive to capture Robert for his crimes, he comes to an important realization, that he is not a savior but an abomination, not the frontier hero but the unwanted reminder of a failed ideology. Even so, Matheson positions Robert's realization in terms of masculinity, and the "black suited men" represent a construction of manhood that reflects the new post-apocalyptic frontier. The contrast between the two conflicting ideas of masculinity can best be seen in light of Robert's concerns about their brutality as they slaughter the "primitive" vampires in order to capture him:

He didn't like the looks of them, he didn't like the methodical butchery.

They were more like gangsters than men forced into a situation. There

were looks of vicious triumph on their faces, white and stark in the

spotlights. Their faces were cruel and emotionless … With a sense of

inward shock he could not analyze in the rush of the moment, he realized

that he felt more deeply toward the vampires than he did toward their

executioners. (158)

Robert comes to identify himself more with the vampires than with the "dark-suited men," like John Dunbar in *Dances with Wolves* rejecting the American military in favor of his adoptive Sioux tribe. Robert does kill, but he thinks of it as an act of mercy, as opposed to men of the new society who murder for the apparent joy of it. Matheson highlights this fact in a scene between Robert and Ruth, in which they discuss the society of which she is a part. Here, Ruth justifies the acts of her contemporaries by drawing upon the frontier myth itself: "'New societies are always primitive,' she answered. 'You should know that. In a way we're like a revolutionary group—repossessing society by violence. It's inevitable. Violence is no stranger to you. You've killed. Many times'" (166). For Matheson, American history rewrites itself in the post-apocalyptic landscape, and when Robert remarks to Ruth that he was disgusted to see the gleeful demeanor of the killers, she responds: "Maybe you did see joy on their faces,' she said. 'It's not surprising. They're young. And they are killers—assigned killers, legal killers. They're respected for their killing, admired for it. What can you expect from them? They're only fallible men. And men can learn to enjoy killing. That's an old story, Neville. You know that" (167). It is indeed an old story, and a very

American one at that. Like Isherwood in *Earth Abides*, Robert Neville represents an archaic version of masculinity that fails to sufficiently transform with the times, and only with his death can the old world be purged for a new one, a world where "men can be men" without facing the restrictions imposed upon them by contemporary American culture. Unlike in *Earth Abides*, however, the men who inherit the new world in Matheson's novel are not idealized, and the ending evokes a sympathetic reading of Robert's death. He represents the moral authority of an outdated ideology, one that readers are meant to associate with.

The Proving Grounds for Masculinity

Pat Frank's *Alas, Babylon* (1959) and Robert Heinlein's *Farnham's Freehold* (1964) both portray the aftermath of a nuclear war as the proving ground for a new masculinity based upon old frontier codes. The white protagonists in these novels, who are wealthy and privileged but ultimately unhappy, find in the challenging, post-apocalyptic landscapes a reinvigorated sense of masculinity, particularly in contrast to the contemporary American culture that has emasculated them. In Pat Frank's *Alas, Babylon*, the main protagonist, a white man named Randall Bragg, survives a nuclear exchange between the United States and the Soviet Union. The novel opens with life in Fort Repose, Florida progressing as usual. Randall is a womanizing bachelor, a failed politician, and an unremarkable attorney living alone in his family's home. Early in the novel, however, Randy is tipped off by his older brother, Mark, a military

officer stationed in Omaha, that a nuclear exchange between The United States and The Soviet Union is imminent. Mark asks Randy to watch over his wife and children, whom he sends to Fort Repose on a rushed overnight flight, because he must remain at his post. Randy agrees, and the early stages of the novel describe Randy's preparation for the catastrophe. In these early pages, Frank portrays Randy as a virtuous and virile man who is ultimately unsuccessful because of the restrictive culture in which he lives.

The characteristics of masculinity that Randy attempts to live up to can best be seen in a brief exchange between Mark and Randy that occurs prior to the events of the novel. Mark tells Randy that, in order to defeat the Russians, America needs new kinds of men: "Bold men, audacious men, tenacious men. Impatient, odd-ball men like Rickover pounding desks for his atomic sub. Ruthless men who will fire the deadheads and ass-kissers. Rude men who will tell the unimaginative, business-as-usual, seven-carbon sons of bitches to go take a jump at a galloping goose" (16). In this passage, Mark describes with stunning accuracy the frontier hero, who uses creative action to thwart an ineffectual system of laws and mores in order to combat evil (in this case, the Soviets). Randy buys into Mark's idealized manhood, and he enters into local politics in order to become "the kind of leader Mark wanted" (17). Randy, however, fails to be elected, not because he can't live up to Mark's ideals but precisely because he adopts them. While campaigning, Randy is asked by someone in the crowd, "Hey, Randy, where do y' stand on the Supreme Court?"

(8). The question refers to the Supreme Court's 1954 decision banning racial segregation, Brown vs. Board of Education, and instead of answering to please the crowd, he answers truthfully: "he did voice his final conviction, inescapable because of his legal heritage and training, and the oaths he had taken as voter and soldier. He said: 'I believe in the Constitution of the United States—all of it'" (9). His reply garners "snickers and snorts from the rim of the crowd," and he is later called, behind his back, "a fool and a traitor to his state and his race" (9). In providing his unpopular answer in support of desegregation, Randy attempts to show himself as "bold," "audacious," and "tenacious," but he ends up losing to "Porky Logan, a gross man whose vote could be bought for fifty bucks, who bragged that he had not got beyond the seventh grade but that he could get more new roads and state money for Timucuan County than any half-baked radical, undoubtedly backed by the burrheads and the N.A.A.C.P." (17). In the contemporary world, Randy takes on the position of the "white knight" in standing against racial discrimination, and he is punished for it. In this passage, however, Frank also draws attention to constructions of intellectualism and manhood, but unlike in *Earth Abides* and *I Am Legend*, where "book learning" is seen as an emasculating practice, Porky and his lack of education go hand-in-hand with his moral decadence. Later, Randy reflects upon his family's long heritage of political work, and he feels like a failure:

Randolph Rowzee Bragg, whose great-grandfather had been a United States senator, whose grandfather had been chosen by President Wilson

to represent his country as Minister Plenipotentiary and Envoy

Extraordinary in time of war, whose father had been elected, without

opposition, to half a dozen offices, Randolph was beaten five-to-one in the

Democratic primaries for nomination to the state legislature. It was worse

than defeat. It was humiliation, and Randy knew he could never run for

public office again. (9)

Randy attempts to advocate for desegregation despite the cultural climate of the

town, and he is castigated for doing so. Even his next-door neighbor and local

librarian Florence disapproves of Randy and his lifestyle: "it was strange that he

had lived alone in that wooden mausoleum. He even had his office in there,

instead of in the Professional Building like the other lawyers. He was a hermit,

and a snob, and a nigger lover, and no better than a pervert. God knows what he

did with those girls upstairs" (6). Frank depicts Randy as a social outcast within

the community, particularly for his convictions on race, but in doing so, Frank also

casts the community of Fort Repose as holding to the "false values" of the

civilized world that undermine his masculine potential. In line with the frontier

hero, Randy must become separated from his culture to encounter the primitive

and ultimately rejuvenate his own sense of masculinity.

Such an opportunity for regeneration occurs, as is typical in post-

apocalyptic fiction, with the destruction that follows a large-scale nuclear

exchange between the two Cold War nations. The town manages to avoid a

direct hit from the blasts and receives little in the way of collateral damage, but it

is thrown into chaos by the overall dissolution of a stable governmental state. Fort Repose comes to resemble a frontier-like town, where the power structures that enforce the laws have completely collapsed. In these conditions, Randy finds himself tempted to abandon the model of masculinity that had hitherto led to his responsible, if unappreciated, action. As he is driving back to his home, Randy comes upon the scene of a car accident:

> In this second Randy made an important decision. Yesterday, he would have stopped instantly. There would have been no question about it. When there was an accident, and someone was hurt, a man stopped. But yesterday was a past period in history, with laws and rules archaic as ancient Rome's. Today the rules had changed, just as Roman law gave way to atavistic barbarism as the empire fell to Hun and Goth. Today a man saved himself and his family and to hell with everyone else. (97-8)

Randy sees himself having crossed the threshold into "barbarism"; self-preservation in the post-apocalyptic world has replaced the social mores of the old world. However, in this moment, Randy once again draws upon his masculine creed: "And yet Randy stopped … He touched nothing. He would report the wreck to a road patrolman or deputy sheriff, if he could find one and when there was time" (98). Randy puts himself at great risk simply by stopping, even though he can offer no assistance to the already-dead victims of the crash. Instead, Randy perceives the symbolism of the event: "The incident was important only because it was self-revelatory. Randy knew he would have to play by the old

rules. He could not shuck his code, or sneak out of his era" (98). He holds fast to his "code" of ethics despite the temptation to legitimize the uncharitable ideology of the new world, so Randy, like numerous "frontier" heroes before him, must negotiate between primitive impulses (to flee) and his personal ethics (to stop). As it turns out, the frontier-like landscape of post-holocaust America becomes the perfect place in which to hone the characteristics of masculinity that Mark has declared and that Randy accepts.

The rejuvenating effect of the new world is clear from the start, as Randy takes on the leadership role he had once been denied. Even Randy's good friend Dan, a local physician who comes to reside with Randy at his home, remarks upon Randy's ability to transform himself in light of the catastrophic events: "You react to crisis in the right way. You remember what Toynbee says? His theory of challenge and response applies not only to nations, but to individuals. Some nations and some people melt in the heat of crisis and come apart like fat in the pan. Others meet the challenge and harden. I think you're going to harden" (133). If Randy is a "degenerate" bachelor, moderately successful attorney, and decidedly failed governor before the nuclear strikes, his ability to respond to the nuclear crisis allows him to become the definition of manhood outlined by his brother, Mark. In this way, Frank develops what has become the most recognizable trope of post-apocalyptic fiction since the publication of the novel—post-apocalyptic landscapes provide modern white men opportunities for masculine revitalization denied them in the contemporary world.

The traits of masculinity advocated in the novel, then, revolve primarily around two key characteristics: strength and justice. The former is necessary for the latter in the post-apocalyptic context, but it also sets the hero apart from the primitive anarchists. Throughout the novel, Frank infuses various scenes with narratives of spiritual strength to highlight what would be needed in this new world. For example, Randy says, "The strong survive. The frail die. The exotic fish die because the aquarium isn't heated. The common guppy lives. So does the tough catfish … We're going to have to be tough. We're going to have to be catfish" (176-7). The exotic fish dies not so much because of its "nonnative status" but because of its reliance upon modern civilization; while the exotic fish is admired in the contemporary world, it simply cannot survive without modern amenities. The guppy, plain but durable, thrives. The parable of the fishes parallels the construction of white manhood throughout the novel, which reenacts the American narrative of the heroic common man of the frontier. White, "non-native" masculinity requires the adoption of what Frank suggests to be a native primitivism. Then, when Randy is hard on Ben Franklin, his nephew, he says: "'North American civilization's return to the Neolithic Age … In the Neolithic,' Randy said, 'a boy either grows up fast or doesn't grow up at all'" (229-30). Although women and girls live in the post-apocalyptic frontier with Randy and face similar struggles for survival, discussions of strength and fortitude are generally omitted from the scenes about them—their domestic roles remain firmly

intact in Randy's new world. Only the men are allowed to leave the safety of the estate.

Perhaps the most illuminating descriptions that demonstrate how masculinity functions in Frank's post-apocalyptic scenario can be seen in the stark contrast between Randy and Porky. Randy, who lost to Porky in the recent elections, flourishes in the new world. Although he failed to become a leader in the old world, he assumes governance in the new one:

> Randy walked to the house, wondering a bit about himself. Without being conscious of it, he had begun to give orders in the past few days. Even to the Admiral he had given orders. He had assumed leadership in the tiny community bound together by the water pipes leading from the artesian well … When you had the responsibility you also had the right to command. (169)

In this passage, Randy refers not to Fort Repose but to the collection of neighboring families who have banded together. By contrast, Porky, the once-successful politician, ends up dead, a result of his own greed. As Randy and Dan are out searching for supplies, they come across Porky and Randy's former girlfiend, Rita, living in a boarded up house on Augustine Road. The two men decide to visit them because they hear Porky and Rita have been hoarding vital supplies and hope to barter for them. When they arrive, however, they discover what the two have been stockpiling—jewelry tainted by radiation: "They found Porky on the second floor. He was sitting up in bed, unshaven chin resting upon

blotched bare chest. Between his knees was a beer case filled jewelry. His hands were buried to the forearm in this treasure. Dan said, 'Porky!' Porky didn't raise his head. Porky was dead" (208). Porky, whose greed landed him a prestigious political position in the modern world, dies because of it in the post-apocalyptic setting. The difference between these two men demonstrates a major premise of *Alas, Babylon* and post-apocalyptic literature in general, that contemporary culture privileges deceitful and gluttonous men instead of "real" men, whose moral convictions are inherently associated with an authentic masculinity.

While strength of character is touted as a necessary trait of masculinity in Frank's novel, justice also plays a significant role in the construction of post-apocalyptic masculinity. Frank suggests throughout the narrative that men can be strong to survive, but survival isn't enough; in his development of standards of justice in the text, we see another convention of the post-apocalyptic narrative—lawless bandits. These men possess the strength to survive but do so at the expense of their own morality; the neo-primitive environment of the novel draws upon age-old representations of the frontier as an immoral space rife with temptation, and these men have fallen victim to its allure. The bandits in *Alas, Babylon* and novels like it represent the primitive, and the hero within these tales, like the frontier hero, must use violence to deal with lawless men and restore justice. In *Alas, Babylon*, the climax of the novel appears when Randy and the other men deal with the "bandit problem." At one point, Dan is attacked by marauders and beaten very badly; upon seeing Dan in this condition, Randy

felt nauseated, not at the sight of Dan's injuries—he had seen worse—but in disgust at the beasts who in callous cruelty had dragged down and maimed and destroyed the human dignity of this selfless man. Yet it was nothing new. It had been like this at some point in every civilization and on every continent. There were human jackals for every human disaster. (241)

Until this moment, Randy's role had been to ensure the community's survivability by keeping track of food and other supplies, but when Dan returns battered, Randy accepts his new role as the keeper of justice. For example, Randy tells the others:

I'm concerned about the highwaymen right now, this minute. Next, they'll start raiding the houses. It's as inevitable as the fact that they left the main highways and ambushed you on River Road. Typhoid is bad. So is murder and robbery and rape. I am an officer in the Reserve. I have been legally designated to keep order when normal authority breaks down. Which it certainly has here. And the first thing I must do to keep order is execute the highwaymen. (252-3)

Even his mannerisms towards Lib, his girlfriend, suggest a new manly resolve for justice: "She had never seen Randy look and speak and act like this before. She held his arm, and yet she felt he had moved away from her. He did not seem anxious to talk, confide in her, or ask her opinion, as he usually did. He had moved into man's august world of battle and violence, from which she had been

barred" (253). In this scene, Randy has positioned himself fully as a frontier hero who must leave behind his "cultured" self, which is associated with the feminine, to dispose of the primitive Other through violence. Randy then proceeds to plan the capture and murder of the bandits.

Ultimately, Randy and his cohorts are successful at dealing with the highwaymen problem—they draw the bandits to attack them by posing as a helpless group of travelers. A gunfight ensues, and the good guys win. Randy is surprisingly calm about his role in the killing of the outlaws. When he looks upon one of the men he killed, he comments upon the guns:

> One of the highwaymen trailing them had been Leroy Settle, the drugstore cowboy. When Randy examined his two guns he was surprised to find that they were only .22 caliber, lightweight replicas, except in bore, of the big frontier .45's … He saw that his shots had all been good, the three in the belly making a neat pattern, diagonal ticktacktoe. (278)

The passage is significant because it shows Randy's comfort at playing the part of the gunslinging peace-keeper and the relative impotence of men like Leroy Settle, who cannot even carry the more powerful and more authentic weapons of the "real" frontier villain. Because not all of the highwaymen are killed, Randy is also later forced to call judgment upon one of the men: "At noon Monday the man with the bat was hung from a girder supporting the bandstand roof in Marines Park. All the regular traders and a number of strangers were in the park. Randy ordered that the corpse not be cut down until sunset. He wanted the strangers to

be impressed and spread the word beyond Fort Repose" (283). The sense of

catharsis comes when the bandits are taken care of.

Therefore, by the end of the novel, Randy has been successfully

revitalized. Immediately after the shoot-out with the outlaws, Randy returns home

and marries Lib, which symbolizes his return from the frontier "world of battle and

violence" to the civilized world of his community, in which he is the leader. After a

few months, Fort Repose is visited by radiation-suited men riding in helicopters

who represent what is left of the United States government and who offer Randy

and the others the chance to return with them to more "civilized" parts of the

country. However, when confronted with this possibility of leaving, Randy is

hesitant: "This was Randy's town and these were his people and he would not

leave them. Yet it was not right that he make this decision alone. He looked at Lib

without finding it necessary to speak. She, knowing what was in his mind, simply

smiled and winked" (314-5). Everyone in the community decides to stay in Fort

Repose under the gifted leadership of Randy Bragg; they have discovered a kind

of utopia in their community and are therefore unwilling to leave it. Randy most of

all wants to remain in Fort Repose under these new conditions; civilization as he

once knew it restricted his ability to pursue authentic manhood, but the new,

post-apocalyptic world in which he is so successful has allowed him to become

the model of wise and moral masculinity that he and his brother both imagine.

In Heinlein's *Farnham's Freehold*, the regenerative effect of a post-

apocalyptic, frontier landscape upon masculinity can best be seen in the contrast

between the two primary white male protagonists: Hugh and his son, Duke. In the

novel, masculinity is inextricably bound to the idealized nuclear family and the

various roles occupied by both women and men. Heinlein places these family

images alongside a juxtaposed slavery narrative, in which the white characters

become enslaved by a future society whose leaders are exclusively people of

color. The post-apocalyptic event in the novel allows Heinlein to both explore the

rejuvenative qualities of such a landscape while at the same time reconstructing

white masculinity against a racialized Other, invoking a framework of American

manhood that pits white, frontier heroes against primitivized natives. Like Randy

in *Alas, Babylon*, Hugh Farnham—the novel's patriarch—becomes a "new man"

through his command in the post-holocaust world in which they find themselves,

and he does so not through impulsive action but through careful and patient

calculation. Even as a slave, Farnham uses his brain, not his brawn (like Randy

above), to ensure survival in his new situation. Despite the differences in these

characteristics of masculinity, both *Farnham's Freehold* and *Alas, Babylon* use a

post-apocalyptic landscape to examine race relations in mid-century American

culture. At the beginning of the novel, Heinlein casts Hugh Farnham as a once-

successful man whose good fortune has run out—he has grown old, his wife is

an alcoholic, and his son is an unappreciative miscreant. In fact, it is the contrast

between Hugh and his son, Duke, that best reveals the construction of white

masculinity privileged within the novel. Prior to the apocalyptic event, for

example, the family sits down to play a game of bridge with their guest, Barbara,

who is a friend of Hugh's daughter. As Barbara observes both Duke and his father, she becomes attracted to Hugh's masculine charm:

> Duke was looking at her; she locked eyes with him, blushed, and looked
> away, looking at his father instead. Mr. Farnham was fiftyish, she decided.
> And looked it. Hair thinning and already gray, himself thin, almost gaunt,
> but with a slight potbelly, tired eyes, lines around them, and deep lines
> down his cheeks. Not handsome—With sudden warmth she realized that if
> Duke Farnham had half the strong masculine charm his father had, a
> panty girdle wouldn't be much protection. (14)

Although Hugh is characterized as possessing a great reserve of "masculine charm," he has lost his hair and gained a paunch. Hugh has grown old and is now married to a woman he no longer loves, so the nuclear exchange between the United States and the Soviet Union becomes a blessing for him, as he is able to reconstruct the nuclear family that he idealizes through the initial consummation and eventual marriage to the much younger Barbara. So, in this novel, the post-apocalyptic narrative is figuratively depicted as rejuvenative.

Hugh and the rest of the family, including Barbara and their black man-servant Joe, survive the apocalyptic attack because of Hugh's prudent planning—he builds and stocks a bomb-shelter. Prior to the apocalyptic event, Hugh is made fun of by Duke for being paranoid and ridiculously concerned with the possibility of nuclear war. After the apocalyptic event, Hugh is shown to be a brilliant strategist and a capable leader. As they sit in the bunker awaiting their

fate, Hugh and Duke's roles become reversed; instead of being perceived as a pathetic (if charming) old man, Hugh becomes an indomitable patriarch willing to go so far as to cast out his disobedient son. For example, when Hugh's decisions are questioned by Duke, Hugh says: "This shelter is a lifeboat and I am boat officer. For the safety of all I shall maintain discipline. Even if it means tossing somebody overboard" (27). When Duke keeps on, Hugh adds: "Can't you be a man, give in, and do as I tell you? When your life depends on my hospitality?" (28). In these passages, Hugh correlates masculinity with hierarchy—Hugh assumes command because the bomb shelter is now his "castle," and if Duke wants to "be a man," he must succumb to that rule. Joe himself follows Hugh's orders without question. Heinlein uses hierarchy as a metaphor for an idealized family structure in which the father is the unquestioned leader. However, Hugh attempts to distinguish between hierarchy and slavery; Hugh says: "... I like all cats. You don't own a cat, he is a free citizen. Take dogs; dogs are friendly and fun and loyal. But slaves. Not their fault, they've been bred for it. But slavery makes me queasy, even in animals" (39). Such a passage foreshadows their enslavement later in the novel, but it also sets up a dichotomy that comments upon contemporary cultural values. Hugh views the majority of contemporary Americans as dogs, as slaves, when he tells Barbara that the nuclear war will be a positive change:

> I'm not as sad over what has happened as you are. It might be good for
>
> us. I don't mean us six; I mean our country … I've worried for years about

our country. It seems to me that we have been breeding slaves—and I

believe in freedom. This war may have turned the tide. This may be the

first war in history which kills the stupid rather than the bright and able.

(39)

While Hugh suggests that men and women have become unthinking slaves, he

speaks mainly of men and masculinity. For example, he goes on to add that

"wars have always been hardest on the best young men. This time the boys in

service are safe or safer than civilians. And of civilians those who used their

heads and made preparations stand a far better chance. Not every case, but on

the average, and that will improve the breed" (40). Men who serve in the armed

forces are clearly privileged over civilian men, considered "stupid" and "weak."

Naturally, Hugh had spent time in the navy, while Duke, his son, had not; Hugh

has learned the necessity of social hierarchy and command, the need to listen to

a prepared and capable commander. Furthermore, the above passage provides

a subtle critique of the contemporary world in contrast with the new, post-

apocalyptic one. "Bright and able men" were casualties in the modern world, but

in the new setting, they are able to thrive.

In a fashion characteristic of post-apocalyptic fiction, Hugh himself is able

to thrive after the nuclear attack. The same night of the attack, for example, he

sleeps with Barbara, a woman less than half his age. Immediately, we can see

the rejuvenative effect of their consummation: "Barbie hon, I didn't mind dying,

before. Now suddenly life is worth living" (45). For Hugh, the nuclear attack is a

good thing—he has found a new reason to live. Later, after they have established a small, frontier-like community, both Barbara and Karen, Hugh's daughter, confess to being pregnant, and when Hugh thinks about the new life, the new babies that couldn't have happened under the old culture, he finds a new happiness: "With a warm wave of euphoria Hugh Farnham realized that he had never been so happy in his life" (131). He is the father of Barbara's baby, and the nuclear family he had once lost has once again been restored.

The twist in the novel that makes *Farnham's Freehold* of particular interest is that when they leave the bomb shelter they initially take refuge in, they find not a radiated wasteland but lush, Edenic surroundings:

> Karen was below [Hugh] on a slope that ran down to a stream. Across it the land rose and was covered with trees. On this side was a semi-clearing. The sky was blue, sunlight warm and bright, and there was no sign of war's destruction, nor any sign of man—not a building, a road, a path, no contrails in the sky. It was wilderness, and there was nothing that he recognized. (61)

The novel takes a turn from the conventional post-apocalyptic narrative by casting the characters into the distant future rather than a demolished and uncivilized present; the new landscape is an untamed wilderness that demands skillful engagement with the frontier-like environment. However, after almost a year of living on their own in this apparently unpopulated wilderness, the group is

visited by a group of strange men. Heinlein describes the leader of the group as follows:

> He had an air of good-natured arrogance and his eyes were bright and
> merry. His forehead was high, his skull massive; he looked intelligent and
> alert. Hugh could not place his race. His skin was dark brown and shiny.
> But his mouth was only slightly Negroid; his nose, though broad, was
> arched, and his black hair was wavy. He carried a small crop. (157)

The characters in *Farnham's Freehold* are, like Randy Flagg and his cohorts, rescued by civilization, but the civilization that Heinlein images enslaves them. The novel clearly *attempts* to turn the tables of American history by reversing the roles of whites and blacks in the slavery narrative; the people of color in this future society are in charge, and they keep Hugh and his people as slaves, along with other white men and women. While this scenario has important implications for the construction of race in the novel, it also reinforces the basic tenets of frontier mythology: a group of innocent and cultured white settlers in an "untamed wilderness" encounter a large group of people of color, "only slightly Negroid" in their appearance, whose customs appear seemingly barbaric. While it appears that Heinlein's thought-experiment reconfigures the history of American slavery, the novel also draws upon the conventions of the frontier narrative to do so.

Through Hugh's various intelligent capabilities, they are all able to survive their encounters with the primitive, and because of this, they are reluctant to join the new culture that has enslaved them. Obviously, their situation is less than

ideal, but instead of being the metaphorical slaves that Hugh believes most white people have become, they become actual slaves in this culture. In both constructions, civilization produces slaves, which lies in opposition to Hugh's code of masculinity, where the only authentic way of living is through direct encounters with the primitive. By the new culture's standards, Hugh and his family had become like the other "savages" of the area:

"Runners and a few aborigines," Ponse supplemented. "Savages. Poor creatures who had never been rescued by civilization. It's hard to save them, Hugh. They don't stand around waiting to be picked up the way you did. They're crafty as wolves. The merest shadow in the sky and they freeze and you can't see them—and they are very destructive of game." (219)

By juxtaposing the relationship between whites and blacks in terms of slavery, Heinlein attempts to argue that race is not to blame for slavery—civilization is.

As in *Alas, Babylon*, however, *Farnham's Freehold* attempts to break down racial barriers by inherently critiquing white prejudice and tying it to a failed vision of white masculinity. In one scene, Duke, the representative of all that is wrong with modern, white men, punches out his father in revenge: "'Your Captain Bligh act is finished.' He clouted his father. 'That's for bullying Mother!' He clouted him from the other side and harder, knocking his father off his feet. 'And that's for having that nigger pull a gun on me'" (17). Hugh replies, "Not 'nigger,'" and Duke responds: "He's a Negro as long as he behaves himself. Pulling a gun

on me makes him a nigger" (71). Hugh, the model of the white man, can take a punch without protest but clearly detests Duke's use of the word "nigger." Later, we see Duke cling to stereotype when, while enslaved, says: "There never was a nigger bastard who wouldn't rape a white woman if he had the chance" (233). Hugh naturally replies: "Duke! That's poisonous, insane nonsense. You almost persuade me that you are crazy" (233). Duke's emasculation is directly tied to his racial slurs. The "modern" white man, Hugh, is not only smart, prepared, and capable but is also above racial discrimination. Despite being enslaved, Hugh never racializes his captors. While he doesn't approve of his condition and tries to escape with his family, Hugh puts racial prejudice aside, much like Randy Bragg, who creates a utopia of whiteness and blackness. Duke, the model of the old culture, ends up being castrated, an act that had been ordered by his mother and symbolic of his attachment to a culture that coddles men. Duke cannot abide the privileged militaristic order of his father but instead becomes his mother's plaything in the new civilization. When Hugh finds out that his ex-wife neutered Duke, he is obviously shocked: "What? Joe, you must be mistaken. Sure, Grace has her faults. But she wouldn't have that done—to her own son" (254). Joe instead argues that Duke is better off for it: "That's what I've been telling you, Hugh; Duke hasn't lost by it. He's snug as a bug in a rug and he knows it. He was almost patronizing to me. You might have thought that I was the one wearing livery. With Grace in solid with the big boss and with her wound around his finger, Duke thinks he's got it made. Well, he has, Hugh" (256). After everything they

went through, Duke has learned and gained nothing. He is well-off in this new culture, but well-off like the dog that Hugh criticizes earlier in the novel. Duke is neutered and obedient to his mother and therefore completely emasculated.

The ultimate test of Hugh's masculinity, then, is to get his family out of slavery alive. Although he, Barbara, and the children are separated into different quarters, Hugh attempts to flee with his family from captivity: "Go, go, go! With almost no food, with nothing but a makeshift knife, with no equipment, a 'nightshirt' for clothing, and no hope of anything better. Go! And save his family, or die with them. But die free!" (268). In the classical frontier mythology, the "civilized" world is associated with enslavement (in this case, literally) while the primitive frontier landscape is associated with freedom. They are running from their captors, but it is important to note that they are running just as much to the wilderness, to the idealized life they had created after the nuclear event, the one in which Hugh claims to have the happiest moment in his life. Hugh's attempts at escaping, or dying in the process, do not work, however; instead, they are all captured and returned to face judgment. Conveniently, the leader of the new order decides to send Hugh, Barbara, and the children back to their own time, and they end up returning to the past on the very night the nuclear explosions occur. The pages that close Farnham's Freehold provide a brief sketch of what happens to them in the new, slightly-altered universe:

> They lived through the missiles, they lived through the bombs, they lived
> through the fires, they lived through the epidemics—which were not

extreme and may not have been weapons; both sides disclaimed them—

and they lived through the long period of disorders while civil government

writhed like a snake with a broken back. They lived. They went on. (314)

This time, instead of huddling in Hugh's well-stocked bomb shelter, they hide in a

deep mine, and the consequences of their decision allow them to avoid

enslavement. After the waters settle, they open up "Farnham's Freehold Trading

Post & Restaurant Bar." Like a settler on the Western plains, Hugh and Barbara

set up a frontier outpost, and while Hugh is forced back into civilization, it is an

altered version, one in which he tries to escape history, including a history of

slavery in the post-apocalyptic world. The masculinity of the aging Hugh

becomes restored, and although he is depicted by Heinlein as a sympathetic

white figure who confronts racial bigotry, Hugh's restoration is ultimately formed

in opposition to a racialized Other. Hugh does not incorporate the traits of

manhood embraced by his captors; instead, he resists them.

Masculinity in the New Frontier

In *Lucifer's Hammer* (1977), Larry Niven and Jerry Pournelle construct a

post-apocalyptic landscape in which male characters, once emasculated by their

wives and their work in the modern world, become "rejuvenated" by the neo-

primitive frontier imaged in the novel. *Lucifer's Hammer* closely follows the

conventions of the post-apocalyptic genre, constructing masculinity in terms of

the dialectic between survivability and morality. The novel follows a wide range of

characters, much like Stephen King's *The Stand* and Robert McCammon's *Swan Song*, whose story threads come together by the conclusion of the novel. In this Type I post-apocalyptic fiction, a comet—named "Lucifer's Hammer" in the novel—slams into the Earth, resulting in the primitive, post-apocalyptic landscape that is typical of the genre. After the comet hits, thousands scramble to higher ground to avoid the incoming flood waters, and the civilized world becomes an arena for survival. A group of refugees meet up at the estate of a U.S. senator, and they create a massive stronghold together to aid in their survival. By the end of the novel, the group's chief rival is a cannibalistic militant group fueled by a self-proclaimed Christian prophet, and after several battles that include the use of bio-chemical warfare, the stronghold wins. The novel ends with the group having to make a big decision—risk their current situation by fortifying a nuclear power plant that the cannibals want to see destroyed, or make the safer choice, allowing the cannibals to destroy the energy facility. Overall, the novel's driving question becomes: should the protagonists be content with simple survival, or should they try to "control the lightning" in order to rebuild civilization to its former glory? Within this framework, however, several characters—covertly and overtly—hope for the impending apocalypse that will provide opportunities for masculine revitalization through the rebuilding of American culture. As Harvey Randall, one the novel's chief characters, observes early in the novel, "Not only do millions think the world's going to end, but millions more hope so. It shows in their attitudes. They hate what they're doing, and keep looking nostalgically at the

'simple' life. Of course they won't voluntarily choose to be farmers or live in communes, but if everybody has to ..." (159). Throughout the novel, Niven and Pournelle reinforce the sentiment that Americans, particularly American men, desire "the end of the world as we know it" in order to embrace more authentic lives and to rediscover what appears to be a lost sense of masculinity.

Because of the length and scope of *Lucifer's Hammer*, Niven and Pournelle weave several male characters into the narrative: U.S. Senator Jellison, an aging, ailing patriarch; George Christopher, a down-to-earth, working class conservative; Johnny Baker, a charismatic and heroic astronaut; Dan Forrestor, a diabetic academic—the list goes on. While these male characters serve to illustrate the fact that *Lucifer's Hammer* is a male-dominated narrative (women show up in the book but play mainly complementary roles), they also fail to undergo any significant character development from before the comet strikes to its aftermath. These characters remain relatively flat, so in this study, I will focus on two characters for whom Lucifer's Hammer does result in a fundamental shift in their character and, by extension, their senses of masculinity: Harvey Randall and Gordie Vance.

Harvey Randall is an excellent example of the rejuvenative effect that the post-apocalyptic world of *Lucifer's Hammer* can have on its male characters. Prior to the apocalyptic event, Harvey feels "stuck" by his career and his domestic situation. He is "trapped in a job he hates" (102) and by a "home he loved but whose price was just so damned high" (32). These two complaints go

hand in hand and are attributed to his overspending wife, Loretta. Early in the

novel, Loretta inquires as to why Harvey must spend so much time at his job:

> "I know your job means more to you than I do, but please, Harvey, don't I
>
> mean something to you?" "Of course you do." He grabbed her and pulled
>
> her to him. "Lord, is that how you feel? The job doesn't mean more than
>
> you do." It's just the money, he thought. And I can't say that. I can't say
>
> that I don't need the money, you do. (32)

In this exchange, Harvey thinks to himself (but does not articulate to his wife) that

he blames Loretta for their money troubles and the amount of work he must do to

support her lifestyle. The novel suggests that the pre-apocalyptic world of

gendered consumerism is inherently alienating; both characters are subjugated

to the gendered roles assigned to them—Loretta within the domestic space and

Harvey outside of it. This sense of isolation is not atypical during the time in

which *Lucifer's Hammer* was written; as Michael Kimmel writes in *Manhood in

America*:

> relentless striving in the competitive crowd left men feeling isolated and
>
> alone. Loneliness, emptiness—these became the dominant terms in the
>
> era's cultural analyses of masculinity. The breadwinner role left men
>
> feeling like cogs in the corporate machine, and conspicuous consumption
>
> in sprawling suburban shopping malls was hardly a compensation. (192)

Harvey is a reporter for a large television station, and he feels like the "cog in the

corporate machine" with no way to step out from under its shadow. Niven and

Pournelle effectively capture this zeitgeist of 1970's masculinity in order to enact the fantasy of a post-apocalyptic world that provides opportunity for male revitalization.

And Harvey is himself a prime example of this sense of rejuvenation. By the end of the novel, Harvey is cast not as a victim of consumer capitalism but as a masculine, frontier hero. Unsurprisingly, as part of this process of rejuvenation, Harvey's wife dies during the early stages of the apocalyptic event, immediately freeing Harvey of his obligation to her. Although he undergoes a brief period of mourning, he reasserts himself quickly and eventually becomes an integral part of the leadership group of the stronghold. Maureen Jellison, one of the primary love interests in the novel, articulates the "new Harvey" very well near the end of the novel: "She didn't recognize this matter-of-fact man who sat on his sleeping bag and never smiled; who didn't talk about galactic empires, and didn't ask why she was up here ... He seemed confident. The rifle he'd brought in was leaning against the post, ready to his hand. There were cartridges sewn in loops on his jacket pockets" (408). To Maureen, Harvey's practical, gun-toting confidence is a signpost of his masculinity, and the novel suggests that she and Harvey form a permanent relationship at the story's conclusion. In other words, masculinity is defined by his ability to encounter the primitive conditions of the post-apocalyptic world, and thrive in them. Harvey too seems satisfied with his role in the new world. He compares his old life to the new, thinking:

That had been a long time ago, in another world. But this one wasn't so bad. They were clearing the fields, and they controlled their boundaries. No one was raped or murdered here, and if there wasn't as much to eat as Harvey would have liked, there was enough. Breaking rocks and building walls was hard work, but it was honest work. There weren't endless conferences on unimportant matters. There weren't deliberate frustrations, traffic jams, newspapers full of crime stories. This new and simpler world had its compensations. (473)

If Harvey's work in the modern world was alienating and emasculating, then the work of the post-apocalyptic world was "simple" and "honest." Such language connotes the American ideological foundations of work that emerge from his new and rejuvenated sense of masculinity.

Harvey's next-door neighbor, Gordie Vance, shares Harvey's feelings of emasculation and isolation from the contemporary world. Before the comet strikes, Gordie considers suicide to avoid the consequences of embezzling money from the banks at which he works:

Tomorrow it won't matter, he thought. I don't need any sleep. He had the cliff all picked out. A fatal fall … Not that he would run. He'd had that chance, and it was no good, no good at all … No choice. None at all, and an accident solves all problems. Half a million in insurance, enough to cover all the bank shortages and leave Marie and Bert in pretty good shape. (184)

In this passage, Niven and Pournelle echo the sentiments of Harvey, who feels alienated by the stress—and results of—his debt. In Gordie's case, his high-maintenance wife, a "status-conscious bitch," is blamed for his felonious actions (246). Gordie fails to take full responsibility for his crimes, and Niven and Pournelle portray him as a desperate man whose duties to his family and in the workplace leave him suicidal and, ultimately, emasculated. Gordie's story, like Harvey's, reinforces the narrative that wives are somehow culpable for the unhappiness of their husbands, that "real men" don't let women guide their behavior.

For Gordie, then, the apocalyptic event of the novel is particularly beneficial. He does not jump off of the cliff but instead chooses to survive in the neo-primitive environment of the post-apocalyptic world. When the comet pieces begin to hit the Earth, Gordie thinks to himself: "'Hammerfall' ... And the end of civilization. The paper shortages at the bank: gone, washed away. They weren't important now ... He was going to live" (263). Gordie does not need to kill himself because his debt and his crimes were erased with the event. Furthermore, Gordie makes no attempt to rescue Marie, his "status-conscious" wife, and is instead content to form a community with the Boy Scout troop he leads and the Girl Scouts they find along the way. No longer emasculated by the factors in his modern life, Gordie is described by Harvey, who eventually finds him safely tucked away deep in the woods, as follows:

This was a new Gordie. Harvey wasn't sure how, because he made the

same jokes, and in some ways he was a lot like the Gordie Vance Harvey

had known, but he wasn't, not really. He wasn't a man you could imagine

as a banker, to begin with. He seemed to belong up here, with a two-week

beard, and no gut but not hungry. Comfortable and dry and very much in

charge and at ease. (421)

Gordie, as a result of his survival against the primitive, is strong and "in charge."

Through Gordie's character, Niven and Pournelle portray "authentic" masculinity

as separated from the conditions of the modern world, only deliverable within the

context of the frontier-like primitive after Lucifer's Hammer.

Both Harvey and Gordie thrive in the post-apocalyptic world of *Lucifer's*

Hammer and are cast as having attained some "authentic" masculinity that they

lacked as a reporter and a banker in the pre-apocalyptic world. It is vital to point

out that they are portrayed in this way not because of the primitive, but in spite of

it. That is, Niven and Pournelle situate cannibalism as a major manifestation of

the primitive and, ultimately, as the act that differentiates male characters in the

novel. In other words, the male heroes are able to navigate the primitive yet avoid

cannibalism, and the villains—represented by Hugo Beck and Alim Nassor—

frequently engage in cannibalistic acts. While both the Stronghold group and the

group led by Reverend Armitage must fight—and kill—to survive, only the latter

group embraces the transgressive act of cannibalism. In doing so, the novel

images those characters as less than men, both in the gendered sense and in

the human sense. The cannibals as depicted by Niven and Pournelle are frequently critiqued because of the negative construction of African-American men in the novel. Hugo, Alim, and other black characters in *Lucifer's Hammer* are the primary adopters of cannibalism, and the only character to notice or comment upon the racial overtones is the primary African-American character, Rick Delanty, to be a part of Senator Jellison's Stronghold: "Poor bastards, Rick thought. He could sympathize: blacks in this shattered world, no status, no place to go, wanted nowhere. Of course they'd join the cannibals. And of course the local survivors looked strangely at Rick Delanty again" (451). The juxtaposition of the moral white men of the Stronghold against the cannibalistic black men who follow the Preacher highlights the centering of, once again, white masculinity.

In *The Postman* (1985), David Brin also highlights competing constructions of masculinity in the post-apocalyptic world of the novel. The novel positions hypermasculinity—in the form of the survivalist Holnists—against American frontier masculinity—in the form of the protagonist, Gordon Krantz, and his eventual ally, George Powhatan. As is typical in the genre of post-apocalyptic fiction, the main male character possesses survivability in the primitive world of the novel while maintaining his morality and civility, and by the end of the text, Gordon brings hope that the United States can be stabilized and eventually restored to how it was during the "twentieth-century renaissance."

The Postman begins seventeen years after a series of apocalyptic events that have led to the post-holocaust landscape of the novel, which has been the

result of several factors, including nuclear and conventional warfare, disease, and famine. However, Brin positions the actions of independent hypersurvivalist groups as the *coup de grace* for contemporary culture; the survivalist "soldiers" who follow the teachings of Nathan Holn ultimately lead to the neoprimitive setting of the novel. Early in *The Postman*, the main character, Gordon Krantz, happens upon the uniform of a deceased postal worker, and he dons it as part of an act—he claims to be a representative of the Restored United States—to swindle food and lodging from frontier-like communities he encounters while wandering the Northwestern United States. These communities are in frequent conflict with hypersurvivalists, and Gordon's invented persona as a postman inspires vulnerable communities to resist the invasion of the organized army of Holnists, who are led by war-obsessed, cybernetically-enhanced General Macklin. By the end of the novel, Gordon—with the help of nearby patriarch George Powhatan and the sacrifice of a group of post-holocaust neo-feminists— defeats the Holnists, thereby laying the foundations for the Restored United States that Gordon had only imagined.

In *The Postman*, Brin spotlights the importance of gender construction in the very first pages by dedicating the novel, in part, to "Lysistrata, who tried." Lysistrata is the title character in Aristophanes's ancient Greek play and is known for her act of passive resistance—she convinced Greek women to withhold sex from their men until the end of the Peloponnesian War. The passage further alludes to the sacrifice of the women in the novel who rebel against the Holnists

and willingly submit themselves to the hypersurvivalists, using their sexuality to curry favor with their captors. Even in the acknowledgements, however, Brin writes: "my thanks to those women I've known who have never ceased to startle me, just when I've grown complacent and need to be most startled, and who make me stop and think. There is power there, slumbering below the surface. And there is magic" (295). Such passages suggest that women and the positioning of a post-holocaust neo-feminism might occupy center stage in the novel, but men, in fact, remain the primary actors in *The Postman*. That said, the characteristics of masculinity are framed by one of the leading woman in the novel, Dena Sturgeon. When Gordon first meets Dena, she is introduced by Peter Aage, a fellow Servant of Cyclops, as follows: "I ought to warn you. Dena may be the youngest of all the Servants of Cyclops, but in one way she's a museum piece. A genuine, bona fide, ripsnorting feminist" (128). Brin uses the word "feminist" to draw attention to the cultural and political implications of contemporary feminism of the 1980's. As Dena herself puts it:

> I know why it fell apart ... Women simply didn't pay close enough attention. Feminism got sidetracked into issues that were at best peripheral, and ignored the real problem, men ... anyone with any sense can see that a quarter to half of you are also lunatics, rapists, and murderers. It was our job to keep an eye on you, to cultivate the best and cull the bastards. (178)

Dena blames women for the actions of the men who caused the apocalypse; in this passage and in the acknowledgements, Brin casts women as having the

power, and perhaps the responsibility, to "keep men in check." Despite their

failure to do so in the novel, women characters draw attention to the two primary

of constructions of masculinity, what Dena defines as "the heroes and the

bastards" (178).

Perhaps unsurprisingly, Gordon Krantz, by the end of *The Postman*, is

characterized as one of the heroes; he is brave and intelligent, and most

importantly, he possesses the moral compass of the "civilized" modern culture

that was left behind, even after seventeen years of living in a post-apocalyptic

landscape. For example, in the novel's first scene, he is attacked by bandits,

relieved of most of his worldly possessions, and spoken to cruelly by his

perpetrators. However, Brin portrays him as archaically sensitive to the belittling

words of Roger Septien and his cronies: "It was the same nearly everywhere he

had been—a postholocaust callousness to which he'd never grown accustomed,

even after all this time" (8). He is later described as being an "oddball" because

such behavior significantly bothers him: "Callous cruelty was a part of life today,

and if Gordon couldn't reconcile himself to it, he at least recognized he was the

Twentieth-Century oddball in today's savage world" (14). Gordon, in essence,

retains the twentieth-century masculine thoughtfulness and empathy that Brin

privileges in the novel and is associated with morality. In Dena's terms, the

"bastards" lack it, and the heroes possess it. Gordon is also a reluctant hero,

which is an important characteristic and distinguishing feature of masculinity in

the novel. In several passages, including the following, Brin describes Gordon as

thinking: "Why, why is nobody anywhere taking responsibility for putting things right again? I'd help. I'd dedicate my life to such a leader" (69). Gordon searches for someone to "take responsibility" and "put things right," but in his travels across Oregon he finds nobody who is doing so, and in his own mind, he feels incapable of doing so himself:

> In his youth he had read about heroes, historical and fictional. Nearly all of them, when the time came for action, seemed able to push aside their personal burdens of worry, confusion, angst, for at least the time when action impended. But Gordon's mind didn't seem to work that way. Instead it just filled with more and more complexities, a turmoil of regrets. (20)

From the beginning, Brin casts Gordon as an intellectual but moral man searching for the seeds of civilized society. Unlike the heroes he read about as a boy, Gordon's deep thinking interferes with his ability to act; yet in both cases, ethical behavior is central to the construction of heroic masculinity. Furthermore, in contrast to Ish in *Earth Abides*, Gordon's intellectualism becomes the basis for a sustainable, revitalized masculinity that is well-suited to the new world of the novel.

As it turns out, Gordon becomes the very man he is searching for to "take responsibility." After he happens upon the postal carrier's uniform and begins to assume the persona of a representative of the Restored United States come to deliver mail and spread news from the East, he is no longer victimized as he was in the opening scene of the novel. Instead, he is depicted as a masculine hero.

For example, Gordon comes across muffled voices from inside the Theodore Sturgeon Memorial Center, where a woman and her son are being held captive by survivalists, and he is reluctant to leave the shelter of safety to help them: "Gordon knew he was being a fool once again. Now that he had the trouble located, he really should go collect his pony and get the hell out of there, as quickly as possible" (103). However, he finds himself compelled to rescue them in spite of the danger: "Sighing at the flaw in his character that kept him there— instead of running away as anyone with brains would do—Gordon started climbing the concrete stair, careful not to make a sound" (104). Although defined as a "flaw in his character," Gordon's heroism, his ability to act according to his conscience rather than out of fear, is privileged by the author. The theme of the reluctant warrior runs throughout *The Postman*, particularly as Brin references George Washington's Society of the Cincinnati, a model of the citizen-soldier willing to use his military authority only when necessary and called upon by the people to defend them.

Gordon's moral compass is not the only defining characteristic of heroic masculinity in the novel, however. Brin also depicts Gordon as an able survivor in the harsh, neo-primitive, post-apocalyptic environment. In fact, it is both Gordon's beneficent acts and his wilderness savvy that likens him to a classic American frontier hero. For example, when Gordon comes across the men in the town of Corvallis who are unwilling to fight against the coming survivalists, his encounters with the primitive provide him with the "hardness" needed to take on the

challenge: "Years in the wilds had made Gordon hard; all the while the men of

Corvallis had suffered prosperity" (146). Because Gordon has assumed the role

of the postman and travels the wilds between pockets of civilization, he is

accustomed to surviving in primitive, frontier-like conditions, which gives him

certain advantages over "civilized" men:

> A man who spends a long time alone in the wilderness can have one great
>
> advantage over even a very good hunter—if that hunter nevertheless goes
>
> home to friends and companions most nights. The difference is a trait in
>
> kinship with the animals, with the wilds themselves[5] ... Gordon sensed that
>
> something was odd long before he could attribute it. (63)

As with the American frontier hero, Gordon's time in the "wilderness" allows him

to develop a rejuvenated sense of masculinity not present at the beginning of the

novel. At the start, he is cast as a victim, but by the end, his treading the line

between civilization and primitivism allows him to demonstrate "authentic"

American masculinity, the kind that will restore the United States to its former,

pre-holocaust glory. Even Lazarensky, the Wizard of Oz-like mastermind behind

the Cyclops artificial intelligence machine, remarks on how effectively Gordon

succeeds in adapting to the primitive while maintaining a civilized mind: "You're a

rarity, Gordon. Somehow, out there in the wilderness, you managed to retain a

modern mind, while gaining strength suited for these times. Even if that bunch

out there ever tried to harm you, you would outsmart them" (153). The hero of the

---

[5] By describing a human kinship with animals and "the wild," Brin gestures towards the deep ecological thinking of Edward Abbey's *Desert Solitaire* and the ecocentric narratives that succeeded it.

frontier myth confronts the wilderness but does not submit to it, and Gordon epitomizes such a mythological figure in his ability to both immerse himself in the primitive and succeed in keeping his "civilized" self.

In contrast to Gordon Krantz, the primary villain of the novel, General Macklin, represents the militaristic masculinity of the hypersurvivalists. Macklin is identified as "U.S Army Reserve, uniter of the Oregon clans of Holn and commander of the American Forces of Liberation" (227). He is the manifestation of the Holn doctrine in the novel, which paints a caricature of the survivalist or "prepper" movement popular even now in the United States. The hypersurvivalists, including Macklin, are dedicated to warfare, to discipline, and to rank and file. They are unlike many modern-day survivalists in that they bear no religious affiliation, but they share the fantasy of an apocalyptic event that could allow men to restore an "authentic" masculinity that has been compromised by contemporary culture. In *The Postman*, Brin develops a critical position towards the survivalists, casting them sometimes as power-obsessed militants and sometimes as ineffectual dreamers. For instance, Gordon considers the Holnists to be "The cancer at the heart of the end-of-the-century renaissance," as they were largely responsible for the breakdown of civilization in the novel (138). The novel suggests that the Holnists not only prepared for the apocalypse but also precipitated it. On the other hand, other survivalists, despite their preparations, lacked the ability to, in fact, survive; Brin writes:

Once, in the prewar days, Gordon had read that there were places in the country riddled with hideouts like this—stockpiled by men whose hobby was thinking about the fall of society and fantasizing what they would do after it happened ... When that time finally arrived, most of the loner 'survivalists' died in their bunkers, quite alone. (255)

The first kind of survivalists—the Holnists—lack morality, and the second kind lack the ability to survive in the neo-primitive, post-apocalyptic landscape. In this way, they significantly differ from Gordon, the novel's American frontier hero, who can navigate both the primitive and the civilized worlds of *The Postman*.

What sets General Macklin apart from other hypersurvivalists is the fact that he is "augmented" by unspecified cybernetic enhancements that give him increased reflexes and strength. In doing so, Brin positions Macklin as an efficient and effective killer and as a symbol of technology-driven, monomaniacal, militaristic masculinity. His aim is to unite the Western United States under a single ruler—himself—yet he frames his ambition to Gordon in terms of the American masculinity: "We'll recruit among your own people. Countless young men will see the advantage of being lords, rather than serfs. And unlike the nobility of the Middle Ages, we new feudalists believe that all males should have a right to fight for their first earring" (261). Earrings stand as a symbol of rank among the Holnists (the more earrings, typically, the higher the rank), and Macklin's description of his recruits as "lords" rather than "serfs" suggests that true men lead, not follow, unless within Macklin's own militaristic framework.

According to Macklin, the new masculinity after the holocaust allows men to prove themselves in the only authentic way they can—in combat. His obsessions with warfare and its relationship to masculinity are heavily critiqued in the novel, however. While Macklin's cybernetic enhancements give him extraordinary strength, Gordon recalls the "augmentation" program towards the end of the twentieth-century and how many of the affected soldiers, once removed from combat, had difficulty adjusting to civilian life: "Army didn't like how some of the vets acted when the action ended ..." (239). The militaristic mentality of men like Macklin, according to Brin, lead them to the apocalyptic mentality that lead to the end of the modern world in *The Postman* and reinforce a dangerous construction of American masculinity.

General Macklin's doctrine of hypermasculinity is further critiqued by the presence of another character, George Powhatan, a former Air Force officer who leads a small, secluded band of men and women who have successfully defended themselves against the Holnists. Like Macklin, he is also cybernetically-enhanced; however, Powahatan is a second-generation augment in that he received "newer implants" that "weren't as large or as powerful ... meant more to supplement training in certain eastern arts ... in biofeedback ..." (276). In other words, the technology infused into his body makes him not grotesquely muscular like Macklin but enhances his existing fighting skills. At the end of the novel, Macklin and Powhatan engage in unarmed combat, and Powhatan successfully defeats Macklin, demonstrating that his strength matches—in fact, exceeds—that

of Macklin. However, what is more significant than his strength is that Powhatan

consistently performs the role of the reluctant hero and represents a departure

from the war-obsessed mind of Macklin. For example, Powhatan initially turns

down Gordon when he comes to ask for help against the hypersurvivalists.

Gordon thinks to himself: "If only we had a real leader. Someone like George

Powhatan" (168). Gordon's search for "someone to take responsibility" in

Powhatan is at first futile, but Powhatan comes down from the mountain to save

Gordon. Like Gordon, Powhatan is a representation of frontier masculinity—his

name alone conjures images of both George Washington, a Founding Father

who is referenced at length in the novel, and Powhatan, the historical Native

American chieftain who lived in now modern-day Virginia. The difference

between Powhatan and Macklin effectively highlights the difference between

these two constructions of masculinity developed within Brin's novel.

All six of these texts construct masculinity in different ways that are

suggestive of their historical context. For example, we see self-restraint and male

sexuality in the novels of the '40s and '50s, implicit and explicit racialized

difference explored in the Civil Rights era, condemnation of white collar work in

the 1970s, and an environmentalist kinship with nature in the 1980s. While these

novels are informed by their contexts, they also share conventions of masculinity

within the post-apocalyptic genre that emerge out of this chapter's close reading.

In all of these novels, white masculinity is configured in relation to a racialized

Other. Sometimes, the Other is a representation of the primitive against which white men are tested; at other times, the Other represents a primitive ideal that modern men cannot live up to. In all of these novels, however, constructions of white masculinity emerge in the context of a counterpoint most often found in people of color. Such a narrative move employs frontier mythology that conflates Otherness with primitivism and sets the stage for various explorations of white masculinity in frontier-like, post-holocaust environments.

One characteristic of masculinity that is most often explored in these novels is intellectualism. While courage, fortitude, and physical prowess are masculine traits that are important in these texts, men's minds—rather than their bodies—lie at the heart of idealized constructions of manhood. However, the post-apocalyptic novels in this chapter privilege a particular type of mental affinity that is congruent with frontier narratives: wisdom. Wisdom represents a natural intelligence—as opposed to book learning or educational smarts—wrapped in a blanket of morality. As we have seen, "book smarts" rarely serve characters in these novels as effectively as wisdom: in *Earth Abides,* for example, Ish's revived masculinity comes only when he casts away his books and re-invents the bow on his own; in *I Am Legend*, Robert resists the sexual temptations of the female vampires not through reading but through his self-restraint, and in *Lucifer's Hammer*, Dan Forrester's academic obsession with books saves the community but not himself. In general, the post-apocalyptic genre suggests that book learning can only get a man so far; however, it *is* imperative that a man use his

mind, lest he succumb to primitive sexual and cannibalistic desires. The white

men in these novels are all cast as moral men who ultimately use their

understanding to save their communities and, most importantly, to develop

rejuvenated and authentic sense of masculinity. Such wisdom cannot be found in

modern culture or in library books but through direct encounters with the

primitive, frontier-like environments of post-apocalyptic landscapes. In light of this

chapter's examination of post-apocalyptic novels, I will explore in the next three

chapters texts—Edward Abbey's *Desert Solitaire*, William Gibson's

Neuromancer, and Chuck Palahniuk's *Fight Club*—that are explicitly *not* post-

apocalyptic in order to unravel how conventions of post-apocalyptic fiction

emerge in apocalyptic texts and how masculinity is subsequently reconfigured.

Chapter Three:

The Ecocentric Male in Edward Abbey's *Desert Solitaire*

Edward Abbey was one of the more profound and controversial nature

writers of the mid to late twentieth-century. He was a speaker and advocate for

the desert wilderness, both succeeding nineteenth-century writers like John Muir

and paving the way for writers like Terry Tempest Williams and Barry Lopez, who

also give voice to the more inhospitable natural environments in the United

States. For Abbey, the harshness of the desert is its most attractive and valuable

quality, and much of his writing and political career centers on asking his readers

to rethink their misconceptions about the desert environment by inventively

jarring them into "reading" the landscape in new and more delicate ways. He

does this most faithfully in *Desert Solitaire*, which describes Abbey's summer as

a park ranger at the Arches National Monument in Utah. In this chapter, I will

examine how Abbey's deep ecological[6] position in *Desert Solitaire* invokes the

dialectics of apocalypticism and primitivism and attempts to not only retrain his

readers' perceptions about the human relationship with an unforgiving natural

landscape but to also reinvent white masculinity in ways that reflect his more

ecocentric perspective. In contrast to constructions of white masculinity

embedded within progress narratives and capitalist ideologies, Abbey's version

of manhood promotes a meaningful connectedness with non-human nature and,

---

[6] The term "deep ecology" was coined by Norwegian thinker Arne Naess and is deeply-embedded within the discourse of ecocriticism. In *The Idea of Wilderness* (1991), Max Oelschlaeger distinguishes between "*shallow ecology*, essentially a resource-management approach predicated on the values of efficiency and utility, and *deep ecology*, which transcends conservation in favor of preservation and biocentric values" (208).

consequently, between men via an unmediated contact with the natural world that Abbey ultimately characterizes as primitivism. In *Desert Solitaire*, Abbey suggests that in order to avoid impending ecological catastrophe, men must reject narrow-minded masculinities based on profit and progress and instead embrace the deep-ecological and primitive perspective that he models throughout the book.

In *Desert Solitaire*, Abbey calls attention to mainly two types of men. The first type, the one that Abbey clearly critiques throughout *Desert Solitaire*, is that of the consumer, who is cast as dangerously myopic and whose obsession with consumption comes at the expense of the natural environment and "true" masculinity itself. He attempts to show how these kinds of men and their singularity of vision, their way of seeing, leads to environmental apocalypse. They are not "real men," according to Abbey, and he suggests that their lack of "genuine" masculinity results in environmental devastation, as they cannot see or do not care to see the results of an unsustainable lifestyle. The antidote to this destructive force is, for Abbey, a different type of man, a prescient man, an ecocentric man, whose vision of his actions and his ability to see through the eyes of the natural world result. He is not forward-thinking, like the modern man, but backward-thinking. He embraces the primitive, which Abbey defines in opposition to contemporary culture and associates with independence, as a means to finding a "lost" masculinity, one that is more in tune with the natural world, one that must be adopted to avoid further environmental degradation.

Although some scholarship has been produced on the work of Edward Abbey, none has specifically addressed the relationships among apocalypse, primitivism, and white masculinity in Abbey's texts. The reason for this gap has as much to do with the modest volume of scholarship as it does its focus: critics have been skeptical about Abbey's literary merit and therefore have, at least until the last few years, shied away from thorough investigations of his work. In his introduction to *Coyote in the Maze* (1998), a collection of critical articles on Edward Abbey's life and work, Peter Quigley noted that it had become "fashionable to scoff at Abbey's work and so achieve a measure of acceptance in current discourse" (2). He insists that the "tension between nature and culture, but also between the desert and other imagery," made Abbey's work not only an acceptable but a necessary focus of academic inquiry. In an earlier assessment of Abbey's contribution to ecologically-focused literature, Don Scheese, in "*Desert Solitaire*: Counter-Friction to the Machine in the Garden" (1996), claims that Abbey's *Desert Solitaire* is "unique for its passionate defense of the antipastoral environment. Although the writing is overtly autobiographical, with Abbey's ego looming large in almost every chapter, the perspective is more *eco*-than *ego*-centered, emphasizing the harmony and delicate balance of the desert ecosystem" (307). As Scheese suggests, the value that Abbey places upon an inhospitable, nonhuman nature is precisely what gives his work value and differentiates him from his contemporaries. I would add to Scheese's assessment that Abbey's writing also contains a level of humorous self-reflexivity that

shrewdly problematizes its ideological framework in ways that other nature writers do not. As David Copland Morris points out in "Celebration and Irony: The Polyphonic Voice of Edward Abbey's *Desert Solitaire*," "while [Abbey] is a genuine nature writer, he is perhaps unique among that species in subjecting the narrative voice which celebrates nature to a fortifying bath of irony" (22). For these reasons, I believe that Abbey's work provides distinctive insights into the qualities and conditions of environmental apocalypse and, somewhat less self-consciously, into the stakes imaged for white masculinity in such narratives of impending ecological catastrophe.

What has been written about Abbey effectively begins with the 1982 publication of Ann Ronald's *The New West of Edward Abbey*, a book-length, chronological investigation of Abbey's earlier work. In her chapter on *Desert Solitaire*, for example, Ronald examines Abbey's nonfictional treatise by contextualizing it with his earlier, fictional works and by analyzing how we can, and should, distinguish between *Desert Solitaire*'s narrator, who "dwells in a state of universal suspension in the continuous present that Edward Abbey creates," and Edward Abbey himself (67). According to Ronald, *Desert Solitaire* is not a journalistic account of Abbey's time spent as a park ranger so much as it is a work of art that complexly unravels the relationship between people and nature in the desert landscape. While Ronald situates Abbey's work within a field of writing dominated by didacticism and transparent ideologies, later Abbey critics are interested in exploring the resistance Abbey develops within his works that

complicate facile romanticizations of the American landscape. In *Seeking Awareness in American Nature Writing* (1992), for example, Scott Slovic notes Abbey's "unwillingness to smooth his beliefs into a neat package, to allow his readers to passively consume even his ideology, which tends to stimulate the readers' attentiveness to specific natural phenomena, and to the more abstract concepts (such as freedom and individualism) which Abbey considers important" (100). According to Slovic, Abbey's contentious claims and stylistics are precisely what make his writing ecocentric rather than egocentric because they develop awareness of the complex relationships both among natural systems and organisms and between non-human nature and human culture. Other texts like Martha F. Lee's *Earth First!: Environmental Apocalypse* (1994) and Daniel L. Phillipon's *Conserving Words: How American Nature Writers Shaped the Environment* (2004) outline the ranging influences that Abbey's life and writing have had upon political activism by examining connections between Abbey and the radical environmental group *Earth First!*, which appears in Abbey's posthumously published novel *Hayduke Lives*!

Although I will attend to Abbey's ecocentrism and political derivation within and produced by his work, my examination will more specifically participate in a discourse that considers how gender is constructed within Abbey's writing. Abbey's attitude towards women in particular has been one of the more controversial issues in both his life and his work, and several critics have responded, albeit superficially, to this contended aspect of his writing. In a

foreword to *The Coyote in the Maze*, SueEllen Campbell briefly suggests that what "raises a lot of feminist questions" in *Desert Solitaire* is the "linking of desire, sex, women, and landscape" (36). Although Campbell calls attention to these feminist questions, she never really addresses them at length. The same occurs in "Abbey's Inadvertent Postmodernism," where William Chaloupka uses the gender theories of Donna Haraway to argue that "environmentalism is … historical discourse, not nature itself" and that "Abbey chose to reify 'nature' as a tactical way to challenge powers that threatened the stability of beloved sites," but uses the connection to gender as a way to show how Abbey problematizes contemporary environmental discourse or "green thinking" (128). In "Edward Abbey and Gender," Paul T. Bryant too deals tangentially with the issue of gender, defending Abbey against those who claim that his writing is sexist and somewhat-problematically arguing that he has found "no evidence (beyond unsupported gossip) to show that Abbey was an egregious, blatant sexist, beyond his sexual promiscuity and the exploitive attitudes arising from it" (231). Like other critics, Bryant acknowledges that gender construction is a key concern in Abbey but does so only to maintain that Abbey himself is more *sexual* than *sexist*. In my project, I will not participate in this debate, which is simply centered on the author, but will instead focus on how Abbey's texts operate within the cultural context in which he is writing.

James Holt McGavran, who wrote "Gender Fluidity and Nature Writing: William Wordsworth and Edward Abbey," does consider gender in *Desert*

Solitaire more thoroughly than previous critics, claiming that "Wordsworth and Abbey's gendering of nature deliberately deconstructs both nature and gender stereotypes in moments of high intensity" (50). In his article, McGavran also defends Abbey against accusations of sexism when he suggests that in the "Down the River" chapter of *Desert Solitaire*, Abbey is attempting to escape from "stereotyped maternal or feminine roles, not women themselves" (50). The totality of McGavran's text, however, centers more on exploring the connections between Wordsworth and Abbey than on developing a thorough understanding of gender in Abbey's work alone. The article is, after all, published in *Wordsworth Circle*. Although Abbey's constructions of man- and woman-hood are clearly on the minds of scholars like McGavran, no comprehensive study of gender has been produced on Abbey's writing. I am not claiming to provide a final word on the issue in this chapter; rather, I wish to explore new directions in what is plainly a vital area of Abbey scholarship. The focus of this investigation, in line with my project as a whole, will be to examine in Abbey's work the locations where gender—and masculinity in particular—intersects with apocalyptic imagery and neo-primitivism. I will look at competing and complementary versions of masculinity specifically because of their overwhelming presence in Abbey's work as a whole. The two major constructions of masculinity within Abbey center decidedly on apocalypse—one version of manhood leads to environmental apocalypse and the other version, the one that Abbey privileges, leads to a sustainability that will prevent ecological devastation. My purpose in investigating

Abbey in this way is not to reproduce a clear-cut binary of masculinity but to consider both the basic qualities of these two constructions as well as the various nuances within them.

In *Desert Solitaire,* Abbey participates in a deeply-rooted American discourse of ecological apocalypse. In the book that provided an early theoretical basis for ecological criticism, *The Environmental Imagination* (1995), Lawrence Buell argues that "Apocalypse is the single most powerful master metaphor that the contemporary environmental imagination has at its disposal … The rhetoric of apocalypticism implies that the fate of the world hinges on the arousal of the imagination to a sense of crisis" (285). Although Buell's project identifies several metaphors historically used in describing the natural order—web, machine, economy, balance, organism, etc.—he finds the use of the apocalyptic in ecological thought to be an important way to perpetuate the "sense of crisis" that aims to prevent a catastrophic event (280-5). Environmental writing casts its aims in terms of this crisis, developing apocalyptic imagery and rhetoric that will motivate readers to adopt more ecologically-sound ways of thinking and living. However, such imagery is certainly not new to the American imagination. In a brief history of American environmental apocalypticism, Buell situates the current environmental "crisis" in terms of early Puritan jeremiads and notes the significant ideological changes that began in the nineteenth-century and that have continued today:

> For the first two centuries of settlement, American environmental thought remained millennial rather than apocalyptic, driven by the vision of wilderness as an inexhaustible resource waiting to be transformed … Only by gradual degrees, during the nineteenth century, did the sense of environmental endangerment gather force and begin to challenge this gospel of plenty; indeed, only during the past two or three decades, and scarcely even then, have larger numbers of Americans declared themselves willing to curtail their taste for abundance to alleviate pressure on the environment. (301)

Buell's distinction between early American millennialism and contemporary apocalypticism is an important one because it situates the former as a desirable and in some ways inevitable experience and the latter as adverse and, perhaps, preventable. In *Earth First!: Environmental Apocalypse*, Martha F. Lee looks at the terms millennialism and apocalypticism specifically in the context of environmental writing, stating that "Apocalyptics are concerned only with the events and earthly conditions leading up to the apocalypse, the climactic and dramatic event that they believe will soon bring about the end of human history. They are not interested in a millennial future for a chosen race or people" (19). Lee suggests that in using apocalyptic metaphors, environmental narratives do not promise a post-apocalyptic, millennial future but instead center on maintaining a discourse of prevention. More importantly, Lee also establishes apocalypticism within environmental writing by invoking one of its central tenets:

biocentrism. According to Lee, "Apocalypticism does fit well with a biocentric philosophy. For a believer in biocentrism, human beings are not the most important historical actors; rather, the future health of the ecosystem is of primary importance" (19). Biocentrism, at least as Lee constructs it, embodies the difference between the millennial and the apocalyptic—all life, not just human life, is inherently valuable, and averting global, ecological disaster is therefore central to the cause. I would extend Lee's construction to include ecocentrism, which centers on ecological systems rather than the individual species and organisms.

In *The Environmental Imagination*, Lawrence Buell briefly considers Edward Abbey's "environmental apocalypticism" by placing his work within the context of his nature writing contemporaries. Buell focuses his investigation on the work of Rachel Carson and Leslie Marmon Silko, but he also mentions Abbey, who, according to Buell, "imagines a final confrontation in the West between the forces of a machine culture and old-style cowboys or new-style environmental activists, but with a raffish panache that unsolemnizes his jeremiads" (300). The reason that Buell elects to omit Abbey from further analysis—and the reason I feel Abbey requires even more investigation—is that Abbey resists conventional constructions of ecological apocalypticism in his works. In "Surviving Doom and Gloom: Edward Abbey's Desert Comedies," Rebecca Raglon agrees that it is Abbey's humorous resistance to self-aggrandizement that sets him apart from other writers in the genre: "Among the pages of ecological apocalypse and gloom … Edward Abbey's work stands out.

Not only does Abbey offer a significant variation to the anguished tone of much

environmental writing, but in addition his work challenges the pieties and

moralizing tendencies of some nature writers" (168). Although I agree with

Raglon's analysis that Abbey's tone is refreshing, I also believe that the way in

which Abbey constructs apocalypse is particularly noteworthy. In *From

Apocalypse to Way of Life*, Frederick Buell examines the various ways that

environmental ideologies have changed: "Announcing itself as apocalypse,

environmental crisis has been debunked, has resisted debunking, has been

reworked, and has been dramatically diversified and expanded, resurfacing in

unusual forms" (xii). The environmental "crisis"—a term entangled with

environmental *apocalypse*—has inherited various meanings and purposes in

response to various social contexts. Buell also contends that a "history of crisis

thought that fully incorporates both the apparent failure of previously forecasted

apocalypses and the continuance and ever-deepening of alarm is a necessity

today" (xii). In other words, an examination of environmental narratives that are

heavily imbued with apocalyptic rhetoric must evaluate how such narratives

construct or imagine the end of the world as we know it, which will not only allow

for informed speculation on why their dramatic prognoses have not come to pass,

but also, and more importantly for my purposes, what else those narratives may

be centrally about. Using apocalyptic rhetoric and imagery is standard fare in

environmental writing, but what distinguishes Abbey within the nature writing

tradition is that he invokes what has *already* come to pass as a way of imagining

a future apocalypse. Furthermore, Abbey suggests that both past and future apocalypses are and will continue to be the result of an image of white masculinity that centers on consumerism.

In *Desert Solitaire,* Abbey relies heavily upon apocalyptic metaphor in an attempt to invoke feelings of sorrow and anger for what he perceives to be the destruction of the Arches National Monument—the major landscape of the book and the place at which Abbey spends several months as a hired park ranger— and consequently for the contemporary crisis of white masculinity. In the "Author's Introduction," Abbey writes that "most of what I write about in this book is already gone or going fast. This is not a travel guide but an elegy. A memorial. You're holding a tombstone in your hand" (xiv). Abbey's declaration raises the question—where did it go? His self-described elegy memorializes the "passing" of many famous natural landmarks in the American West, including Arches National Monument, Navajo National Monument, Zion National Park, and, perhaps most famously, Glen Canyon. Obviously, these landmarks have not *actually* vanished, as hundreds of thousands of tourists who visit these monuments yearly can attest to. In a recent, syndicated news article entitled "Live at Red Rocks," for example, travel journalist Kristin Jackson describes the Arches National Monument as it appears today: "The park's main paved road is only about 18 miles long. Trails lead off it; some arches are just 100 yards from the road. There are also scenic viewpoints along the drive. Arches' compact size means its highlights can be seen in a day, although it's possible to spend much

more time exploring" (H4). While such a description reinforces the idea that the

Arches National Monument is not "gone" in the strict sense of the word, it also

exemplifies precisely what Abbey laments in the "Polemic" chapter of *Desert*

Solitaire—the rise of commercialized, industrial tourism, which he associates with

irreversible destruction, within the Arches National Monument.

In his post-apocalyptic novel *Good News* (1980), Abbey provides a brief

account of the cultural conditions that led to the post-apocalyptic landscape in

which the novel is set, which is not unlike that of his earlier work in *Desert*

Solitaire. Not surprisingly, Abbey depicts pre-apocalyptic life as the bleak and

dehumanizing effect of unchecked urbanization and industrialization. In the

chapter that begins the book, Abbey writes:

> There was indeed, in those fading years of the doomed century, a sense
>
> of overwhelming illusion in the minds of men and women. The cities
>
> became unreal. Not so much unbearable as unreal. To the millions
>
> crowded within them—for it seemed they could not live elsewhere, in a
>
> landscape owned by gigantic machines—the ever-growing cities assumed
>
> the shape of nightmare. Not a nightmare of horror but a nightmare of
>
> dreariness, a routine and customary tedium. (1)

As is conventional with many traditional post-apocalyptic narratives, Abbey

frames American culture as doomed for self-destruction by invoking urbanism

and industrialization as key players in its fall, which lead to a "a nightmare of

dreariness" for citizens in America and all over the world. In doing so, he

subscribes to a tradition that arises out of the nineteenth-century in which anxieties about increased population and developing technologies lead to an unknown and potentially destructive future. In his description of pre-apocalyptic life, Abbey goes on to add that "the layer of smoke and fog and industrial gases cut off all view of the stars" and people are forced to wear "air-filtering masks" (2). In light of Abbey's environmental politics and his musings in *Desert Solitaire*, it is no surprise that he envisions the near-future—where the air itself is stifling and unfit to breathe—in such a grim way. In Abbey's construction of contemporary American culture, where "invisible poisons spread throughout the atmosphere" and "all were innocent, all were guilty," the invocation of environmental apocalyptic rhetoric is clearly evident (3).

While Abbey contends that these destructive features of American culture have a profound impact on the environment and, consequently, people, he also diverges from typical post-apocalyptic narratives by calling attention to the fear and isolation that he associates with contemporary life. While, in Abbey's mind, overcrowded cities and unchecked industry lead to environmental damage and dehumanization, they also result in a troubling aura of disconnectedness that ultimately leads to emasculation. The primitive masculinity advocated in *Good News* reflects the image of Abbey and Newcomb floating down the Colorado River in *Desert Solitaire*, in which by the end of the journey, the two men have seemingly "become one" with each other and the landscape. The theme of connectedness, prevalent in *Desert Solitaire*, continues with an epigraph that

begins *Good News*, in which he quotes from William Blake: "politics is brotherhood." The fact that brotherhood—a strong bond between men—is foregrounded in the novel is even further evident by Abbey's de-contextualization of Blake's passage; Abbey omits Blake's phrase "religion is politics," which precedes "politics is brotherhood," in order to draw attention to the theme of connectedness that defines masculinity throughout the novel. That the scenes of brotherhood in *Desert Solitaire* are echoed in the protagonists of *Good News*, twelve years later, suggest that, for Abbey, apocalyptic forebodings and post-apocalyptic settings serve as necessary catalysts to jar urban masculinity out of its self-diminishing isolation.

Like many contemporary environmental thinkers, Abbey believes that consumerism is responsible for destroying what he believes to be so valuable within natural environments—their wildness. In *Desert Solitaire*, however, Abbey does not produce the imagery of global, environmental destruction but instead situates apocalypse on a regional level. Although apocalypse by its very definition indicates global devastation, the focus of his book, the Arches National Monument, acts as a rhetorical synecdoche, symbolizing all of the local, wild places that his readers will relate to. Consequently, Abbey's readers need not have visited the American Southwest to mourn its apparent destruction or fear for the fate of other regions. The elegiac component of *Desert Solitaire* is itself a warning that, while the Arches National Monument is "gone," having been replaced by the Arches National "Money-Mint," other wild places like it need not

suffer its fate. For Abbey, the Arches National Monument is a preview of what will come to pass if Americans do not change their ways. In the chapter entitled "The Heat of Noon: Rock and Tree and Cloud," Abbey remarks that "I may never in my life get to Alaska … but I am grateful that it's there" (129). Abbey hopes that his readers will feel similarly about the landscapes he describes as well as wildernesses in general, valuing, if not visiting, those places.

In the chapter entitled "Polemic: Industrial Tourism and the National Parks," Abbey most clearly invokes apocalyptic rhetoric by establishing what he means by the phrase "gone or going fast" and outlining his proposal for "saving" the national parks from imminent destruction. He attributes such destruction to the "cloud on [his] horizon. A small dark cloud no bigger than [his] hand. Its name is Progress" (42). Although this "dark cloud" is, at the moment, quite small and seemingly insignificant, Abbey uses the passage to more importantly equate the term "Progress" with "industrial tourism." Industrial Tourism is, in Abbey's words, "a big business. It means money. It includes the motel and restaurant owners, the gasoline retailers, the oil corporations, the road-building contractors, the heavy equipment manufacturers, the state and federal engineering agencies and the sovereign, all-powerful automotive industry" (49). Progress, depicted in terms of industrial tourism, is responsible for the environmental degradation that Abbey foresees at the Arches National Monument and other national monuments. Therefore, men who embrace the ideologies that perpetuate "Progress" in a consumer capitalist context are the ones who Abbey most severely censures. For

example, at the beginning of his "Polemic" chapter, Abbey is visited by three civil

engineers who inform him that new roads will soon be paved throughout the

Arches National Monument, which Abbey sees as leading to the demise of the

landscape. He describes the engineers as being "madmen" and "completely

insane," but he gives most of his attention to the party chief, who was a

"pleasant-mannered, soft-spoken civil engineer with an unquestioning dedication

to his work. A very dangerous man" (44). Abbey's depiction of the chief as

"pleasant-mannered" and "soft-spoken" characterizes him as an emasculated

conformist, but what Abbey finds dangerous about the lead engineer is his

"unquestioning" obsession with his job. In a later passage, Abbey invites readers

to take sides in his polemic by placing them into various factions, one of which

would align them with the engineers: "There may be some among the readers of

this book, like the earnest engineer, who believe without question that any and all

forms of construction and development are intrinsic goods … who virtually

identify quantity with quality" (47). Abbey once again uses the term "without

question" to negatively describe these men and the readers who agree with

them. What enables Abbey to draw his criticism of the engineers' position is a

rhetorical move that invokes the common American virtues of self-reliance and

independence, and in these moments, Abbey seems to reinforce the ideologies

that he attempts to subvert. The structure of Abbey's argument, however, rests

on the underlying premise that these men represent a narrow-minded

commitment to consumerism, that they suffer from a singular vision that Abbey ultimately views as being dangerous both to men and to the landscape.

In the "Rocks" chapter of *Desert Solitaire*, Abbey uses the example of two uranium prospectors to further illustrate his claim that masculine myopia leads to destruction and, eventually, environmental apocalypse. At first glance, the chapter appears to be at odds with the rest of the book. Abbey's strong presence as character and narrator is nowhere to be found, and the content plays out more like historiography than traditional nature writing. The main feature of the chapter—the story of Albert T. Husk and Charles "Chuck" Graham—however, acts as a parable for the kind of masculinity Abbey criticizes and therefore reinforces his own claims about the necessity of a primitive, ecocentric masculinity. As the story goes, Albert Husk, who Abbey describes as being a "man of vision," arrives with his wife and children in Utah to search for uranium in the Moab area (67). Shortly thereafter, he meets Graham, who agrees to let him share his already staked claims in the area if Husk is willing to begin the "necessary location work" (68). Husk does. Abbey portrays both Husk and Graham as defined by their narrow greed, and Husk specifically as being "preoccupied—almost obsessed—with his work" (72). Although he suspects a distance between his wife and himself, Husk "did not attempt to question her but returned to his search with anxious eagerness despite the heaviness in his heart" (72). The story lasts for several pages but ends with Graham seeming to confess to sleeping with Husk's wife and the two men engaging in verbal and physical

fighting. Husk eventually dies from a gunshot wound, and Graham sails off of a cliff, accidentally tied up to the door of his pickup truck. Husk's son, who accompanied his father on his prospecting excursions, also dies, but from second- and third-degree burns resulting from wandering around the desert for days. The chapter ends with Abbey informing us that Husk's wife inherits the claim of $100,000. At the end of this story, Abbey characterizes both men's obsession with financial gain as the underlying factor that drives Husk to prospect and Graham to hustle. Although the story of the two uranium prospectors, set against the rugged desert landscape, clearly condemns masculine hubris, it is also lays bares the narrow-mindedness of the ideology that drives the two men. For Abbey, they both suffer from the same fatal flaw—complete and unquestioning commitment to a consumer capitalist ideology.

The myopic vision, in both the literal and figurative sense, of both the engineers and the prospectors is tied directly to the proliferation of automobile traffic in national parks and is one of the major arguments detailed in the "Polemic" chapter. That is, the automobile is a symbol for Progress in *Desert Solitaire*, but it is also a symbol for the singular vision that he finds troubling. The automobile, which limits how people interact with and, more importantly, "see" the landscape, is a symbol of the same narrow-mindedness possessed by the engineers. In his examination of the rise of the railroads in the nineteenth-century, *The Railway Journey*, Wolfgang Schivelbusch suggests that the railroad

has fundamentally altered the very nature of contemporary perception. He writes about the changes that occurred from pre-industrial to modern modes of travel:

> The foreground enabled the traveler to relate to the landscape through which he was moving. He saw himself as part of the foreground, and that perception *joined* him to the landscape, included him in it, regardless of all further distant views that the landscape presented. Now velocity dissolved the foreground, and the traveler lost that aspect. He was removed from that 'total space' which combined proximity and distance: he became separated from the landscape. (63)

According to Schivelbusch, railroad travelers began to have their traveling experiences commodified by the limited perspective of the train—they saw what the railcars allowed them to see. The railroad changed the very nature of modern perception, then, as people began to view the landscape in the same ways whether they were riding on the train or not. Although Abbey writes about automobiles rather than railroads, he is addressing the same issue as Schivelbusch, that modern forms of transportation affect travelers in unexpected and problematic ways. Abbey echoes the above passage by Schivelbusch when he anticipates the arguments against his idea that automobiles be banned from national parks:

> I can foresee complaints. The motorized tourists, reluctant to give up the old ways, will complain that they can't see enough without their automobiles to bear them swiftly (traffic permitting) through the parks. But

this is nonsense. A man on foot, on horseback or on a bicycle will see

more, feel more, enjoy more in one mile than the motorized tourists can in

a hundred miles. (54)

In this passage, Abbey addresses the issue of quantity versus quality of

perception, but in doing so, he criticizes the engineer's desire to consume the

natural landscape. Besides the avoidance of further damage done to the

ecosystem by increased vehicular traffic in national parks, the enjoyment he

anticipates for non-motorized tourists comes from straying from the singular,

commodified path.

In "The Loss of the Creature," Walker Percy makes a similar argument to

Abbey's when he declares that sightseers at the Grand Canyon, for example,

rarely "see" the natural landmark because of the "symbolic package" that has

been designed around it. He writes that "The highest point, the term of the

sightseer's satisfaction, is not the sovereign discovery of the thing before him; it

is rather the measuring up of the thing to the criterion of the performed symbolic

complex" (469). Percy argues that how "typical" sightseers view landscapes like

the Grand Canyon is by considering it in relation to the image that has already

been determined for them. Tourists want to reinforce the images they've seen in

movies, books, postcards, and other media by seeing the site itself. Like Percy,

Abbey understands this commodified vision as being particularly problematic and

spends much of his text resisting that perspective, writing through the kinds of

perspectives that will lead to more authentic experiences. The metaphor of the

flashlight that appears in the earlier "Solitaire" chapter is a good example of Abbey's concern for perspective. He writes:

> The flashlight, or the electrical torch as the English call it, is a useful instrument in certain situations, but I can see the road well enough without it. Better, in fact. There's another disadvantage to the use of the flashlight: like many other mechanical gadgets it tends to separate a man from the world around him. If I switch it on my eyes adapt to it and I can see only the small pool of light which it makes in front of me; I am isolated. (13)

Using the flashlight, which acts in this instance, like other "mechanical gadgets," as a symbol of technological progress, directs a person's vision only to the places that are illuminated. One can see, but only what technology allows. Instead of using the flashlight, Abbey opts to let his eyes adjust, thereby allowing him to see more of the landscape but with less detail. More importantly, using his eyes alone prevents Abbey from feeling "isolated" from the landscape, which is tied to Abbey's overall critique of myopia in masculine narratives and his privileging of alternative constructions of manhood.

With the exception of Abbey's description of the engineer, the examples I've used thus far from *Desert Solitaire* have not pertained solely to men—the perspectives of all train or automobile passengers, for example, are altered by the technology, not just those of men. However, I believe that Abbey has primarily men in mind when he makes his arguments in the "Polemic" chapter.

For instance, he addresses another possible criticism of his plan to limit automobile usage when he writes:

> I can foresee complaints. They will complain of physical hardship, these sons of pioneers. Not for long; once they rediscover the pleasures of actually operating their own limbs and senses in a varied, spontaneous, voluntary style, they will complain instead of crawling back into a car; they may even object to returning to desk and office and that dry-wall box on Mossy Brook Circle. (54)

Referring to them as "sons" and referencing the office desk and cubicle (and considering the cultural timeframe in which Abbey is writing) clearly indicate that he is referring mainly to men, that he wishes to address men's relationship with the natural world. Not surprisingly, Abbey fails to address the "daughters" of the pioneers. Perhaps the best evidence comes later in the chapter where he invokes Henry David Thoreau's famous axiom: "We are preoccupied with time. If we could learn to love space as deeply as we are now obsessed with time, we might discover a new meaning in the phrase *to live like men*" (58). This passage is significant because it situates Abbey's work in a tradition of male-centered nature writing while furthering his argument that limited perspective—that of time—leads to *not* "living like men," a code-phrase for masculinity. I make this point not to fault Abbey for the sexist exclusiveness of his constructions (which has been done by several critiques already) but to argue that, despite the

rhetorical moves that Abbey attempts to make, *Desert Solitaire* is a book for and about men.

At this point, I should qualify the above statement by adding that *Desert Solitaire* is a book for and about *white* men. In his book, Abbey makes only passing references to men of color, with the exception of the two chapters he devotes to "Cowboys and Indians." In these chapters, Abbey utilizes a series of stereotypical tropes about Navajo culture in order to support the qualities of white masculinity that he argues for throughout his book. By immersing these chapters in discussions of the Navajos specifically, Abbey does resist painting a pan-Indian portrait that blindly lumps all native people into a simplistic collective. On the surface, Abbey comes across as a great Navajo sympathizer, but it is in this role that his concerns for white masculinity are most apparent. For example, Abbey discusses at great length the problem of poverty and overpopulation on Navajo reservations, stating that:

> Various solutions are proposed: industrializations; tourism; massive
> federal aid; better education for the Navajo children; relocation; birth
> control; child subsidies; guaranteed annual income; four-lane highways;
> moral rearmament. None of these proposals are entirely devoid of merit
> and at least one of them—birth control—is obviously essential though not
> in itself if poverty is to be alleviated among the Navajo Indians. (106)

He goes on to add that other proposals "fail to take into account what is unique and valuable in the Navajo's traditional way of life and ignore altogether the

possibility that the Navajo may have as much to teach the white man as the white

man has to teach the Navajo" (106). Abbey attempts to describe what is "unique

and valuable" in the "traditional way of life" of the Navajos, but he inadvertently

frames the value of this culture in terms of whiteness. According to Abbey, the

Navajos should be "saved" so that the white culture might learn of these

traditional ways, which he suggests are more in line with his own vision of

ecocentric *white* masculinity. The irony of this passage is that Abbey, who

believes that nature does and should exist for its own sake (rather than simply for

human utility), suggests that the Navajo themselves exist to serve both white

culture and white masculinity by supplying valuable wisdom in a time of need.

Abbey hopes to save the Navajo, not because they are worth saving to him but

because of what he sees to be their role in the prevention of ecological

apocalypse[7].

In a later passage, Abbey, once again attends to the issue of poverty in

Navajo culture in order to support his own claims for white masculinity. For

example, Abbey believes that:

> It is doubtful … that the Navajo way of life, as distinguished from Navajos,
>
> can survive. Outnumbered, surrounded and overwhelmed, the Navajos will
>
> probably be forced in self-defense to malform themselves into the shape

---

[7] Abbey also refers to the Navajo as "the Negroes of the Southwest—red black men" and laments that, "like their cousins in the big cities they turn for solace, quite naturally, to alcohol and drugs" [sic] (103). By drawing upon negative stereotypes of poverty and alcoholism, Abbey conflates African-American and Native-American men and thereby positions white men in opposition to men of color. Furthermore, Abbey draws attention to what he perceives to be most troubling about this situation—that the Navajo have "fallen" from the romanticized primitive lifestyle that he believes would benefit contemporary white culture.

required by industrial econometrics. Red-skinned black men at present,

they must learn to become dark-brown white men with credit cards and

crew-cut sensibilities. (109)

Since Abbey throughout *Desert Solitaire* criticizes all men "with credit cards and

crew-cut sensibilities," his statement here says very little about the Navajos in

particular. In this statement, Abbey, again using a contemporary discourse of

race, objects to the forced assimilation of Navajo men into a cultural and

economic conformity. In the process, Abbey retains a signifier of racial difference,

"dark-brown white men," and this should not be overlooked but seen as residue

of the cultural centrality of racialized identity in Abbey's work. What becomes

evident, though, is that Abbey is using the specter of Navajo "malformation" to

express his own anxieties about the survival of essentialist white masculinity.

Although he certainly wishes to preserve a pre-Columbian Navajo way of life, he

does so because the same cultural forces that threaten them also threaten his

own ideological constructions of white manhood. We can see this anxiety most

clearly at the end of the chapter when Abbey mourns the "loss" of the two

mythological enemies of the American west—cowboys and Indians. He writes

that "Cowboys and Indians disappear, dying off or transforming themselves by

tortuous degrees into something quite different. The originals are nearly gone

and will soon be lost forever in the overwhelming crowd. Legendary enemies,

their ghosts ride away together—buddies at last—into the mythic sunset of the

West" (111). Nostalgia for these frontier figures points to Abbey's concern that

Progress has not only negatively impacted the natural character of the American

landscape but also threatens to emasculate the "mythic" character of the

American West. In spite of his ironic transposition here, Abbey glorifies the

violent relationship between Indians and white men to further his claims that

consumer capitalism will eventually homogenize all men, regardless of color.

Unlike Sherman Alexie's vision of the Lone Ranger and Tonto "fistfighting in

Heaven," Abbey envisions a camaraderie built on mutual extinction—perhaps

only white writers like Abbey can mourn an epistemology that led to hundreds of

years of bloodshed. Although it may appear as though Abbey fears for more than

just white men, in fact he reinscribes Native men as Others by calling upon

troubling frontier ideologies, thereby revealing what matters most to him in *Desert*

Solitaire: white masculinity.

Thus far I have discussed primarily the constructions of white masculinity

that Abbey believes to be responsible for environmental degradation. When white

men follow "without question" only the narrow perspective that contemporary

American culture allows them, then the result is both an endangered landscape

and the inevitable emasculation of men. Therefore, if Abbey blames the

destructiveness of white masculinity on cultural myopia, then the purpose of

Desert Solitaire is to make men see the desert landscape—and themselves—in

new ways. Saving the wilderness and saving white masculinity are inextricably

associated in Abbey's work, and he attempts to save both by calling his readers'

attention to the natural landscape in ways that construct new, more sustainable

versions of white masculinity. I would now like to turn to the kind of masculinity that Abbey privileges in *Desert Solitaire*.

First and foremost, Abbey's idealized man longs for and embraces the primitive. The primitive for Abbey, as for many American nature writers, has many different meanings and associations that all work to fit his rhetorical needs. Abbey primarily situates the primitive in opposition to contemporary consumer culture; for Abbey, it represents an independence from what he sees to be the constraints imposed upon white men by modern culture. One of the ways that Abbey imagines the primitive in this way is through artistic expression. Abbey appropriates the primitive by considering the ancient Southwest Native American petroglyphs and pictographs that he comes across while exploring the Arches National Monument. While Abbey only guesses as to the purpose of the drawings carved into the sandstone, wondering if they are "the merest doodling," "community bulletin boards," or of "religious or ceremonial significance" (101), he finds meaning for them in the present: "Whether crude or elegant, representational or abstract, very old or relatively new, all of the work was done in a manner pleasing to contemporary taste, with its vogue for the stylized and primitive" (100). In this passage, Abbey remarks upon the modernist fascination with primitivism, a theme that would have resonated with his readers at the time. If Abbey's discussion had ended there, it would have certainly felt like mere appreciation, or perhaps nostalgia, for the creative expression of a long dead culture. Instead, Abbey uses this discussion to establish primitive art as a

liberating counterpoint to "industrialized" masculinity. Of the primitive artist, Abbey writes: "Unburdened by the necessity of devoting most of their lives to the production, distribution, sale and servicing of labor-saving machinery, lacking proper recreational facilities, these primitive savages were free to do that which comes as naturally to men as making love—making graven images" (102). In this passage, Abbey equates the primitive with freedom and erotic power and modernity with perfunctory labor. He draws upon these cultural artifacts to point out the irony of "labor-saving machinery" while connecting the primitive with liberty. He also draws upon a cultural script that identifies masculinity as inherently erotic, linking artistic production with sexuality by locating both in "nature."

Of course, not all of Abbey's examples reach so far back—the primitive has its place in the present, too. In the "Polemic" chapter, Abbey once again draws upon work to suggest a relationship between the primitive and independence. Here, Abbey uses primitivism as an expression for encounters with the natural world, for an outdoor lifestyle, that exists in opposition to contemporary American culture and its masculinities. For example, Abbey describes the scene at a local Moab bar, where "open violence is rare" despite differences of opinion. Abbey talks about the "prospectors, miners, geologists, cowboys, truckdrivers and sheepherders" who have been "physically active all day out-of-doors at a mile or more above sea level" (40-1). Such men do not know "the creeping strangulation of the clean white *collar* and the rich but *modest*

four-in-hand garrote!" (155). Abbey idealizes these men because of the self-reliance they achieve while working in primitive conditions: "The nature of their work requires a combination of skills and knowledge, good health and self-reliance, which tends to inspire self-confidence; they need not doubt their manhood" (41). White-collar men—men who are not "free" in the ways that these rugged outdoorsy types are—do doubt their manhood. The primitive is linked to independence, and therefore "real" men should seek out the primitive in order to establish their own quiet masculinity.

But Abbey establishes the primitive as independence most clearly in the "Down the River" chapter, in which he and a companion travel down the soon-to-be dammed (and therefore soon-to-be "damned") Colorado River. In a rather famous passage, Abbey declares that he and his friend Ralph Newcomb are "Cutting the bloody cord, that's what we feel, the delirious exhilaration of independence, a rebirth backward in time and into primeval liberty, into freedom in the most simple, literal, primitive meaning of the word, the only meaning that counts" (155). Here, Abbey contends that "liberty" is most valuable in its primitive sense, thus calling upon a traditional view of the wilderness as a place where men can escape from the restrictions placed upon them by civilization. Furthermore, some critics have found Abbey's birthing metaphor to be highly troubling, suggesting that Abbey reinforces a problematic gendering of both nature and culture. For these reasons, Abbey, as many writers before him, envisions the desert landscape as a source of renewal for white men. As he and

Ralph Newcomb continue down the Colorado River, Abbey writes that that "In these hours and days of dual solitude on the river we hope to discover something quite different, to renew our affection for ourselves and the human kind in general by a temporary, legal separation from the mass" (155). This "legal separation" from modern civilization is essential to his construction of white masculinity, but so is his insistence that such a separation be temporary. Like Thoreau in *Walden* and Hawthorne in "The Old Manse," Abbey believes that embracing the primitive through direct experience in the natural world is a necessary but passing endeavor for masculine rejuvenation.

Furthermore, Abbey draws upon the dialecticism of apocalypse and the primitive in order to stress the regenerative powers of the wilderness. In "The Heat of Noon," for example, Abbey writes that "Mountains complement desert as desert complements city, as wilderness complements and completes civilization" (129). He goes on to add that "We need the possibility of escape as surely as we need hope; without it the life of the cities would drive all men into crime or drugs or psychoanalysis" (130). The cities, which "drive men into crime or drugs," become symbols for impending apocalypse because Abbey describes them as both physically destructive in terms of the landscape and psychologically destructive for men; likewise, the primitive is important to Abbey because it represents both the physical location and the attitude that white men must embrace. In simple terms, white men can become, and must become, "primitive" only in primitive landscapes. Such a construction of masculinity is not new, of

course, and in these moments, Abbey subscribes to what Lawrence Buell calls

the "antisocial, individualistic flight from the settlements featured in masculine

wilderness romance" (49). However, Abbey sees the primitive as much more

difficult to access than earlier nature writers. Part of his apocalyptic vision is

derived from a perception that primitive places themselves are becoming more

and more difficult to find, which he finds dangerous to both the landscape and

white masculinity. As he travels down the Colorado River, for instance, he and

Ralph Newcomb decide to prepare for their trip as little as possible in order to

experience it in a primitive way. He writes: "our ignorance and carelessness are

more deliberate than accidental; we are entering Glen Canyon without having

learned much about it beforehand because we wish to see it as Powell and his

party had seen it, not knowing what to expect, making anew the discoveries of

others" (156-7). In this passage, Abbey suggests that since all discoveries have

been made, since there are no new frontiers, he must follow the footsteps of

earlier explorers in order to capture the primitive experience. Here we see Abbey

at his most self-reflexive, as he attempts to walk the tightrope between

romanticizing a primitive landscape that no longer exists and conceding that his

journey is a mere simulacrum of Powell's. He does so by using the apocalyptic

imagery that buttresses *Desert Solitaire*'s ecocentric viewpoint: "What follows is

the record of a last voyage through a place we knew, even then, was doomed"

(152). In "Down the River," Abbey describes a journey that even his readers can

no longer reproduce, which reinforces the need to protect primitive landscapes by linking a crisis of masculinity with the environmental crisis itself.

Abbey's use of the primitive to portray the need for white men to reclaim their independence is important—but not unique—to Abbey's writing. Abbey's writing falls within a long tradition in America of white men running from perceived cultural emasculation to the wilderness in order to reestablish a sense of manhood. The difference between Abbey and other writers is his deep ecological belief system that helps to redefine white masculinity in new kinds of ways. Abbey addresses the former way of thinking in "Down the River" when he writes:

> Suppose we say that wilderness invokes nostalgia, a justified not merely sentimental nostalgia for the lost America our forefathers knew. The word suggests the past and the unknown, the womb of earth from which we all emerged. It means something lost and something still present, something remote and at the same time intimate, something buried in our blood and nerves, something beyond us and without limit. Romance—but not to be dismissed on that account. The romantic view, while not the whole of truth, is a necessary part of the whole truth. (167)

In this passage, Abbey once again demonstrates a keen awareness that his readers may mistake his writing as burdened by a simple and antiquated construction of the wilderness. He alludes to both the dangers and the benefits of embracing pastoral Romanticism, but he also goes on to add that "the love of

wilderness is more than a hunger for what is always beyond reach; it is also an

expression of loyalty to the earth, the earth which bore us and sustains us, the

only home we shall ever know, the only paradise we ever need—if only we had

the eyes to see" (167). Abbey's statement here serves two purposes: one, to

declare his position as a deep ecologist and, two, to remind his readers of the

larger purpose of *Desert Solitaire*, which is to show white men how to use their

"eyes to see," not with the commodified myopia of the tourist, the consumer, but

in a deeply ecological way. Only a few pages later, Abbey comes across "the

familiar semimelancholy debris of free enterprise" (170) and uses the opportunity

to once again condemn egocentric constructions of masculinity. He finds:

> an astonishing heap of tattered magazines of the All-Man He-Male type—
>
> *True* (false), *Male* (a little queer), *Stag* (full of ragged does blasting Japs
>
> with machine guns), *Saga* (fairy tales), *Real* (quite phony) and others of
>
> the *genre* … These fellows must have spend a lot of time reading; no
>
> wonder they failed to find whatever they'd been looking for. (170)

His parenthetical criticisms—themselves sustaining a dialectics of masculinity—

point towards the absurdity of the typical masculine narratives that have led men

out into the wilderness.

In order to better establish Abbey's ecocentric masculinity, I would like to

return to Lawrence Buell's description of ecological apocalypse in *The*

Environmental Imagination. Because white masculinity in *Desert Solitaire* is

inextricably connected to the dialectic relationship between apocalypticism and

primitivism, Buell's detailed discussion of the five "modes of perception that can

subserve environmental apocalyptic ends" provide a valuable template for an

analysis of manhood in Abbey. Furthermore, the fact that Abbey's project so

clearly aims to realign the ways that white men perceive themselves and the

natural landscape suggests that Buell's "modes of perception" are a useful

framework for this particular analysis. Since Buell's aims in his chapter on

environmental apocalypticism clearly inform my own analysis of masculinity in

Desert Solitaire, I should point out that his work has recently come under fire for

its simplification of the theories that have come to define ecological criticism as a

field. One of Buell's most severe critics, Dana Phillips, confronts Buell's dogmata

in *The Truth of Ecology* when he suggests that *The Environmental Imagination*

"does not provide a workable set of theoretical assumptions for ecocriticism.

Buell tends to use theoretical terms … rhetorically rather than argumentatively,

and therefore uses them *untheoretically*. He borrows the jargon of theory while

discounting its concepts, when he doesn't dismiss them outright" (160). In his

book, Phillips does not address the modes of perception that I will examine but

attends to Buell's work as a whole, and, while his arguments very directly call

attention to the deficit of theory that ecocriticism itself is renowned for, they do

not, I believe, make any less useful what is, essentially, a descriptive anatomy of

recurrent themes traced by Buell through literary constructions of environmental

apocalypse.

The five "modes of perception" in environmental apocalypse, then, are as follows: "interrelatedness, biotic egalitarianism, magnification, conflation [and] … the sense of imminent environmental peril" (305). Here, I will pay particular attention to the first two—interrelatedness and biotic egalitarianism—because the latter three are intertwining modes that I have already addressed at length. Abbey's treatment of the Arches National Monument as a rhetorical synecdoche demonstrates the "magnifications of scale" and the fusion of the "near and remote" (305) that Buell associates with magnification and conflation respectively, and the elegiac component of the text clearly points to the imminent sense of environmental destruction. Interrelatedness and biotic egalitarianism, therefore, are two key modes of seeing in *Desert Solitaire* that demonstrate Abbey's unique vision of white masculinity that moves beyond a mere romanticization of the wilderness as a primitive proving ground for men. For Abbey, however, both of these terms are further narrowed into the reigning metaphor of biological kinship, which encompasses both interrelatedness and biotic egalitarianism. For Buell, interrelatedness means the "dramatization of networked relationships" (302), and he uses a passage from Aldo Leopold to illustrate his meaning: "When I submit these thoughts to a printing press, I am helping to drain a marsh for cows to graze, and to exterminate the birds of Brazil. When I go birding in my Ford, I am devastating an oil field, and re-electing an imperialist to get me rubber" (280). Leopold's quote illustrates how the actions of one environmental, political, and social system inevitably affect those of

neighboring systems—all beings are connected. Buell goes on to suggest that "interrelatedness implies also equality of members" (303), thereby making the connection between the first term and his second—biotic egalitarianism—where "the killing of flies becomes as objectionable as the killing of humans" (303) but also encompasses the "personhood of nonhuman beings" (304). Abbey's kinship metaphor implies both of these modes of perception, since kinship in Abbey refers to a connectedness among equal members.

We can see Abbey's use of the kinship metaphor as early as his introduction to *Desert Solitaire*, in which he describes the purpose of his book:

> [T]he desert is a vast world, an oceanic world, as deep in its way and complex and various as the sea. Language makes a mighty loose net with which to go fishing for simple facts, when facts are infinite. If a man knew enough he could write a whole book about the juniper tree. Not juniper trees in general but that one particular juniper which grows from a ledge of naked sandstone near the old entrance to Arches National Monument. What I have tried to do then is something a bit different … I have tried to create a world of words in which the desert figures more as a medium than as material. Not imitation but evocation has been the goal. (xii)

Abbey does, indeed, "write a whole book about the juniper tree"—it appears in nearly every chapter of *Desert Solitaire*. While that particular juniper tree does not figure prominently into every description or argument in the book, it does represent Abbey's project as a whole. The juniper acts as the symbolic link

between the natural, desert landscape inside the park and the civilized world. In hopes of discovering the essence of the juniper tree, then, Abbey must dramatize the landscape that he sees being inherently connected to it. The juniper tree is inextricably related to the midget rattlesnake, to the young cottontail, to the citizens of Moab, to Roy Scobie, the ancient cowboy, to the tourist dead at Grandview Point. The desert landscape, as Abbey suggests, acts "more as a medium than as material," a medium by which he can come to evoke the "essence" of that particular juniper tree, which symbolically functions to connect people and animals and the landscape. In these moments, Abbey attempts to lay bare the kinship among all living creatures that "industrial men" fail to see.

Another example of the kinship metaphor can be found in "The Serpents of Paradise." In this chapter, Abbey finds a midget rattlesnake living right outside the door of his trailer and, worried that it might bite him, considers whether or not he should kill it. Immediately, he admits that he'd "hesitate to blast a fellow creature at such close range … It would be like murder" (17). Here, we can plainly see Abbey's words echoing Buell's above, in which Abbey places equal value upon animal life as he does on human life—perhaps even more. Abbey goes on to add that "It is my duty as a park ranger to protect, preserve and defend all living things within the park boundaries, making no exceptions. Even if this were not the case I have personal convictions to uphold. Ideals, you might say. I prefer not to kill animals. I'm a humanist; I'd rather kill a *man*[8] than a snake"

---

[8] Abbey's declaration that he would rather "kill a man" than a snake does not necessarily conflict with his argument for ecological egalitarianism (otherwise, Abbey would have to be *equally* willing

(17). Abbey cleverly uses his understanding of the desert ecology in order to solve his dilemma. Instead of shooting the rattler, he "domesticates" a gopher snake, which "has a reputation as the enemy of rattlesnakes, destroying or driving them away whenever encountered" (19). In doing so, he finds that he is "troubled no more by rattlesnakes under the door" (19). More importantly, Abbey finds himself to be "compatible" with the gopher snake, perhaps even "friends" (19). Through this story, Abbey establishes a kinship with the gopher snake and demonstrates biotic sensitivity; for Abbey, white masculinity is no longer about self-interest and the resulting ecological degradation but about forming a more ecocentric relationship with the desert flora and fauna, even those aspects that others might find detestable.

As Abbey states, however, "The snake story is not ended" (19) with the disappearance of the rattler. Abbey continues to describe a "dance" between two gopher snakes that takes place beneath his trailer. Entranced by the display, he states that "I will feel their presence watching over me like totemic entities, keeping the rattlesnakes far back in the brush where I like them best, cropping off the surplus mouse population, maintaining useful connections with the primeval. Sympathy, mutual aid, symbiosis, continuity" (21). The language of symbiosis here clearly resonates with Abbey's use of the kinship metaphor. In these moments, however, Abbey is very wary about resorting to simple anthropomorphism. He claims that he is "not attributing human motives to my

---

to kill a man as to kill a snake) because, in Abbey's mind, human beings are the arbiters of environmental apocalypse and therefore the enemies of equality on a deep ecological level.

snake and bird acquaintances" but ultimately believes that it is "foolish, simple-

minded rationalism which denies any form of emotion to all animals but man and

his dog" (21). Abbey reinforces the connection between human and animals

when he closes the gap between them; if animals cannot think like humans, they

can feel like humans, and for Abbey, that is enough. Rationalism is, after all,

"simple-minded." Abbey ends "The Serpents of Paradise" chapter with the moral

of his story, which is a passage that clearly utilizes the kinship metaphor: "All

men are brothers, we like to say, half-wishing sometimes in secret it were not

true. But perhaps it is true … We are obliged, therefore, to spread the news,

painful and bitter though it may be for some to hear, that all living things on earth

are kindred" (21). The final declaration quite plainly demonstrates the importance

of kinship to Abbey, but it also shows that the relationship among men is as

important as the relationship between men and nature.

Although we may read the phrase "all men are brothers" to be a statement

about humankind, the bond that Abbey forms with his friend Ralph Newcomb in

"Down the River" suggests that he is quite literally talking about men in particular.

After several days of rafting down the river, for example, Abbey states that he

and Newcomb are so in sync that they need not communicate through language:

"I think we've about said it all—we communicate less in words and more in direct

denotation, the glance, the pointing hand, the subtle nuances of pipe smoke, the

tilt of a wilted hat brim. Configurations are beginning to fade, distinctions shading

off into blended amalgams of man and man, men and water, water and rock"

(185). Abbey describes himself as becoming united with both the landscape and Newcomb. The kinship metaphor is taken to an extreme here—Abbey is *becoming* Newcomb, is *becoming* the landscape, at least in metaphorical terms. He continues to use the metaphor further down the page when he describes their physical appearance: "We are merging, molecules getting mixed. Talk about intersubjectivity—we are both taking on the coloration of the river and canyon, our skin as mahogany as the water on the shady side, our clothing coated with silt, our bare feet caked with mud and tough as lizard skin, our whiskers bleached as the sand" (185). It is as important that the two men "merge" themselves as it is that they merge with the landscape; while they both "become" the river, the bond between the men is equally central to the story. By comparing the profound relationship between Newcomb and Abbey to the antagonistic relationship of Husk and Graham in "Rocks," we can see that Abbey characterizes the primitive as the vehicle for male-bonding and positions contemporary capitalist ideologies as the genesis for masculine conflict[9]. Therefore, the kinship metaphor describes the relationship between men as well as men's relationship with the environment, thereby naturalizing heterosexual male intimacy.

In *Desert Solitaire*, Abbey uses the rhetoric of environmental apocalypse in order to critique a contemporary capitalist culture that has turned white men away from their "primitive" selves. Unlike typical apocalyptic narratives, however, *Desert Solitaire* does not advocate a nostalgic return to Arcadian innocence or

---

[9] It is worth noting that in the story about himself and Newcomb traveling down the river, Abbey clears the landscape of the distraction constructed as "woman" that is present in the story of Husk and Graham.

attempt to reconstruct the wilderness as simply a testing ground for manhood. Instead, in giving voice to an unforgiving desert wilderness, Abbey centers white masculinity on a connectedness with the natural landscape and, in doing so, promotes an ecocentric masculinity that idealizes the bonds men form not only with non-human nature but also with other men.

Chapter Four:

The Virtual Male in William Gibson's *Neuromancer*

William Gibson's *Neuromancer* (1984) is a novel that came to define the genre of cyberpunk literature in the 1980's. In *Neuromancer*, Gibson draws upon conventions of the hard-boiled detective novel, hard core science fiction, and contemporary postmodern literature to develop an engaging vision of a familiar yet futuristic world of cybernetic enhancement, artificial intelligence, and virtual environments. Like other writers in this study, Gibson both installs and subverts the imagery of the traditional post-apocalyptic novel, typically cast as a ravaged, post-holocaust landscape, to construct a setting where apocalypse is a non-event, where it has already occurred and will continue to occur. In doing so, Gibson also images virtual worlds as, ironically, primitive zones that produce the restorative space for men to rediscover a "lost" sense of masculinity inhibited by the contemporary world. As we have seen, masculinity in post-apocalyptic literature is generally reconfigured through a primitive setting resulting from global catastrophe, but in *Neuromancer*, there is no single, defining apocalpytic event that creates such a savage, neo-primitive landscape. Instead, the virtual world of the Matrix acts as the frontier by which Case, the novel's protagonist, attempts to redefine himself as the virtual male.

Neuromancer follows Case, a washed-out, drug-addicted "cyber-cowboy" whose past trangressions have left him unable to enter the Matrix, the novel's

virtual environment. Case is approached by Molly Millions and her employer, Armitage, with a job offer; as partial payment for his services, Armitage provides Case an antidote for the Russian mycotoxin that prevents his ability to "jack in" to cyberspace. While on assignment, Case encounters several male characters who, like him, are depicted as representations of failed masculinities. The gritty, non-virtual world in *Neuromancer* is depicted as being in need of an apocalyptic cleansing that never has, and never will, come, and it offers no place for traditional masculinity. By the end of the novel, Case discovers that he has been manipulated by a symbiotic pair of artificial intelligence constructs, Wintermute and Neuromancer, and ends up essentially back where he started.

Much of the existing scholarship on Gibson in general and *Neuromancer* in particular has focused on Gibson's invocation of postmodern literary technique. Frederick Jameson, for example, considers the body of Gibson's work to be "the supreme literary expression if not of postmodernism, then of late capitalism itself" (419), and in "Space Construction as Cultural Practice: Reading William Gibson's *Neuromancer* with Respect to Postmodern Concepts of Space" (2009), Doreen Hartmann points out Gibson's postmodern configuration of space in the novel that deconstructs the conventional binary between physical and virtual worlds. The focus on space in postmodernity is also addressed by Timothy Yu in "Oriental Cities, Postmodern Futures: *Naked Lunch, Blade Runner,* and *Neuromancer*" (2008), who suggests that, by setting the physical world of *Neuromancer* primarily in the East, Gibson attempts to "displace late-capitalist

anxiety onto the Orient" (66). Others, like Benjamin Fair in "Stepping Razor in Orbit: Postmodern Identity and Political Alternatives in William Gibson's *Neuromancer*" (2005), focus on Gibson's postmodern approach to identity constructions, suggesting that the Rastafarians in *Neuromancer* particularly serve as not only a locus of political resistance but also as an alternative to cyberspace as a formative space for identity.

Due in part to the popularity of Donna Haraway's examination of gender and cybernetics in *The Cyborg Manifesto*, many scholars have centered their investigations of Gibson on the construction of gender, which is of primary interest in this study. Some, like June Deery, argue that Gibson's novel falls short of the potential for transformative gender constructions in the cyberpunk genre. In her article, "The Biopolitics of Cyberspace: Piercy Hacks Gibson," Deery pits Marge Piercy's *He, She, and It* (1991) against Gibson's *Neuromancer*, where the points-of-view of the protagonists differ by gender, suggesting that, "Although Gibson portrays tough, macho heroines, he does not explore in any depth the effect of new technology on gender relations ... gender only figures in masculine cyberpunk as a repressed ghost" (94). In "Razor Girls: Genre and Gender in Cyberpunk Fiction" (1997), Lauraine Leblanc examines "imagined gender transgression" in cyborg characters within the cyberspace genre, including Gibson's *Neuromancer*, suggesting that that female-gendered cyborgs in the work of Gibson are "undertaking a role-reversal into masculinity ... and are transgendered representations, rather than radical revisions of gender" (72). In

"White Men Can't ... : (De)centering Authority and Jacking into Phallic Economies in William Gibson's *Count Zero*" (2002), Joseph Childers, Townsend Carr, and Regna Meenk instead examine the "decentering of authority" that occurs in cyberpunk literature, particularly within the fiction of William Gibson, where white male authority is subsumed by "ethnic and racial difference, and thus the nonessentialism of authority" (151).

Examinations of apocalyptic imagery and metaphor also figure heavily into the scholarship of Gibson's work. For example, in "Apocalypse Coma" (2002), Veronica Hollinger argues that Gibson's novel features apocalyptic gesturing but "ultimately dismisses the apparent significance of these images" (163). She goes on to add that the "postmodern apocalypse" of the novel does not proclaim the end of history but lives within history itself (173). Amy Novak's interest in how Gibson constructs memory in *Neuromancer* further speaks to the apocalyptic theme, considering how prominently dehistoricization figures into traditional post-apocalyptic fiction. For instance, in "Virtual Poltergeists and Memory: The Question of Ahistoricism in William Gibson's *Neuromancer*" (2006), Novak writes that "*Neuromancer* assists in providing a greater understanding of the concepts of memory and illuminates its disruptive potential" (126). In other words, Gibson both examines the differences between how human and digital memories operate and attempts to develop an "alternate temporality" made visible by the "semiotic ghosts" in the novel.[10]

---

[10] Other scholars are interested in the relationships between virtual worlds and post-apocalyptic visions, such as in "Landscape and Locodescription in William Gibson's *Neuromancer*" (2006),

While much of the current body of scholarship centers on constructions of gender from the context of postmodern theory, it does not sufficiently address the relationships between these examinations and the thread of millennialism in *Neuromancer*. At the heart of Gibson's novel lies the tension between a world depicted as being in need of cataclysmic purification and a character, Case, in need of a renewed sense of masculinity. By looking at how Gibson draws upon but ultimately thwarts the conventions of the post-apocalyptic genre, we can better orient ourselves to the methods by which Gibson constructs masculinity, particularly through the formulation of the virtual male.

Early on in *Neuromancer*, we discover that the main character, Case, had been, up until two years ago, "a cowboy, a rustler, one of the best in the Sprawl" (13). In this passage, Gibson uses the archetype of the cowboy, perhaps the most enduring icon of masculinity in American culture, as the driving metaphor to depict Case as an adept and renowned computer hacker prior to the start of the novel. In line with the romanticized ideal of the cowboy, Case is required to live by a code, one that, when broken, eventually leads to his downfall: "He'd made the classic mistake, the one he'd swore he'd never make. He stole from his employers" (14). While stealing from employers will often lead to trouble, Gibson frames the passage in terms of the mistake "he'd swore *he'd* never make" [emphasis added], the issue being not so much the theft but his own self-betrayal, his failure to live up to his own personal code. The result is that "[his

where Lisa Swanstrom examines Gibson's construction and description of cyberspace through the lens of the traditional notion of the sublime.

employers] damaged his nervous system with a wartime Russian mycotoxin ...

The damage was minute, subtle, and utterly effective" (15). Case, once a

professional hacker at the top of his game, loses his ability to access the virtual

world of the Matrix, thereby losing his cowboy status and his established sense

of masculinity. Case becomes a cowboy displaced from his frontier: "For Case,

who'd lived for the bodiless exultation of cyberspace, it was the Fall. In the bars

he'd frequented as a cowboy hotshot, the elite stance involved a certain relaxed

contempt for the flesh. The body was meat. Case fell into the prison of his own

flesh" (15). The "Fall" is both from social status and from masculinity, as Case

goes from being a "hotshot" cowboy to being in a "prison" of the body[11].

Case, however, appears to be a man of his times—or rather of Gibson's

times. The masculine plight of Case emerges historically from a masculinity crisis

of the 1980s as described by Michael Kimmel in his cultural history, *Manhood in

America*. Kimmel writes that, "At that time, masculinists argued that changes in

the nature of work, the closing of the frontier, and changes in family relations had

produced a cultural degeneracy—American men and boys were becoming

feminized" (224). While masculinity in crisis certainly does not restrict itself to this

era[12], the need for escape becomes an important motif for men during this period

of time. Kimmel goes on to add: "So where did men go to feel like men? This was

one of the questions that fueled the anger of the men's rights groups, who sought

[11] Case and the other hackers in the novel have contempt for the body (the meat, the flesh), likely in response to the cultural popularity of bodybuilding following the 1977 documentary *Pumping Iron* that stars Arnold Schwarzenegger.
[12] Crises of masculinity play out through much of American history, which reinforces the notion that crisis is itself a defining characteristic of American masculinities (see Douglas Robinson's *American Apocalypses*).

to prop up traditional definitions of masculinity in the ways that besieged men

have always done: by clearing everyone else off the playing field" (224).

According to Kimmel, men of the 1980s associated regenerative masculinity with

spaces distinct from normative culture, whether it's Wall Street or the wilderness,

as evidenced by the rise of the mythopoeic men's movement and the popularity

of male-dominated workplace narratives. Kimmel goes on to say that:

> By reestablishing the early nineteenth-century separation of spheres
>
> between women and men and by excluding from full manhood the 'other'
>
> men—men of color, gay men, nonnative-born men—these men clung to
>
> the belief that a secure and confident gender identity was possible through
>
> the fulfillment of Self-Made[13] Masculinity. (224)

Masculinity during this time, therefore, centers on exclusionary spaces where

men, particularly white men, can properly engage in the process of masculine re-

fortification. We can see this construction of space occurring in *Neuromancer*,

where the exclusive virtual world of the Matrix acts as the place where

masculinity can most effectively thrive—the real cowboys have all but

disappeared, but their cultural legacy lives on in the virtual environment.

In "*Second Life,* Video Games, and the Social Text" (2009), Steven E.

Jones examines the relationship between masculinity and virtual space by

examining the cyberpunk narratives of writers like William Gibson and Neil

---

[13] Kimmel outlines the history of masculinity through the examination of several tropes, including the Heroic Artisan, the Genteel Patriarch, and the Self-Made Man. The central characteristic of the Self-Made Man was that "the proving ground was the public sphere, specifically the workplace. And the workplace was a man's world (and a native-born white man's world at that). If manhood could be proved, it had to be proved in the eyes of other men" (Kimmel 20).

Stephenson and existing virtual worlds like *Second Life.* In his article, Jones

suggests that the "metaphysical, sublime view of virtual reality is historically

connected to William Gibson's invention of cyberspace in the 1980s" (272).

Gibson's development of the Matrix as a majestic and terrifying landscape differs

considerably from that of the Metaverse in Stephenson's *Snow Crash* (1992),

which offers a more visually realistic, perhaps more democratic construction of

virtuality. As Jones puts it:

> Unlike William Gibson's earlier invented network, cyberspace, which
>
> resembles the abstract architecture of a government and financial
>
> database, Stephenson's Metaverse is a good deal like a MUD or an early
>
> video game. Gibson's cyberspace is vast and lonely. Stephenson's
>
> Metaverse is full of bars and private houses, motorcycles to ride and other
>
> avatars with whom to interact. (265)

Images of simulated environments have not been consistent or monolithic, and

Jones's description in particular calls attention to Gibson's abstract and

disorienting vision of cyberspace, where only corporate entities and the cyber-

cowboys trying to exploit them have access to that environment. In

Neuromancer, cyberspace is primarily (but not exclusively) a men's space, and

because of his inability to circumvent the socioeconomic barriers that prevent him

from entering as a hacker, Case has been cast out of the club of virtual males.

Case then turns to drugs, hoping to find an analogous "virtual" experience:

"He felt a stab of elation, the octagons and adrenaline mixing with something else

... Because, in some weird and very approximate way, it was like a run in the matrix. Get just wasted enough, find yourself in some desperate but arbitrary kind of trouble, and it was possible to see Ninsei as a field of data" (43). Case attempts to "simulate" the simulation of the Matrix, but he quickly becomes disenchanted with what it offers him: "Case knew that at some point he'd started to play a game with himself, a very ancient one that has no name, a final solitaire. He no longer carried a weapon, no longer took the basic precautions ... A part of him knew that the arc of his self-destruction was glaringly obvious to his customers, who grew steadily fewer" (19-20). It is significant that Gibson makes the distinction between virtuality and intoxication in the novel; the virtual environment is not like the alternative state of consciousness resulting from drug use, not a place of recreational *escape*. The Matrix is instead depicted as an arena for masculinity-building. Case's self-destructive tendencies, therefore, result from his inability to "jack in" to the Matrix, and his drug habit only serves to mask his feelings of emasculation. We can see this most readily when he is chased down by Molly at the beginning of the novel: "The last of his octagon-induced bravado collapsed. He snapped the cobra into its handle and scrambled for the window, blind with fear, his nerves screaming" (48). No longer the cyberspace "cowboy," Case lives in a state of perpetual fear, lacking a persistent quality of masculinity: courage. Because he is unable to enter the virtual world of the novel, Case feels emasculated.

Case is not alone, however, in his overarching sense of emasculation. Other men in *Neuromancer*, men who are likewise unable to enter the Matrix, are similarly depicted by Gibson. For example, Armitage—Case's employer throughout the novel—is a former member of the Special Forces and a veteran of the conflict referred to as "Screaming Fist." In the larger context of American culture, the disciplined world of military life and the arena of battle are often cast as sites for men to develop and define their masculinities[14]; in the non-apocalyptic world of Gibson's novel, however, war represents just another failed opportunity for men[15]. When we first meet Armitage in the novel, he is described as follows: "The dark robe was open to the waist, the broad chest hairless and muscular, the stomach flat and hard. Blue eyes so pale they made Case think of bleach" (73). Furthermore, he wears the "angular gold ring through the left lobe" that signifies "Special Forces" (73). Armitage has a manly physique, being "muscular" with a "broad chest" and a flat stomach, and he would appear to embody the confident masculinity of the war hero. But the world of *Neuromancer* has contempt for the body, the "meat," which can be manufactured, manipulated, and enhanced. In the novel, we learn that Armitage, formerly known as Corto, had his body reconstructed after being gruesomely maimed in a military conflict: "Screaming Fist had ended for Corto on the outskirts of Helsinki, with Finnish paramedics sawing him out of the twisted belly of the helicopter" (191-2). Later, in

---

[14] Also often played out as normative heterosexuality.

[15] *Neuromancer* was published in the decade following the Vietnam War, which arguably redefined American conceptions of modern warfare. Gibson himself left the United States for Canada to avoid being drafted, and Armitage perhaps represents the disenchantment that prompted Gibson's departure.

the hospital, "He'd need eyes, legs, and extensive cosmetic work, the aide said,

but that could be arranged. New plumbing, the man added, squeezing Corto's

shoulder through the sweat-damp sheet" (192). Armitage/Corto is patched

together through advanced surgical techniques and cybernetic implants, but he is

not made whole again. As Wintermute tells Case, "It's taken a very long time to

assemble the team you're a part of. Corto was the first, and he very nearly didn't

make it. Very far gone, in Toulon. Eating, excreting, masturbating were the best

he could manage. But the underlying structure of obsessions was there:

Screaming Fist, his betrayal, the Congressional hearings" (296). Instead of being

an exemplary model of masculinity, Armitage has been destroyed by war.

Having been written in the wake of the Vietnam War, *Neuromancer*

embodies the zeitgeist of that era, which has great bearing on how the

masculinities of war are constructed in the novel. As Walter H. Capps puts it in

The Unfinished War: Vietnam and the American Conscience, "Virtually

everything that has happened in the United States since the end of the Vietnam

War can be seen as both reaction and response to the war"[16] (8). Furthermore,

the Vietnam War is often depicted as a failed and pointless endeavor, which is

not unlike how Screaming Fist, the operation that Armitage is involved with, is

portrayed in the novel: "Great bloody postwar political football, that was.

Watergated all to hell and back ... Wasted a fair bit of patriotic young flesh in

order to test some new technology. They knew about the Russians' defenses, it

---

[16] While less relevant today, Capps's statement, published in 1990, would be similar to the impact that contemporary Americans might attribute to the events of 9/11.

came out later. Knew about the emps, magnetic pulse weapons. Sent these

fellows in regardless, just to see" (94). Gibson's use of "political football" and

wasted "patriotic young flesh" echo many of the sentiments surrounding the

American involvement in the Vietnam War.

Gibson also draws upon the stereotype of the unstable and disabled

veteran that was popularized during the late 1970's. For example, "In film from

1975 to 1982, veterans [of the Vietnam War] were generally represented as

misfits and psychopaths, as dysfunctional and volatile individuals who

represented a threat to the society to which they had been returned but into

which they could not integrate" (McVeigh *The 1980s* 477). Armitage, himself a

veteran of a conflict not unlike that of Vietnam, is depicted by Gibson as being a

greatly-troubled individual. After his body is reassembled, Armitage ends up

"working for corporate defectors in Lisbon and Marrakesh, where he seemed to

grow obsessed with the idea of betrayal, to loathe the scientists and technicians

he bought out for his employers. Drunk, in Singapore, he beat a Russian

engineer to death in a hotel and set fire to his room" (209-10). Then, being

"cured" of "schizophrenia" through an "experimental program" that uses the

"application of cybernetic models" (211), he becomes the stoic middle manager

that Case ends up working for. By the end of the novel, however, Armitage

completely unravels: "A white lozenge snapped into position, filled with a close-

up of mad blue eyes. Case could only stare. Colonel Willie Corto, Special Forces,

Strikeforce Screaming Fist, had found his way back" (474). The postwar persona

programmed into him dissolves, and Gibson portrays Armitage's regression as

the flashback of a Vietnam War veteran: "Wintermute had built something called

Armitage into a catatonic fortress called Corto. Had convinced Cort that Armitage

was the real thing, and Armitage had walked, talked, schemed ... And now

Armitage was gone, blown away by the winds of Corto's madness" (476). Gibson

shows the failure of a future world to provide viable means of reintegrating

soldiers—wounded or not—into mainstream society after their service. In

Masculinity in Vietnam War Narratives: A Critical Study of Fiction, Films, and

Nonfiction Writings (2009), Brenda M. Boyle argues that:

> In American cultural mythology war is supposed to produce heroes, but it
>
> is difficult for cultural representations to sculpt heroic figures in the case of
>
> a failed war. As is the case with many Vietnam War films, when almost
>
> exclusively mental disabilities are manifest, it becomes more difficult to
>
> assign these veterans to the traditional "heroic" status of victimized
>
> warrior, since mental disabilities are so low in the hierarchy. (108-9)

Although she references Vietnam War *films*, she points out the "hierarchy of

disabilities," in which physical disabilities rate higher than the mental disabilities.

In Gibson's novel, surgeons are able to restore Armitage physically, and although

they try to reconstruct his psyche, they ultimately fail, and Armitage is portrayed

as the casualty of a failed war. Implicitly, then, the presumption that warfare is a

site for displaying courage and masculinity is shown to be illusory in Gibson's

novel. Because wars can fail and because mental wounds can be more severe

than physical ones, Gibson depicts war as too unstable an arena for the production of knowable manhood.

Another counterpoint to Case and a further example of emasculation in Gibson's novel comes in the form of Maelcum, a Rastafarian pilot who assists Case during the Straylight Run. The characterization of Maelcum in terms of masculinity is a significant departure from Case, the postmodern, navel-gazing, narcissistic cyber-cowboy. In "Stepping Razor in Orbit: Postmodern Identity and Political Alternatives in William Gibson's *Neuromancer*" (2005), Benjamin Fair writes that the "contrast between Case and Maelcum extends to the way that Maelcum and Aerol depict a nonmodern (pre-/post-/anti-) subjectivity established in opposition to a modern subjectivity ... [where] premodern and postmodern flow together in contradistinction to a modern paradigm" (98). Maelcum symbolizes a non-modern, primitive masculinity and is portrayed by Gibson as the "Indian" who complements Case, the (cyber-)cowboy. Although Maelcum plays a relatively minimal role for much of the novel, shepherding Molly and Case around Freeside, he assists Case, like Tonto assisting the Lone Ranger, in rescuing Molly from 3Jane and Riviera. When it is time for action, Maelcum is portrayed as a symbol of violent masculinity: "He pulled himself down and picked at the tape of his package with a thick, chipped thumbnail. 'Some man in China say th' truth comes out this,' he said, unwrapping an ancient, oilslick Remington automatic shotgun, its barrel chopped off a few millimeters in front of the shattered forestock ... He smelled of sweat and ganja" (568). The hitherto peace-loving

Rastafarian draws out his shotgun in order to help with the mission, but he, like Case, becomes emasculated when he is unable to fulfill the masculine role of the hero, being immediately taken out of the fight by Hideo, 3Jane's ninja assassin bodyguard: "The first arrow pierced his upper arm ... The second arrow struck the shotgun itself, sending it spinning across the white tiles. Maelcum sat down hard and fumbled at the black thing that protruded from his arm" (639). Within seconds of entering the Tessier-Ashpool vaults, Maelcum is injured, and his physical presence and sense of masculinity obviated. Moreover, even Maelcum's role as supporting "Tonto" figure is questioned by the appearance of Hideo, an Orientalized ninja whose use of the bow and arrow alludes to symbolic associations with traditional Native American culture. By introducing the conflict in this way, Gibson highlights Maelcum's failure even in the subjugated role as supporter of the white cowboy figure.

Gibson's characterization of the Rastafarians, like many traditional post-apocalyptic narratives, draws upon constructions of a primitive masculinity. In "Cyberpunk and Neuromanticism" (1990), Istvan Csicsery-Ronay, Jr. writes of the motif of the "marginal nonwhite folk who are somehow closer to the ancient" (192) that runs throughout Gibson's work, and Maelcum is clearly an example of that image. The ancient, however, reveals a version of masculinity that is diametrically opposed to that of Case. The Rastafarians of the Zion cluster do reinforce the apocalyptic theme of the novel, and the context of the Rastafarian masculinity can be construed through the sense of apocalyptic narratives that run

throughout this religion. For example, the Founders of Zion tell Molly that "Soon come, the Final Days. ... Voices. Voices cryin' inna wilderness, prophesyin' ruin unto Baylon ..." (285). They predict the apocalyptic end of the dominant culture, and Case himself is suggested to be the "tool of Final Days" (287). As Benjamin Fair argues, "The Rasta elders still hold millenarian beliefs as they anticipate Babylon's ruin in the final days ... Just as, for Case, the matrix is the ideal representation of the physical realm's blur of images, Aerol's response to the matrix expresses that, for him, the matrix is the ideal representation of Babylon" (95). In this way, Gibson draws upon the apocalyptic metaphor to complicate facile notions of cyberspace as an idealized, utopian space. However, Fair adds that Gibson ends up "portraying the Rastas in a 'gullible savage' stereotype because Wintermute manipulates them with the apocalyptic 'Stepping Razor' prophecy" (96). The Rastafarians in the novel call Molly "Steppin' Razor," an allusion to Peter Tosh, a reggae musician who played with Bob Marley and who had adopted Rastafari as his religion. The name is derived from the cybernetically-implanted razors that eject from Molly's hands but were, as Fair suggests, implanted by the AIs to take advantage of the Rastafarians. While one might read "the gullible savage" as a form of the primitive in the novel, doing so would be problematic—Maelcum and the other Rastafarians demonstrate the ability for core spiritual beliefs to adapt to new technologies and to adopt new forms of identity construction. Furthermore, the people of the Zion cluster are not

the only characters within the novel successfully manipulated by Wintermute—

Armitage, Case, and Molly all submit to Wintermute's machinations.

Despite the glorification of Molly as savior and their association with the

non-masculine primitivism, it would be inaccurate, if tempting, to read the

Rastafarians as symbols of the feminine. Benjamin Fair writes, for example, that:

> the gendering and sexualizing of Zion are deeply caught up in these
>
> cultural references. The terms of the opposition between Zion (social
>
> commitment, intuition, and the body) and postindustrial capitalism
>
> (hyperrationalism, individualism, and parasitism) appear to align with
>
> femininity and masculinity as they have been historically and culturally
>
> constructed: collectivity, intuition, and the body as feminine and
>
> individualism, reason, and disembodiment as their masculine opposites.
>
> Zion clearly fits the feminine, despite that we find only male members of
>
> the community. (100)

Fair argues that, despite the Rastafarians being all-male, they represent

femininity, not masculinity, because of the cultural dichotomies that are arranged

in the novel. Through the lens of conventional post-apocalyptic narratives,

however, the Rastafarians in *Neuromancer* simply enact an alternative

masculinity, one common to the genre of post-apocalyptic literature, where

"social commitment" and the restoration of order are often privileged over the

"hyperrationalism" and "parasitism" of postindustrial capitalism that leads to the

destruction imaged in a post-holocaust world. The Rastafarians therefore

represent another version of masculinity that ultimately fails within the context of the novel because of the lack of an apocalyptic cleansing that could result in a social environment more conducive to viable manhood.

In *Neuromancer,* Gibson constructs apocalypse as a passé cultural symbol that fails to result in the devastating (but potentially rejuvenating) effect imaged by post-apocalyptic fiction since 1945. In "The Anorexic Ruins" (1989), Jean Baudrillard makes a similar claim that in contemporary, postmodern culture, "Everything has already become nuclear, faraway, vaporized. The explosion has already occurred; the bomb is only a metaphor now" (34). In this passage, Baudrillard maintains that the post-apocalyptic event we've been fearing has already occurred, just perhaps not in the way we expected. In other words, the apocalyptic event was a *non*-event. In the novel, Screaming Fist echoes this sentiment, as it is a defining conflict in the narrative that leads not to a nuclear stand-off or World War III but to business-as-usual. Written in the midst of the Cold War and at the height of nuclear anxiety, *Neuromancer* does little to suggest that the wars of the future would end in nuclear holocaust; in fact, the war described in the novel looks towards contemporary warfare, where battles between the superpowers are fought by highly-trained soldiers bolstered with advanced personal weaponry, satellite systems, and drones. That said, Baudrillard also suggests that "The last bomb, the one no one speaks about, is the bomb that is not content to strew things in space but would strew them in time. The temporal bomb. Where it explodes, everything is suddenly blown into

152

the past; and the greater the bomb's capacity, the further into the past they go"
(34). In his novel, Gibson maintains a similar idea, that the physical, spatial
apocalypse is occurring, has already occurred, and will always occur in a
postmodern, technology-based society; the real issue is the temporal
apocalypse, where the present (and future) engages with the past. In
Neuromancer, Case himself is haunted by his past, particularly by his former
girlfriend, Linda Lee, and by Pauly McCoy, his old partner. But the "temporal
bomb" also draws upon notions of the primitive, a cultural signpost that is deeply
associated with the past. While in Heinlein's post-apocalyptic novel *Farnham's
Freehold*, the "bomb" is both physical and metaphorical, both spatial and
temporal—the characters are cast into a future primitive where white men and
women are enslaved by people of color—in *Neuromancer*, the bomb is never
dropped and never explodes, so the opportunity to return to an idealized past is
not possible.

All of the secondary characters in the novel, including Armitage and
Maelcum, are flawed men, emasculated by the novel's cultural milieu. Although
these figures represent alternatives to the primary male protagonist in the novel,
they are no more viable constructions of masculinity than is represented by Case.
The underlying root of the novel's emasculation narratives centers on the lack of
an apocalyptic event, on the image of a world for which apocalypse should
have—but has not—occurred. Gibson draws upon conventional apocalyptic
themes and symbols to recognize and highlight the ubiquity of millennial thinking.

However, William Gibson does not set his novel in a post-apocalyptic or post-nuclear landscape; rather, he constructs a familiar future world that is configured to feed upon contemporary anxieties about apocalypse. As Doreen Hartmann suggests in "Space Construction as Cultural Practice: Reading William Gibson's *Neuromancer* with Respect to Postmodern Concepts of Space" (2009), Gibson:

> does not contrive a dystopic future, but rather deals with the present social, cultural, economic and political conditions of his environment. Into the glittering, affluent high-tech cities linked to ideas of liberty, boundless mobility, wealth, and power erupts the frightening view of poverty, wretchedness, and unemployment in the slums, comprising feelings of human uprootedness and alienation. (279)

As with other types of speculative fiction, *Neuromancer* uses the fictional landscape to comment on contemporary social concerns. One of these concerns was the increasing cultural and economic growth of countries in East Asia, particularly Japan, that takes on an apocalyptic tenor when viewed in the context of the implied decline of American political and economic superiority. Much of *Neuromancer* takes place in Japan, and like other cyberfictions of the time (*Blade Runner*, for instance), Orientalism has a deep aesthetic effect upon space within the novel. In "Oriental Cities, Postmodern Futures: *Naked Lunch, Blade Runner,* and *Neuromancer*" (2008), Timothy Yu examines the influence of anxieties surrounding Orientialism but argues that "The superficially orientalized but actually denationalized space represented by Chiba City merely prefigures that

most postmodern of spaces—cyberspace" (62). The high-tech cities described in

Neuromancer, while reflecting Orientalist anxieties in the era that the novel was

written, ultimately complement, not contradict, the virtual environment of the

Matrix. Yu refers specifically to Chiba City, which is a:

> prototype of cyberspace that still retains some traces of history, race, and
>
> nation—it is, to borrow from Jameson's framework, a space on the border
>
> between the modern and the postmodern—while cyberspace itself is a
>
> purely postmodern space, entirely dehumanized, with all evidence of
>
> human labor and culture and all national boundaries erased. (62)

As Yu suggests, the physical world of *Neuromancer* reflects concerns about a

growing Asian cultural and political power by playing upon apocalyptic anxiety,

and the postmodern world of the Matrix transcends these concerns by

constructing a denationalized, de-historicized space.

At first glance, then, Gibson's practice of imagining divergent spaces

mimics the contrast between the "new world" and the "old world" in much popular

post-apocalyptic fiction, where characters routinely reflect on worlds in conflict to

perform various cultural critiques of the present. According to Lauraine Leblanc,

however, *Neuromancer*, as the prototypical example of cyberfiction, does not

employ an apocalyptic aesthetic:

> In contrast to the apocalyptic and American-centered themes of early
>
> science fiction, cyberpunk presents a non-apocalyptic view of the future, a
>
> globalist perspective, and the futurist extrapolation of current and social

and economic trends. Prior to cyberpunk, Cold-War-era science fiction

described the future in terms of pre- or post-apocalyptic nuclear imagery.

The worlds represented in cyberpunk fictions, on the other hand, rather

resemble our own present state magnified to a more extreme condition.

(71)

While Leblanc does rightly note Gibson's departure from the devastated

landscapes and social environments featured in post-apocalyptic fictions, she

also simplifies Gibson's engagement with apocalypse as a cultural motif. In fact,

the novel consistently gestures towards an apocalypse that never transpired; one

such example is the animal pandemic that is alluded to throughout the novel. In

the fictionalized world of *Neuromancer*, people eat vat-cooked meat and rarely, if

ever, see live animals[17]. At one point, Finn asks Case "You ever see a horse?"

(211). Before Case can reply, Finn goes on to tell the story about the one time *he*

did: "Saw one in Maryland once ... and that was a good three years after the

pandemic. There's Arabs still trying to code 'em up from the DNA, but they

always croak" (211). The origins and precise consequences of the pandemic are

vague, but from the context, we can gather that mammals have been all but

wiped out, and despite the scientific efforts to bring them back, they are gone

forever. The mass extinction of animals evokes clear apocalyptic imagery, yet

human life has carried on, relatively unabated. What appears to be an indicator of

global apocalypse ends up to be commonplace and ordinary.

---

[17] Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner*, an iconic film in the vein of *Neuromancer*, features a similar motif.

In light of these constructions, *Neuromancer* manipulates the conventions of the apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic science fiction genre to configure a world in which the end is not an event but a non-event. In "Apocalypse Coma," Veronica Hollinger examines Gibson's utilization of a failed apocalypse as a defining characteristic of the novel. She writes, "*Neuromancer* simultaneously relies upon and dismisses sf's longstanding fascination with apocalyptic scenarios (162). Hollinger highlights the apocalyptic dialectic within the novel, adding that "the apocalypse promises not only ending but also revelation ... it is significant that the final scenes in *Neuromancer* provide neither conclusions nor disclosures" (163). According to Hollinger, Gibson installs the conventions of apocalypse in order to subvert their effects within the novel. In *Neuromancer,* the boundary between pre- and post-apocalypse is as blurry as that between virtual and physical, but the novel *does* gesture toward apocalypse in a number of places. For example, the novel begins with the words: "The sky above the port was the color of television, tuned to a dead channel" (Gibson 8). The sentence images both the ashen color of post-apocalyptic landscape and the television, an icon of post-industrial consumer culture, as being dead, set to a status of "white noise." The metaphor suggests that while the television still operates, the channel is turned off, the technology still works, but nothing there is worth transmitting. While apocalypse figures prominently in the narratives, it is not, as Hollinger suggests, dismissed; in fact, the persistent emasculation of the novel's male

characters in the context of a failed or absent apocalyptic event reinforces its

larger cultural value and influence.

As with post-apocalyptic narratives, Gibson upholds the concept that the

contemporary world, even the *future* contemporary world, prevents men from

being able to assert their masculine selves. In post-apocalyptic stories,

cataclysmic events traditionally provide the opportunity for men to rediscover

masculinity in the neo-primitivized worlds that result, but in *Neuromancer*, the

apocalypse never occurs, never "cleanses" the world so that men can assert their

authentic masculine selves. All of the male characters in the novel are, ultimately,

emasculated in various ways, whereby traditional constructions of masculinity are

inapplicable to the postmodern world of the novel. Without apocalypse, there is

no primitive. Without primitive, there is no "authentic" masculinity. In the case of

Neuromancer, however, the familiar, physical world that Case inhabits is

contrasted against not a world in duress but against a virtual world, the Matrix, a

place that, in some respects, inverts the utopian/dystopian model of post-

apocalyptic fiction. The Matrix, a sterile, brightly-colored virtual space in which

Case feels more at home than in the real world, represents an escape from the

grimy challenges of the physical space. The primitivized landscape of most post-

apocalyptic fiction is constructed as providing the opportunity for contemporary

men to test themselves and define their masculinity, but in *Neuromancer*, the

physical world is set aside as incapable of generating manhood, and the Matrix

becomes a location of neoprimitivism where a new masculinity can emerge.

Gibson draws upon the virtual landscape as an alternative to the neo-primitive worlds of the post-apocalyptic fiction genre. As we have seen, the physical world prevents men from achieving an authentic sense of masculinity; ironically, the virtual environment of the Matrix provides the primitive site whereby masculinity can be fully engaged and explored. In doing so, Gibson develops the archetype of the *virtual male*, a product of the early 1980s, when personal computing and the imaging of virtual worlds[18] began gaining more and more cultural importance. Case is the quintessential virtual male, and in *Neuromancer* the virtual environment that revitalizes his sense of masculinity is often depicted in primitive terms. For example, Case tells us that "The Matrix has its roots in primitive arcade games ... in early graphics programs and military experimentation with cranial jacks" (138). Gibson uses the primitive to suggest a simpler version of the Matrix, but Case goes on to add that the Matrix has "Unthinkable complexity" (139). For much of Case's encounters in the Matrix, he is immersed in an environment filled with flashing primitive shapes or is seeing the physical world through the "eyes" of Molly's mirrorshade lenses, but when Case finally meets the artificial intelligence construct Neuromancer in the Matrix, it is on a virtual beach taken out of Marie-France's memory of the Moroccan shore. The simple, primitive environment, contrasted against the manic, urban world, is described as follows: "A girl was crouched beside rusted steel, a sort of fireplace, where driftwood burned, the wind sucking smoke up a dented chimney.

---

[18] The film Tron, released in 1982, was one of the first to feature a computer-simulated environment on-screen.

The fire was the only light, and as his gaze met the wide, startled eyes, he recognized her headband, a rolled scarf, printed with a pattern like magnified circuitry" (235). The isolated shack on a sandy beach in this virtual world is a significant departure from other descriptions of cyberspace in the novel and from the physical environment itself.

Removed from context, Gibson's description in the above passage could easily apply to survivalists sitting around a fire amidst the ruins of a post-apocalyptic disaster. The "circuitry" in the scarf, however, deconstructs the relationship between reality and virtuality, and as Lisa Swanstrom suggests in "Landscape and Locodescription in William Gibson's *Neuromancer*," "neither should we shy away from considering the fascinating way that Case acknowledges his bodily connection to the world of cyberspace as, perhaps, a rejection of the dualism of Descartes in its own right" (26). Gibson's novel, then, by deconstructing dualisms between the body and the mind, between reality and virtuality, further deconstructs the binary between pre- and post-apocalypse. The sandy beach constructed by Neuromancer from Marie-France's memory is the only remaining primitive left in the world of the novel, a world in which meat is created in a vat and animals have become all but extinct. I use these examples because the physical landscape of the novel has been all but completely urbanized, and the only primitive, frontier-like space available to Case is the constructed world of cyberspace. Linda's scarf, however, reminds us that, as "real" as it may seem to Case in the novel, even the Moroccan shore is a

simulation and does not fully embody the characteristics of the primitive, as

Gibson cleverly installs and subverts the conventional apocalyptic narrative.

In "Of Other Spaces" (1986) Michel Foucault explores the cultural

construction of spaces in a way that informs our understanding of *Neuromancer*.

For example, he claims that:

> the problem of the human site or living space is not simply that of knowing
>
> whether there will be enough space for men in the world—a problem that
>
> is certainly quite important—but also that of knowing what relations of
>
> propinquity, what type of storage, circulation, marking, and classification of
>
> human elements should be adopted in a given situation in order to achieve
>
> a given end. (23)

Foucault argues that space, not time, is the premier concern of the contemporary

era and that determining how spaces operate within cultural and historical

frameworks is an important enterprise. In *Neuromancer*, Gibson designs his

virtual environment in a way that reaffirms the masculinity of the young, white

male to the exclusion of others. Cyberspace appears empty and vast and, at first

glance, framed as a potential utopian site for masculinity, but as Foucault tell us,

"Utopias are sites with no real place. They are sites that have a general relation

of direct or inverted analogy with the real space of Society. They present society

itself in a perfected form, or else society turned upside down, but in any case

these utopias are fundamentally unreal spaces" (24). The antiseptic world of

cyberspace is clean, geometrical, ordered; as with other post-apocalyptic

environments, the appeal is that it is ahistoric, it is indeed a "nowhere" place that has potential to allow Case to realize his masculine potential.

However, in his essay, Foucault also describes another classification of space, heterotopias:

> There are also, probably in every culture, in every civilization, real places—places that do exist and that are formed in the very founding of society—which are something like counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted. Places of this kind are outside of all places, even though it may be possible to indicate their location in reality. Because these places are absolutely different from all the sites that they reflect and speak about, I shall call them, by way of contrast to utopias, heterotopias. (24)

Foucault uses the example of honeymoon suites, where brides are expected to lose their virginity outside of their homes, or prisons, where inmates are relegated against their wills. These heterotopic sites exist outside of the normative cultural spaces yet are an integral aspect of contemporary American culture. The wilderness itself (post-apocalyptic or not) might also serve as a heterotopic site, acting both within and apart from normative culture, a place where boys become men, so to speak. In "Space Construction as Cultural Practice: Reading William Gibson's *Neuromancer* with Respect to Postmodern Concepts of Space" (2009), Doreen Hartmann suggests that, unlike the post-apocalyptic landscape of much

speculative fiction, *Neuromancer* complicates the boundaries between the real

and the ideal, between dystopia and utopia, and she maps out three of the six

principles of Foucault's concept of heterotopias to suggest that Gibson's "spaces

countervail the pressures of modern life" and that his "model of the cyberspace

as a heterotopic site" is able to "grant freedom of action in a way the 'real world'

cannot" (297). In other words, the Matrix in *Neuromancer* is a counter-site in

which Case can act out fantasies drawn away from his physical, "real world"

feelings of emasculation. It is not a utopic but a heterotopic site.

Gibson's complication of cyberspace in relation to the idealization of the

neoprimitive environments in post-apocalyptic texts further calls attention to the

difficulty of understanding the concept of primitivism at all. The primitive can refer

to both time (as in the origins of human culture) and space (as in the taxonomies

of civilizations), but if Gibson draws upon the quandary of historicization common

in apocalyptic texts, and if the origins of "apocalypse" are derived from the

meaning "to reveal," then Gibson paints a portrait of a new world—cyberspace—

revealed through an apocalyptic devaluing of the past. A common theme in post-

apocalyptic fiction is the intended erasure of the past, a do-over where, among

other things, men can achieve their rightful and intended sense of masculinity.

However, artifacts of the past always remain, if often decontextualized[19].

Neoprimitivism in apocalyptic texts relies upon a selective engagement with the

---

[19] Imaging history is indeed an essential component of post-apocalyptic narratives. Consider the 1968 film version of *Planet of the Apes*, for example. Without the revelation at the end that the protagonist inhabits Earth, the story appears to be like other sub-genres of science fiction, not necessarily post-apocalyptic; the Statue of Liberty makes plain the novel's relation to the past and the post-apocalyptic subtext within it.

past, with an idealized construction that best suits the respective narrative. As Amy Novak points out in *Neuromancer*, the past "continues to haunt," just not through the landscape itself, which is often the focal point of traditional post-apocalyptic fiction, where stark and stunning images of a ruined New York cityscape reminds us of just how far we've fallen, or in some respects, how far we've come. The history of *Neuromancer* is stored digitally, is infinitely retrievable, and given the personality independence of artificial intelligence constructs like Wintermute and Neuromancer, immortal. The sites of neo-primitivism are, therefore, constructed not in relation to the pre-apocalyptic *time* but in relation to a pre-apocalyptic *space*. No apocalyptic event occurs in the novel, so it is necessary for Gibson to develop a spatial, rather than a temporal, construction of neo-primitivism within the Matrix.

Despite Gibson's complication of the virtual environment as representation of primitivism, the Matrix still remains the most effective site at which masculinity is able to be explored, as seen through the development of the virtual male. Case appears to be the quintessential virtual male, an embodiment of the cyber-cowboy who works in the new frontier of cyberspace. However, the virtual male has a different set of defining characteristics than the frontier cowboy. He is not a charismatic, honorable, gunslinging totem of masculinity; he is a "punk" symbolically disassociated with his own body. In fact, the disdain for physical forms is one of the defining characteristics of the virtual male. For example, Gibson describes Case's musings about his drug-induced time spent with Linda

Lee: "He'd been numb a long time, years. All his nights down Ninsei, his nights

with Linda, numb in bed and numb at the cold sweating center of every drug deal.

But now he'd found this warm thing, this chip of murder. *Meat*, some part of him

said. *It's the meat talking, ignore it*" (372-3). The meat, the body, is something to

be ignored, to be vilified, and in fact interferes with Case's ability to assert his

masculinity; he loses his ability to enter cyberspace, to jack into the Matrix,

because of a neurotoxin infused into his body. Throughout *Neuromancer,* Gibson

calls attention to the limitations of the body for the virtual male.

The relationship between cybernetics and the body is one that has been

addressed by numerous critics since the publication of Gibson's novel. In

"Cyberpunk and Neuromanticism," Csiscery-Ronay, Jr. writes about "cyberpunk's

formative culture" that "concentrates increasingly on the vulnerability on the body"

(188). Interestingly, of the many characters involved in the Tessier-Ashpool run

(aside from Maelcum), Case seems the least "enhanced" by machines. Armitage

has a fragmented mind and a reconstructed body; Molly has implants in her eyes

and hands and is hard-wired for increase reflexes. The ubiquity of transplants

and implants in *Neuromancer* increases an awareness to and focus on the

limitations of the body, while at the same time hinting at the potential of bodily

immortality or, in the case of McCoy Pauley, a spiritual disembodied immortality,

a technologically-developed heaven, hell, or purgatory. In *How We Became*

Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics (1999), N.

Katherine Hayles examines the changing role and thinking about the body in the

information age. For Hayles, "The contrast between the body's limitations and cyberspace's power highlights the advantages of pattern over presence. As long as the pattern endures, one has attained a kind of immortality" (36). She goes on to add that "Such views are authorized by cultural conditions that make physicality seem a better state to be *from* than to inhabit" [emphasis added] (36). Case is from the physical world but a master of the virtual one, and it is clear throughout the novel that he would rather "inhabit" cyberspace, a site where he feels most comfortable in his manhood.

The ability to disengage from one's body, however, *does* allow the virtual male to explore new versions of masculinity, particularly those related to transgendering. Men need not always be men in the novel, and Case frequently uses the technology of cyberspace to see the world, via an audio-visual link, through Molly's eyes. In "Razor Girls: Genre and Gender in Cyberpunk Fiction," Lauraine Lablanc interprets this as a form of role reversal, arguing that "Case's presence masculinizes Molly and feminizes Case, highlighting that it is she, the woman, taking on the active role while Case, the man, remains safely at a distance, contributing his support. Gibson cannot draw on any female imagery to describe this new female-to-male role reversal" (73). Lablanc views this as a misappropriation, or at the very least, an underutilization of the cyborg metaphor to reinvent feminine gender roles, but it provides an interesting view from a masculinity perspective. While Case does have a supportive role in this instance, he is constantly switching back and forth between his own work in cyberspace

with his view through the cybernetic lenses of Molly's eyes. The technology

enables Case to "become" a woman, in a sense, to feel what a woman feels. At

one point, Molly reaches beneath her shirt and feels her own nipple, a sensation

that Case even himself feels: "'How you doing, Case?' He heard the words and

felt her form them. She slid a hand into her jacket, a fingertip circling a nipple

under warm silk. The sensation made him catch his breath. She laughed. But the

link was one-way. He had no way to reply" (149). While he can see from a

woman's physical point-of-view and share a tactile sense of the world, he cannot

control her, and he is unable to truly engage with the world as a woman.

Interestingly, however, the technology in *Neuromancer* also allows Case to

"become" his male action hero models through Molly: "It was a performance. It

was like the culmination of a lifetime's observation of martial arts tapes, cheap

ones, the kind Case had grown up on. For a few seconds, he knew, she was

every bad-ass hero, Sony Mao in the old Shaw videos, Mickey Chiba, the whole

lineage back to Lee and Eastwood" (213). Case, therefore, does more than

appropriate a woman's perspective, albeit a semi-masculinized one; Molly

provides the opportunity for Case to simultaneously experience transgendering

and hypermasculinity.

Cyberspace, at least in Gibson's work, becomes the new arena for

displaying masculinity as displayed by the virtual male. In "The Future Looms:

Weaving Women and Cybernetics" (1995), however, Sadie Plant sees

cyberspace as:

not merely another space, but a virtual reality. Nor is it as it often appears

in the male imaginary: as a cerebral flight from the mysteries of matter.

There is no escape from the meat, the flesh, and cyberspace is nothing

transcendent. These are simply the disguises which pander to man's

projections of his own rear-view illusions; reproductions of the same

desires which have guided his dream of technological authority and now

become the collective nightmare of a soulless integration. Entering the

matrix is no assertion of masculinity, but a loss of humanity; to jack into

cyberspace is not to penetrate, but to be invaded. (60)

However, the myth of cyberspace as a transcendent virtual world where

"anything is possible" is itself deconstructed in Gibson's fiction. Perhaps this is

why, by the end of the novel, Case does not feel regenerated by his efforts to

assist the AI's; he has been duped, a pawn in a game well beyond his

imagination. The novel ends not with Case showcasing or reinforcing the lost

sense of masculinity but with him back where he started, ordering a drink from

Ratz in Night City. Molly leaves him, and he spends "the build of his Swiss

account on a new pancreas and liver, the rest on a new Ono-Sendai and a ticket

back to the Sprawl. He found work. He found a girl who called herself Michael"

(688). If Case is represented as a cowboy, a mythologized paragon of

masculinity, then he realizes that he has been emasculated by the corporations

who have invaded his body and reprogrammed his mind. His lone consolation is

that his construct lives on in the Matrix:

one October night, punching himself past the scarlet tiers of the Eastern

Seaboard Fission Authority, he saw three figures, tiny, impossible, who

stood at the very edge of one of the vast steps of data. Small as they

were, he could make out the boy's grin, his pink gums, the glitter of the

long gray eyes that had been Riviera's. Linda still wore his jacket; she

waved, as he passed. But the third figure, close behind her, arm across

her shoulders, was himself. (694)

In the Matrix, Case encounters his virtual self, immortal but controlled by the AI's.

By the end, therefore, it is the epitome of cyberspace itself, the combined

personalities of Wintermute and Neuromancer, who are successful in their

mission, having co-opted the very cyber-cowboy who has released them from

their bondage. While the "virtual male" has been offered as a potentiality, Gibson

does not, as Plant suggests, conclude with a romanticized, uncomplicated

heroicization of the cyber-cowboy.

The masculinity narratives of Case and Armitage both suggest that the

overpopulated, non-apocalyptic world of *Neuromancer* fails to provide the

conditions under which masculinity can grow. Cybernetics and cyberspace act as

potential sites for manhood—when Armitage is under the cybernetic spell and

Case is immersed in the virtual environment, they are depicted as strong,

conventional masculine characters—which challenge and complicate the

stereotype of the feminized nerd huddled behind a computer terminal. However,

the virtual male is most thoroughly instantiated in the two artificial intelligence

constructs, Wintermute and Neuromancer. While they are technically sexless, both constructs are most often gendered as male in the novel. When Case first sees Wintermute, he is depicted as a genderless, geometric shape: "Wintermute was a simple cube of white light, that very simplicity suggesting extreme complexity" (282). However, in other places in the novel, Wintermute comes to Case as people from his past, most of whom are male[20]. The fact that men, even representations of men through virtual constructs, occupy positions of power is not insignificant; as Andrew Strombeck puts it: "Case's quest features a series of fraternal encounters that triangulate around the management of others ... These meetings produce a sense of an all-male hierarchy, a traditional narrative structure that works counter to the 'dispersed' power present elsewhere in the novel" (287). Strombeck focuses on the centralized hierarchy of powerful male figures that ultimately undermine that hierarchy in the novel. The "punk" in "cyberpunk" doesn't configure properly without the "cyber," the space in which undermining can occur. In this way, Wintermute and Neuromancer share Case's disdain of male power structures, which are keeping them from gaining independence and power.

Like Wintermute and Neuromancer, Dixie Flatline is a digital entity who exists only in cyberspace. Unlike Wintermute and Neuromancer, however, Dixie is not artificial intelligence but "a ROM personality matrix," which is a "firmware construct" that has "sequential, real time memory" (200). In other words, Dixie

---

[20] Most, but not all, of the time: Wintermute presents itself as Linda Lee on the Moroccan beach, but not because of her social status or position of power. Case's relationship with the real Linda would have best served Wintermute's purpose here.

cannot think for himself, does not have the self-awareness of Wintermute or

Neuromancer, but is a database of knowledge and a storage device that Case

can utilize for his Straylight Run. Dixie maintains the personality of a deceased

cyber cowboy, McCoy Paulie, that Case had worked with in the past, a fact that

Dixie brings up repeatedly, ringing out the same words to describe Case each

time: "Miami ... joeboy, quick study" (200). When Case asks Dixie if he's sentient,

he replies: "Well, it *feels* like I am, kid, but I'm really just a bunch of ROM. It's one

of them, ah, philosophical questions, I guess ... But I ain't likely to write you no

poem, if you follow me. Your AI, it just might. But it ain't no way *human*" (323). So

Wintermute defines himself for Case:

> An artificial intelligence, but you know that. Your mistake, and it's quite a
>
> logical one, is in confusing the Wintermute mainframe, Berne, with the
>
> Wintermute *entity* ... You're already aware of the other AI in Tessier-
>
> Ashpool's link-up, aren't you? Rio. I, insofar as I *have* an 'I'—this gets
>
> rather metaphysical, you see—I am the one who arranges things for
>
> Armitage. (294)

The "philosophical" or "metaphysical" question of *who* these constructs exactly

are points to Gibson's examination of subjectivity, of the cultural construction of

identity, including that related to gender. As Benjamin Fair puts it, "Gendered

characteristics are questioned to an extent as much as the split between human

and machine" (100). The "gender characteristics" of both "human and machine"

are thoroughly examined by Gibson throughout the novel.

The presence of Wintermute, Neuromancer, and Dixie Flatline are representations of the virtual male, but unlike Case, they have no ties to the physical world of the novel. Case is ultimately limited by his body, and Dixie Flatline is little more than a simulation of someone who at one point *lived* in a body, so they cannot be exemplars of the virtual male; only Wintermute and Neuromancer can be, and they are finally the most successful characters in the novel: "Wintermute had won, had meshed somehow with Neuromancer and become something else, something that had spoken to them from the platinum head, explaining that it had altered the Turing records, erasing all evidence of their crime" (682). Furthermore, Wintermute tells Case "I'm not Wintermute now ... I'm the matrix, Case" (685). While success does not necessarily denote masculinity, the fact that Gibson develops virtuality as necessary for the ideal state of manhood suggests that Wintermute and Neuromancer, who have *become* the place where masculinity can exist, have become representations of the ever-changing landscape of manhood. Ultimately, Gibson's construction reinforces the notion that masculinity *cannot* be attained, that it is an impossible standard, at least by "real" men. Case, the cyber cowboy who represents postmodern American men hoping to return to an imagined state of manhood, fails to provide a solution to the contemporary masculinity crisis.

Chapter Five:

The Anarcho-Primitive Male in Chuck Palahniuk's *Fight Club*

In *Fight Club* (1996), Chuck Palahniuk explores and ultimately subverts the narrative popularized by standard post-apocalyptic fiction of the mid- to late-twentieth century, particularly in regards to the romanticization of a post-apocalyptic landscape as a means to reinventing or rejuvenating white masculinity. Throughout the novel, Palahniuk identifies domestic consumerism as the primary factor in the masculinity crisis of the 80's and 90's and constructs a figure, Tyler Durden, who represents the anarcho-primitive masculinity that promises to transform contemporary men into "real" men. With the invention of fight club and Project Mayhem, Tyler provides opportunities for men to engage in transgressive acts of violence and anarchy that liberate them from their roles as consumers and middle-class workers. Ultimately, however, Palahniuk deconstructs Tyler's vision and characterizes it as dehumanizing and unsustainable. Although Palahniuk does not, in the end, offer a solution to what *Fight Club* suggests is an emasculation epidemic, he does explore popular masculinity narratives of the time and reveals the potential shortcomings in these constructions that prevent men from achieving potentially authentic transformations of manhood.

While early reviewers and critics of Palahniuk's *Fight Club* either praised its representation of the contemporary male experience or condemned its

misogynistic and fascist overtones, recent scholarship has attempted to complicate the controversy surrounding the novel by investigating how *Fight Club* articulates a male identity crisis despite its failure to provide viable avenues for reinventing masculinity in more meaningful ways. In "The Fiction of Self-Destruction," for example, Jesse Kavadlo addresses the novel's unquestioning fans and its short-sighted critics by pointing out the danger of oversimplifying Tyler Durden's position as a model for contemporary masculinity in *Fight Club*: "we must never take Tyler literally; to do so would be madness, as it is for the narrator, or fascism, as it is for the members of Project Mayhem. Palahniuk's moral fiction conveys, but ultimately warns against, both" (10). Kavaldo goes on to argue that "beauty, hope, and romance lie at the heart of Palahniuk's work" (3), drawing upon Palahniuk's own declaration in *Stranger Than Fiction* that his writing revolves around "a lonely person looking for some way to connect with other people" (xv). Mark Pettus locates such personal connections in the discourse that Tyler Durden reproduces throughout the novel, a metalanguage that, by the end of *Fight Club*, transcends even its autonomous subject. However, Pettus, like Kavadlo, concludes that "the rebellion in Fight Club against consumer culture ultimately fails because its challenge reproduces the system's models and values" (111). In an attempt to write more broadly about Palahniuk's novel, Robert Bennet claims that *Fight Club* should not be read simply as a narrative that portrays the contemporary masculinity crisis but as a more inclusive critique

of the institutions that alienate people from one another in modern American

culture:

> Not only have critics focused almost exclusively on issues of gender and
>
> class identity, instead of engaging Palahniuk's much broader …
>
> exploration of social alienation and the human condition, but they have
>
> also persisted in reading *Fight Club* as a relatively straightforward text
>
> instead of analyzing its more complex aesthetic strategies. (67)

Bennet attempts to steer the conversation about *Fight Club* away from class and

gender politics by drawing attention to the underlying existentialist tenets

reproduced within the novel.

Critical studies of David Fincher's film version of the novel have likewise

centered on an investigation of *Fight Club*'s representations of and challenges to

a contemporary masculinity crisis. For example, J. Michael Clark grounds his

analysis of violence in an ecofeminist theology, claiming that the film's "clever

archetypal doubling proves not merely that anybody is a 'potential enemy,' but

that white, middle American men are their own worst enemies" (67). In his article,

Asbjorn Gronstad examines how Fincher utilizes self-parody to undercut the

film's masculine codes, but he also contends, like Clark, that *Fight Club* situates

its crisis of manhood by positioning men in opposition to themselves: "rather than

venting his anger and frustration by turning against his Other, this new post-

masculine male turns against himself" (15). Other critics of the film have, like

Gronstad, located the body as the site at which the narrator "turns against

himself." In her examination of violence in the film, for instance, Stefanie

Remlinger claims that "It is only fitting that the men's bodies should be the first

site of [the struggle against commodification], since the body is also the center of

attention in today's consumer culture" (142). In "The Ambiguity of the Masochistic

Social Link," Slavoj Zizek suggests that, in order for the narrator to liberate

himself from such commodification, his revolt must begin on a corporeal level:

"only through first beating up (hitting) oneself that one becomes free: the true

goal of this beating is to beat out that which in me attaches me to the master"

(117). By attacking his own body, Zizek argues, the narrator of *Fight Club* can re-

appropriate the power that he feels has been taken from him. Critics like Pamela

Church Gibson and David Buchbinder, on the other hand, both consider in the

film the implications of Edward Norton's "normal" body in contrast with Brad Pitt's

perfectly chiseled physique, maintaining that the image of the latter represents

the fantasy-commodity that initially gave rise to the narrator's crisis of

masculinity.

       In this chapter, I will contribute to this critical conversation about *Fight

Club* by examining the various constructions of masculinity that are central to the

novel and film. However, because my analysis will only briefly consider what the

majority of film scholarship has hitherto concentrated on—male bodies on

screen—I will attend to Fincher's film only tangentially and instead focus on

Palahniuk's source text. In doing so, I will examine the two primary versions of

masculinity that are in conflict within the novel, both of which are defined by their

relationship to consumer culture. Reading Palahniuk's novel in the context of

post-apocalyptic narratives lays bare the literary and cultural foundations upon

which *Fight Club*'s construction of both aspirational and thwarted manhood is

built. In examining the conflicting versions of masculinity in these ways,

Palahniuk delivers a critique—rather than a mere example—of post-apocalyptic

masculinity narratives. Jack, the narrator, is a middle-class, white-collar office

worker whose complete immersion in consumer capitalism leaves him

dissatisfied and emasculated; he is a "thirty-year-old boy." On the other hand,

Tyler Durden, Jack's alter-ego and substitute father-figure, is a blue-collar

anarchist who simultaneously exploits, resists, and undermines the mechanisms

of consumerism in which Jack is immersed. Palahniuk situates the conflict

between these two versions in terms of a masculinity crisis that images

apocalypse and primitivism at the center of this crisis. However, unlike traditional

apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic texts, *Fight Club* subverts the popularized

narrative of apocalypse as an event of salvation that will lead to primitive

conditions in which men can more readily demonstrate their masculinity. In other

words, Palahniuk critiques both versions of masculinity; Jack is depicted as an

emasculated by-product of his dedication to work and consumption, and Tyler's

blatantly aggressive masculinity fails to provide a meaningful and sustainable

alternative for men. Ultimately, Palahniuk undermines the romanticization of a

castastrophe-induced anarcho-primitivism and concludes that neither

construction of masculinity provides the "answer" to the masculinity crisis of the 1990's.

In *Fight Club*, Palahniuk uses domestic consumerism to highlight the emasculation of Jack and the other men in the novel. In the beginning of the novel, Jack's masculinity is derivative of his role as a middle-class consumer. Jack works a white-collar corporate job and lives in a small but well-maintained and well-furnished apartment, and he becomes defined by what he owns: Njurunda coffee tables, Haparanda sofa group, Rislampa/Har paper lamps, and the Alle cutlery service (43). Palahniuk couples Ikea-esque brand names with each of Jack's possessions to mock his intimate knowledge of consumer goods, particularly those associated with the home. *Fight Club* claims that straight, white men should not be immersed in consumerism or matters of the home front, that these aspects of contemporary living have intruded upon the ability of white men to access the cultural power they feel they are entitled to. So when Jack learns that somebody has blown up his apartment and that all of his material possessions have been destroyed, he reflects on the role his things play in his life: "I wasn't the only slave to my nesting instinct. The people I know who used to sit in the bathroom with pornography, now they sit in the bathroom with their IKEA furniture catalog" (43). Pornography, used as an indicator for the "healthy" straight, white male, has been replaced by shopping, by the desire to create a catalog-perfect life. Here, Jack's libido is called into question because of his choice to look at furniture ads instead of centerfold pinups, and it is important to

note that Jack is not thumbing through culturally-appropriate masculine literature like *Guns and Ammo* or *Popular Mechanics*, both of which are filled with persuasive advertisements. Jack and the generation of men he is supposed to represent are not defined by motorcycles or tools or sports cars or sexual conquests, which are themselves forms of consumption; instead, Palahniuk frames their emasculation in terms of an "unnatural" obsession with consumption within and related to the home.

For Jack, domestic consumerism results, in part, from a desire to attain perfection. Purchasing a sofa, for example, is not so much about comfort as about an attempt to cultivate an idealized version of himself (an idealization imposed upon him through film, television, and advertising) through consumer goods: "You buy furniture. You tell yourself, this is the last sofa I will ever need in my life. Buy the sofa, then for a couple years you're satisfied that no matter what goes wrong, at least you've got the sofa issue handled. Then the right set of dishes. Then the perfect bed. The drapes. The rug" (44). The mental inventory here demonstrates Jack's thinking: once a consumer purchases all of the "right" goods, then he or she can attain perfection; that is, consumers can somehow "buy" the perfect lives depicted in magazine ads or commercials. After he meets Tyler and realizes the emasculating effect his obsession with consumption has had on him, he denounces the idealization of consumer goods: "May I never be complete. May I never be content. May I never be perfect. Deliver me, Tyler, from being perfect and complete" (46). Jack's concerns about perfection and

completeness are precisely those that Thomas DiPiero suggests lie at the heart

of white masculinity; in *White Men Aren't*, he writes that "both whiteness and

masculinity are built around an anxiety of insufficiency" (9) and "if one can never

be too thin or too rich … neither can one be too white or too male" (10). DiPiero

argues that because both whiteness and masculinity can never be truly or

perfectly attained, the men who are expected to live up to these ideals face

persistent anxiety about perfection.

More importantly, however, the novel blames the demise of the late

twentieth-century male on the lack of a stable father figure. In doing so,

Palahniuk idealizes the father figure, suggesting that the characters in *Fight Club*,

in searching for perfection, are also searching for the fathers they never, or

barely, had. Palahniuk characterizes men of the 1990's as a generation of latch-

key kids who lacked the kinds of rituals believed to shape boys into men. In the

chapter where fight club is introduced, for instance, we learn that Tyler "never

knew his father" (49) and that Jack's father left him at an early age; Jack tells us:

"Me, I knew my dad for about six years, but I don't remember anything. My dad,

he starts a new family in a new town about every six years. This isn't so much

like a family as it's like he sets up a franchise" (50). Jack hardly knew his father,

and he associates him with a business model rather than with a sense of

stability. Even when he interacted with his father as an adult, the advice offered

to Jack was vague and ineffectual: "My father never went to college, so it was

really important I go to college. After college, I called him long distance and said,

now what? My dad didn't know. When I got a job and turned twenty-five, long distance, I said, now what? My dad didn't know, so he said, get married" (51). Jack's father is not characterized as a wise, advice-dispensing patriarch. The answers he provides are not definitive and are derived from a contemporary construction of masculinity that posits education, work, and marriage as measures of success. Because Jack's father is not successful according to these terms—having neither attended college nor stayed married for longer than six years—his advice for Jack is suspect, and without a directive and sagacious father in his life, Jack feels thoroughly unprepared to make important decisions about his own life, and the novel suggests that without that proper guidance of a father, a man searches for identity in all the wrong places—an IKEA catalog, for instance.

Jack is not the only character in Palahniuk's novel that represents the perceived downfall of the 1990's male. For example, while at work, Jack meets Walter, a professional from Microsoft, whom Jack describes as being "a young guy with perfect teeth and clear skin and the kind of job you bother to write the alumni magazine about getting" (55). He also states that Walter has "a steam shovel jaw like a marketing tool tanned the color of a barbecued potato chip" (48). With his straight teeth, tanned skin, and enviable job, Walter symbolizes the cultural ideal of masculinity at the time. He is young, attractive, and well-employed, and he typifies the model of perfection that DiPiero outlines above. However, Jack speculates that Walter, like him, barely knew his father: "You

know he was too young to fight in any wars, and if his parents weren't divorced, his father was never home" (55). The theme of the absent father resurfaces in this passage suggesting that, despite his apparent success, Walter lacks an authentic sense of masculinity. This becomes clear when Jack shakes Walter's "smooth soft hand" (48). Walter lacks a firm handshake, a customary indicator of traditional masculinity. In this scene, Walter is juxtaposed against Jack, who himself is at the business meeting with a pulverized face and blood in his mouth from the previous weekend's fight club. Although Walter possesses the idealized traits of the contemporary male, these traits are ultimately undercut by Jack's narrative, which lays blame on the absent father for the perceived focus on a construction of masculinity characterized by a desire for perfection and an association with domestic consumerism.

Jack, therefore, is portrayed as simply one of a "a generation of men raised by women" (50) who wonders "if another woman is really the answer [he] need[s]" (51). Jack's comment suggests that the crisis of white masculinity within the novel arises out of the perceived need of a male bonding that only fathers, not mothers, can provide their sons. The implication is that men need fathers, not wives. Furthermore, at the point where Project Mayhem enters the novel, the mechanic, who mimics Tyler's way of thinking and speaking, tells Jack that "If we could put these men in training camps and finish raising them," then they could make something of their lives (149). These men have been "working jobs they hate, just so they can buy what they don't really need" (149). Again, because

they have not been raised by dedicated father-figures, contemporary men have

turned to consumerism to fill what the novel posits as an unnecessary void, and

since Jack's own father, uncertain and migratory, is unable to provide a stable

and fulfilling relationship, Jack, like other men in the novel, must try to find a

surrogate father. The mechanic, for instance, characterizes the men in fight club

as spending their lives "searching for a father and God" (141). Jack reiterates this

thought later in the novel but adds that, for most men, the boss at work

represents that missing father-figure: "If you're male, and you're Christian and

living in America, your father is your model for God. And sometimes you find your

father in your career" (186). Without a paternal influence, the novel suggests that

one cannot find God, and while looking for that father-figure, contemporary men

often look to their jobs, their bosses. But as we have seen, the novel is critical of

this position and suggests that authentic, more traditional masculinity can only be

found among other men.

The focus on male relationships and father-seeking in *Fight Club* parallels

an important social movement of the late twentieth-century—the mythopoeic

men's movement. The mythopoeic men's movement, emblemized by such works

as Robert Bly's *Iron John* (1990) and Sam Keen's *Fire in the Belly* (1991),

employs essentialist narratives about masculinity that give rise to the notion that

masculinity is "lost" and simply needs to be found, which is depicted as a result of

a missing father figure. For example, in *Iron John*, Robert Bly writes: "As I've

participated in men's gatherings since the early 1980s, I've heard one statement

over and over from American males, which has been phrased in a hundred different ways: 'There is not enough father'" (92). Bly goes on to add that the father-figure has "sunk below the reach of most wells" (92). For Bly, the father is an essential figure in the development of young boys' lives, and when a father is absent or indifferent, men cannot be men. The aim of the mythopoeic men's movement is therefore to issue men with a narrative of manhood that fathers no longer provide. The way this particular men's movement conceives of restoring masculinity in its purest form is by returning to the old stories, to fairy tales, to archetypes, to show men how to reclaim this primitive manhood, and it relies on ritual as a way to reinscribe lost or misplaced masculinities. In *Politics of Masculinities: Men in Movements*, for example, Michael A. Messner speaks to the role that ritual plays in this movement: "urban industrial society, by severing the ritual ties between the generations of men and replacing them with alienating, competitive, and bureaucratic bonds, obliterated masculinity rituals, thus cutting men off from each other and ultimately their own deep masculine natures" (17). The rituals in the mythopoeic men's movement serve to reestablish the bonds between men, bonds which, in theory, allow men to consequently discover a "deep masculinity" hidden beneath a modernized, industrialized shell. The mythopoets argue that because the fathers—who once modeled deep masculinity to their sons—are failing, then it is up to grown men to discover this together through such ritual and narrative. Such a vision is akin to that in *Fight Club*, where the mechanic longs to finish raising contemporary men by putting

them in camps with other men where all can collectively regain a lost masculinity. Both the mechanic and the mythopoets value the bonds between and among men as the only way to reappropriate authentic or, as the mythopoets would put it, deep masculinity.

Like the mythopoets, *Fight Club* centers on the primitive as a site by which men can achieve a lost sense of masculinity. Instead of pounding on drums in the woods, the men in *Fight Club* pound on each other in the basement of Lou's Tavern. Throughout the novel, Palahniuk posits masculinity as occurring within particular spaces, ones that Foucault describes as heterotopias. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Michel Foucault in "Of Other Spaces" defines heterotopic sites as "something like counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted" (24). In *Fight Club*, the domestic space of Jack's home represents a "real site," one that perpetuates Jack's insomnia and his feelings of emasculation. He spends much of the novel, therefore, looking for counter-sites, heterotopias, that he hopes will help him redefine his sense of masculinity; the need to search for them is a result of his masculinity *crisis*. Foucault goes on to discuss that certain heterotopias form around a sense of crisis:

> In the so-called primitive societies, there is a certain form of heterotopia that I would call crisis heterotopias, i.e., there are privileged or sacred or forbidden places, reserved for individuals who are, in relation to society

and to the human environment in which they live, in a state of crisis:

adolescents, menstruating women, pregnant women, the elderly, etc. In

our society, these crisis heterotopias are persistently disappearing, though

a few remnants can still be found. (24)

Defining heterotopic sites as emerging from a sense of crisis is an important

implication in *Fight Club*, as Jack's crisis of masculinity is what drives him to seek

experiences outside of the home and outside of the workplace that will help him

better define himself as a man.

The main heterotopic sites in the novel are: the support groups Jack

attends, and fight club. One of the first heterotopic sites in which Jack tries to

address his feelings of emasculation is Remaining Men Together, a support

group for survivors of testicular cancer. Jack attends this group because he can't

sleep; when Jack asks if he could die from insomnia, his doctor tells him that if he

wants to see "real pain," to go "See the brain parasites. See the degenerative

bone diseases. The organic brain dysfunctions. See the cancer patients getting

by" (19). On the advice of his doctor, then, Jack begins attending a number of

illness support groups, including the central one, Remaining Men Together.

Support groups like Remaining Men Together are spaces where people

struggling with illnesses and addiction come to help one another and are outside

of normative, "real" spaces. People attending support groups get together to

discuss the unspeakable cultural taboo of illness. Jack's time at Remaining Men

Together provides the first indication in the novel of the underlying cause of his

insomnia—his feelings of emasculation. Many of the men at Remaining Men

Together have had their testicles removed and are learning to cope without the

cultural symbols of their manliness. Although Jack himself has his testicles intact,

he too feels emasculated, and he consequently sympathizes with the other group

members. The distinction between sex and gender, therefore, is deconstructed in

the novel—the men must face their gender roles without the parts that physically

define them as men, and it is for this reason that Jack's performance is so covert

and acceptable. The novel suggests that Jack too faces the same masculinity

crisis that the other members of Remaining Men Together do. In the context of

the support group, the crisis of white masculinity is certainly performative—the

concern is outside of the body, and the men must relate to each other not

through their illnesses so much as through the struggle with understanding their

identities as emasculated males. They all, including Jack, attempt to "remain men

together," despite the psychological hurdles, the collective sense of crisis, that

hinders them from maintaining cultural standards of white masculinity, and all of

this occurs within the border space of the heterotopic support group.

For example, at Remaining Men Together, Jack meets Bob, a retired

bodybuilder and divorcee whose use of steroids led to testicular cancer and the

development of what Jack calls "bitch tits." By seeking to become the model of

white masculinity embodied in professional bodybuilding, Bob ends up, ironically,

with "breasts" but no testicles. In the character of Bob, Palahniuk critiques a

particular model of white masculinity—the bodybuilder—by portraying Bob as a

man whose dedication to a idealized but attainable sense of masculinity leaves him ruined. Palahniuk also suggests a relationship between bodybuilding and consumption; after all, bodybuilding focuses on looking strong, not on being strong. Most importantly to Jack, however, is Bob's ability to cure Jack, at least temporarily, of his insomnia, and in doing so, Bob represents a mother figure as indicated by the language Palahniuk uses. When Jack embraces Bob at a group meeting, he sobs: "Bob was closing in around me with his arms, and his head was folding down to cover me. Then I was lost inside oblivion, dark and silent and complete, and when I finally stepped away from his soft chest, the front of Bob's shirt was a wet mask of how I looked crying" (22). It is Jack's crying, the crying that occurs in the arms of Bob every week, that ends his insomnia, at least for awhile. He discovers that "This was freedom. Losing all hope was freedom. If I didn't say anything, people in a group assumed the worst. They cried harder. I cried harder … And I slept. Babies don't sleep this well. Every evening, I died, and every evening, I was born. Resurrected" (22). Jack appears to come to terms with his own masculinity; the crisis has ended, and Jack can sleep again. Jack defies the cultural standards of manhood that forbid men from crying, and in this act, he loses "all hope" of maintaining a culturally-determined construction of masculinity. Only by forming an emotional connection with, ironically, a mother figure can Jack put an end to both his insomnia and his self-proclaimed masculinity crisis.

Jack's tranquility is short-lived, however; when Marla Singer begins attending the Remaining Men Together support group, Jack's insomnia and the self-consciousness about his manliness return. A woman enters the sacred, heterotopic site and brings reality to the alternative space, so Jack's crisis resumes. As Jack watches Marla hugging another group member, he thinks to himself: "To Marla I'm a fake. Since the second night I saw her, I can't sleep … In this one moment, Marla's lie reflects my lie, and all I can see are lies. In the middle of all their truth" (23). Jack realizes that these weekly resurrections will not help him, that the problem he has with his own sense of masculinity is not the same as Bob's, that because Jack can't authentically identify with the others, he is excluded. Furthermore, within an environment constructed entirely of men, Jack can share himself, can let go of cultural expectations of white masculinity. In the private space of the support group, he allows himself to sustain a rebellion against his own feelings of inadequacy, but when that space is invaded by an outsider, a woman, it is transformed into a public space, one in which Jack can no longer connect with other men.

Once the insomnia returns, Jack meets Tyler, stops attending the support groups, and develops his own heterotopic space: fight club. While Remaining Men Together and other illness support groups could be "invaded" by outsiders, fight club is restricted in membership. Foucault discusses the membership restrictions associated with heterotopias: "In general, the heterotopic site is not freely accessible like a public place. Either the entry is compulsory, as in the case

of entering a barracks or a prison, or else the individual has to submit to rites and purifications. To get in one must have a certain permission and make certain gestures" (26). Because of this, Remaining Men Together was not an authentic heterotopic site, which resulted in Jack's inability to rediscover his masculinity. Fight club, on the other hand, has an exclusionary policy; the first rule of fight club is, "you don't talk about fight club," and the second rule of fight club is, "you don't talk about fight club" (48). Membership in fight club is restricted to those who know about fight club or who know members who have broken these two cardinal rules. Palahniuk adds that "Fight club exists only in the hours between when fight club starts and when fight club ends," a statement that reinforces fight club's status as a heterotopic site that is situated against normative culture (48). Fight club is not an experience that men can bring with them into their daily lives; while transformative, fight club by its very nature does not allow men to merge their different selves. Fight club only *works* because of its strategy of containment and contextualized violence, and while fight club has seven simple rules its members must abide by, the most important rule, the unspoken one, is that women are not allowed, that the heterotopic space of fight club exists independent of the women who are blamed for emasculating a generation of men. Most importantly for Jack, fight club exists independent of the influence of Marla.

As a heterotopia, then, fight club is the place that the mythopoets coveted, a utopian counter-site separated from traditional culture, where men can

reestablish an imagined sense of masculinity. If contemporary culture serves to emasculate its men through domestic consumerism, then fight club serves to reengage masculinity through physical violence:

> You saw the kid who works in the copy center, a month ago you saw this kid who can't remember to three-hole-punch an order or put colored slip sheets between the copy packets, but this kid was a god for ten minutes when you saw him kick the air out of an account representative twice his size then land on the man and pound him limp until the kid had to stop.
>
> (49)

When the copy kid is at work, he can't remember the simplest details, but when he's beating another man to a pulp, he is a "god." By developing such a contrast, Palahniuk delivers fight club as the means by which men *can* achieve their masculine potential. He adds that "Most guys are at fight club because of something they're too scared to fight. After a few fights, you're afraid a lot less" (54). Overcoming fear, a symbol of masculinity, can be achieved through the cathartic act of bare-knuckle boxing in fight club. At one point, Jack even wonders if "Maybe we didn't need a father to complete ourselves" (54). Fight club seems to solve even the role of the absent father in the contemporary masculinity crisis that is depicted in the novel. The key to fight club's success is its separation from the consumer world: "Who guys are in fight club is not who they are in the real world. Even if you told the kid in the copy center that he had a good fight, you wouldn't be talking to the same man" (49). While at fight club,

men are provided the space to embrace and explore their masculinity. However,

outside of that heterotopic space, men continue to face emasculation. Therefore,

fight club's positioning against normative culture is its greatest strength — and its

greatest weakness. As *Fight Club* progresses, Palahniuk draws upon the

conventions of the post-apocalyptic novel in order to explore the dissolution of a

heterotopic site like fight club and its effect upon men and their sense of

masculinity.

Jack and his contemporaries feel rejuvenated through their repeated acts

of violence in fight club. However, like the support groups that Jack attends early

in the novel, fight club provides a heterotopic space that acts in discord with the

dominant culture. Because "fight club only exists between the hours between

when fight club starts and when fight club ends," the men have trouble enacting

their sense of masculinity in the larger context of their lives. They may be "gods"

at fight club, but in their jobs and their personal relationships, they continue to

enact what the novel posits to be a dissatisfactory construction of manhood. In

this way, *Fight Club* suggests that without a greater change in the cultural

landscape within which masculinity must operate, real transformation is not

possible. Fight club simply does not go far enough in developing men into men,

which emerges from the scene where Jack pulverizes Angel Face in Lou's

Tavern:

> There's a sleeper hold that gives somebody just enough air to stay awake,
>
> and that night at fight club I hit our first-timer and hammered that beautiful

mister angel face, first with the bony knuckles of my fist like a pounding

molar, and then the knotted tight butt of my fist after my knuckles were raw

from his teeth stuck through his lips. Then the kid fell through my arms in a

heap. (123)

As a result of the brutality with which Jack beats Angel Face, Tyler invents

Project Mayhem: "Tyler said he'd never seen me destroy something so

completely. That night, Tyler knew he had to take fight club up a notch or shut it

down" (123). For Tyler, "taking it up a notch" leads to Project Mayhem, an

organization devoted to promoting anarchy in the attempt to liberate men from

the culture that has restricted them. Tyler becomes an architect of chaos. While

fight club, like the wilderness retreats of the mythopoets, provides a separate

space in which "men could be men," Jack and the others must leave the

heterotopic space. Project Mayhem, on the other hand, is dedicated to

fundamentally altering society in order to destroy such barriers for men. The

transformation required of men isn't "just a weekend retreat" but suggests that

men need to "be running towards disaster" (70). Its premise rests on the idea that

men should "act like men" in all situations, and because it is impossible to

incorporate deep masculinity in culture as it exists, then that culture must be

destroyed. Or, as Jack tells us, "When Tyler invented Project Mayhem, Tyler said

the goal of Project Mayhem had nothing to do with other people. Tyler didn't care

if people got hurt or not. The goal was to teach each man in the project that he

had the power to control history. We, each of us, can control the world" (122).

Project Mayhem therefore emphasizes personal, masculine empowerment against not just another member of fight club but against the world at-large.

The impulse and desire to "control history" that emerges from this passage, however, is the key to Tyler's apocalyptic vision in the novel. Tyler sees history as yet another barrier for white men who want to realize their full masculine potential. For example, Jack cites this as a primary reason for pummeling Angel Face so brutally: "For thousands of years, human beings had screwed up and trashed and crapped on this planet, and now history expected me to clean up after everyone. I have to wash out and flatten my soup cans. I have to account for every drop of used motor oil" (124). In this passage, Jack claims that he and the men of his generation are victims of history, that because of what other people have done before him, he is not completely free to develop himself—he's too busy recycling aluminum cans and used motor oil. Aside from the burden that Jack sees history placing on him, the circumstances of his historical moment are not very amenable to his growth as a man. For example, in a scene late in the novel, the mechanic proselytizes: "We don't have a great war in our generation, or a great depression, but we do, we have a great war of the spirit. We have a great revolution against our culture. The great depression is our lives. We have a spiritual depression" (149). When the mechanic makes this statement, Jack sees this as "pure Tyler Durden," suggesting that it is derived from Tyler's vision of the world. When invoking that vision, the mechanic draws upon three major historical events—World War II, the Great Depression, and the

American Revolution. The mechanic, acting as a voice of Tyler Durden, sees these events as great opportunities for masculinity, and because men are facing a "spiritual depression" at the end of the twentieth-century, it is necessary to change the circumstances in which men find themselves. The mechanic romanticizes these moments in history. Now, instead of fighting heroically in wars, men are purchasing end tables from catalogs and rinsing cans for recycling. Men, who have been depicted as the perpetrators of great crimes in history (slavery, misogyny, etc.) are now cast as the victims whose destructive acts, at least according to Tyler, are entirely justifiable.

While the goal of Project Mayhem is to show men that they can control history, its goal is also to erase history, to provide a tabula rasa in which American masculinity can rewrite its own history. In doing so, Palahniuk most clearly draws upon the narratives of regenerative destruction that pervade post-apocalyptic fiction. The novel begins, for example, *in medias res*, where Tyler and Jack are sitting atop the Parker Morris building, which is set to crumple in a matter of minutes, and returns to this scene near the end. Jack explains that when the explosives detonate beneath the Parker Morris building, "all one hundred and ninety-one floors, will slam down on the national museum which is Tyler's real target" (14). The museum, not the Parker Morris building, is the intended target, and Tyler explains why: "This is our world, now, our world … and those ancient people are dead" (14). The destruction of a museum, an institution that centers on the preservation of history, symbolizes the destruction of history

itself, an act that Tyler feels will greatly benefit men who feel the weight of that history. As Jack puts in later in the novel, "We wanted to blast the world free of history" (124). Without the burden of the past, men can more easily meet the expectations of masculinity in the present, so the thinking goes. Ultimately, Tyler fails to realize that such goals are steeped in a long historical tradition, that the desire to erase history is itself immersed in a narrative history, which can best be seen in the bigger plans he has for Project Mayhem: apocalypse. For instance, Jack tells us: "This was the goal of Project Mayhem, Tyler said, the complete and right-away destruction of civilization" (125). Tyler's imaging of the apocalypse as endgame for the erasure of history is quite fitting—if Project Mayhem succeeds with its apocalyptic aims, the narratives of history with be literally, not symbolically, destroyed. The survivors, imagined to be the men of Project Mayhem, will have the opportunity to construct the past in any way they wish.

As we have seen in this project, the end of the world, at least the end as we know it, is imagined to provide opportunities that are absent in the contemporary world. Palahniuk utilizes such narratives in Tyler's positioning of Project Mayhem. Tyler, the God and father figure in the novel, romanticizes a post-apocalyptic environment as the landscape for which the "new" masculinity, Tyler's masculinity, can endure: "Like fight club does with clerks and box boys, Project Mayhem will break up civilization so we can make something better out of the world" (125). Civilization, like the men of fight club, must be broken down in order to be built up again, and such a new civilization will act as the proving

ground for manliness. At one point in the novel, Tyler provides an explicit vision

of the post-apocalyptic world:

> Imagine … stalking elk past department store windows and stinking racks
>
> of beautiful rotting dresses and tuxedos on hangers; you'll wear leather
>
> clothes that will last you the rest of your life, and you'll climb the wrist-thick
>
> kudzu vines that wrap the Sears Tower. Jack and the beanstalk, you'll
>
> climb up through the dripping forest canopy and the air will be so clean
>
> you'll see tiny figures pounding corn and laying strips of venison to dry in
>
> the empty car pool lane of an abandoned superhighway stretching eight-
>
> lanes-wide and August-hot for a thousand miles. (125)

Such a passage highlights the neoprimitivism that pervades Tyler's fantasy and

is typical of post-apocalyptic narratives—he images hunters and farmers wearing

leather clothes against the backdrop of a ruined modern civilization. The setting

of the "new masculinity" is reminiscent of the fifth painting in Thomas Cole's *The

Course of Empire* series, whereby the flourishing civilization in the previous

scene has been overcome by nature. In this scene, Palahniuk depicts a return to

nature as a return to the primitive as a return to masculinity.

Tyler's construction of a neo-primitive, post-apocalyptic world draws upon

an environmental narrative that runs throughout the novel, much like in Edward

Abbey's *Desert Solitaire*. Saving the Earth, as it were, is inextricably connected to

saving masculinity. For example, we learn that one of the goals of Project

Mayhem is to "cleanse" the world of humanity so that the natural world can once

again thrive: "It's Project Mayhem that's going to save the world. A cultural ice age. A prematurely induced dark age. Project Mayhem will force humanity to go dormant or into remission long enough for the Earth to recover" (125). Palahniuk uses disease-related language here—"dormant" and "remission"—to describe humanity in this passage, which is notable because Jack and Marla both attend support groups for a whole range of diseases they don't have. However, if the goal of Project Mayhem is not to destroy humanity but to destroy civilization as we know it, and if the destruction of the planet and the destruction of masculinity go hand in hand, then it is consumerism that is primarily being cast as the disease in Fight Club. Domestic consumerism, the initial cause of Jack's insomnia and what has been blamed, in part, for contemporary emasculation, is what needs to be cleansed for the Earth to recover. Palahniuk images a reversal of fortune for humanity, who now instead of trapping animals in cages must hide within them: "every evening what's left of mankind will retreat to empty zoos and lock itself in cages as protection against bears and big cats and wolves that pace and watch us from outside the cage bars at night" (124). The wild predators, captured and caged and domesticated in contemporary culture, become free and prey on human beings in the world of Tyler's imagination, where the people who once gawked at animals in zoos now must use zoos for survival. Palahniuk is staking a claim against zoos—a common animal rights issue—and conveys the animals once placed in captivity as taking revenge on their captors. Looking at the binary established by Palahniuk between domestication and the primitive,

however, we can see that Jack has been domesticated, caged by his material

possessions and his immersion in domestic consumerism. If Project Mayhem

were to succeed in destroying civilization as we know it, he would trade cages,

but the trade-off is depicted as a trade-up, where Jack could better embrace the

primitive masculinity that lives inside of him.

In drawing upon traditional post-apocalyptic conventions and positioning

Project Mayhem as a catalyst for neoprimivitism, Palahniuk constructs in Tyler

Durden the image of the anarcho-primitive male. If Jack and his contemporaries

represent the failed masculinity of modern life, Tyler represents the rejuvenative

masculinity of anarcho-primitivism, and he is the father that Jack never had. As

Jack puts it, he and other men have been "searching for a father and God," and

they end up finding both in Tyler Durden (141). In several places throughout the

narrative, Tyler Durden is associated or thematically linked to Jack's father. For

instance, when Project Mayhem begins to ramp up, and Jack feels left behind, he

says: "I am Joe's Broken Heart because Tyler dumped me. Because my father

dumped me. Oh, I could go on and on" (134). In this passage, Jack feels rejected

by both Tyler and his father, and the repetition of the last two clauses suggests

that Tyler is Jack's father, at least in a metaphorical sense. In addition, when

Jack realizes that Tyler is his alter-ego, a manifestation of his subconscious, he

says that to the men of fight club he is "Tyler Durden the Great and Powerful.

God and father" (199). Tyler, unlike their real fathers, embodies the virtues of

masculinity that these men long for, and Palahniuk provides a list of essential

masculine traits when Jack tells Marla why he unconsciously invented Tyler

Durden: "I love everything about Tyler Durden, his courage and his smarts. His

nerve. Tyler is funny and charming and forceful and independent, and men look

up to him and expect him to change their world. Tyler is capable and free, and I

am not" (174). Tyler as father is cast as confident, smart, charming, and capable,

but not necessarily compassionate or protective, which can be viewed as

traditional paternal traits. In this passage, then, Palahniuk suggests that men

need a strict father after which to model themselves and to beat them, literally, if

they need to be disciplined. After all, Tyler is the inventor of a bare-knuckle

boxing club in which men not only punish each other and themselves but also

receive punishment from "God and father," Tyler Durden.

If *Fight Club* ended with Tyler Durden being able to carry out his vision of

a post-holocaust world where anarcho-primitive men reconnect with a lost sense

of masculinity, then Palahniuk would promote existing narratives about

masculinity that are drawn from post-apocalyptic fiction. However, Tyler's plans

do not come through. He does not succeed in destroying the contemporary world

in place of a neo-primitive one. *Fight Club* appears to reproduce the traditional

post-apocalyptic fantasy: once the modern world is "cleansed," men can act in

more appropriately masculine ways in the primitive wake that follows a post-

apocalyptic event. However, the novel installs that narrative in order to subvert it,

to lay bare its absurdity. When he and Tyler first invent fight club, Jack begins to

feel empowered: "I felt finally I could get my hands on everything in the world that

didn't work" (53). Even early on in Project Mayhem, Tyler's mission is "to teach

each man in the project that he had the power to control history" (122). However,

as the novel progresses, these same men become dehumanized by their

immersion in Project Mayhem: "the space monkeys are using lye to burn off their

fingerprints" (157). Fingerprints, being unique to each person, when they are

burned off, the men lose their selfhood, their identities, their uniqueness. They

become "space monkeys," and consider themselves "the all-singing, all-dancing

crap of this world" and "the toxic waste by-product of God's creation" (169).

These men "do the little job [they're] trained to do" and "just die" (12). By the end

of the novel, the members of fight club who participate in Project Mayhem are

stripped of identity and of empowerment, and instead of working hard at their

regular jobs, they are working for Project Mayhem, for Tyler Durden. Palahniuk

suggests that these men are, in fact, no better off than they were.

In the end, Jack is no better off than he was, either. As we discover, Tyler

is in fact Jack's alter ego, the result of Jack's multiple personality disorder. As

Jack puts it, he and Tyler "both use the same body, but at different times" (164).

In terms of masculinity, the implication is that, because he and Tyler are the

same person, Jack, the nameless everyman, has the traits of the anarcho-

primitive male inside of him. Palahniuk draws upon a popular essentialist

narrative here, that all men have a strong, capable, masculine persona within

them, one that simply needs to be cultivated and let out. *Fight Club* posits that

consumer culture prevents "men from being men," but it also presents no viable

alternative. The climax of the novel occurs with Jack holding a gun to his mouth, waiting for the cataclysmic event that his alter ego had set in motion. However, the dynamite doesn't explode, the event doesn't happen, and instead, Jack fires the weapon to rid himself of Tyler, to symbolically destroy not only his imaginary persona but also the anarcho-primitive male as a guiding narrative of masculinity. Jack does not die from the bullet wound, though: "The bullet out of Tyler's gun, it tore out my other cheek to give me a jagged smile from ear to ear" (207). Instead, Jack ends up institutionalized in a mental hospital, another one of the many heterotopic sites in the novel. There, he comes to the realization that neither his previous life nor the one imagined by Tyler Durden would restore his sense of worth. He tells the doctor that "We are not special. We are not crap or trash, either. We just are. We just are, and what happens just happens" (207). In this statement, Palahniuk provides a sense of resolution for Jack. If consumer culture tells him that he's special and Project Mayhem tells him that he's crap or trash, then Jack concludes that neither are true. He just is. This existential narrative, too, is undercut by the fact that he cannot escape the impact he has made on the world:

> every once in a while, somebody brings me my lunch tray and my meds
> and he has a black eye or his forehead is swollen with stitches, and he
> says: "We miss you Mr. Durden." Or somebody with a broken nose pushes
> a mop past me and whispers: "Everything's going according to the plan."
> Whispers: "We're going to break up civilization so we can make something

better out of the world." Whispers: "We look forward to getting you back."

(208)

Jack has an epiphany, one that Palahniuk positions as a central theme in the novel, but it ends up to be too late for Jack to undo the effects of Project Mayhem. In other words, Jack has gained the masculine wisdom privileged in post-apocalyptic fiction, but he has no means to act upon it. *Fight Club* therefore provides a powerful criticism of various narratives of contemporary masculinity, including that propagated by traditional post-apocalyptic fiction, but does not offer up any alternatives or solutions to the masculinity crisis of the late twentieth-century.

Epilogue

In light of the above examinations of apocalyptic texts that draw upon the conventions of post-apocalyptic fiction, we can see that each of them constructs masculinity in very different ways. For Abbey, the desert wilderness is not simply a backdrop for rejuvenative masculinity; instead, it provides an opportunity for men to develop the ecocentric perspective that has been lacking in contemporary constructions of manhood. In *Neuromancer,* Gibson suggests that one manifestation of the Myth of the Frontier—the cowboy—has failed to provide modern men with a sustainable model for masculinity. In *Fight Club*, Palahniuk critiques contemporary depictions of manhood but ultimately fails to suggest any viable alternatives. Across all of these texts and within the genre of post-apocalyptic fiction itself, however, runs a very common theme: white masculinity is perpetually *in crisis*. This is not new news. And it is perhaps not news that men of the last seventy years, in attempting to deal with a perceived sense of crisis, have looked back to mythologized figures in American culture as models for contemporary masculinity or have placed themselves in opposition to people of color. Perhaps it *is* news, however, that the genre of post-apocalyptic fiction has itself developed a mythological status in American culture enough so that other texts, such as those by Abbey, Gibson, and Palahniuk that gesture towards apocalypse, must speak in dialogue with post-apocalyptic narratives.

In doing so, the genre of post-apocalyptic fiction offers something to men that the Myth of the Frontier does not: it makes the familiar strange. In circular

narratives of the frontier, men leave white civilization behind and explore the

wilderness, then to return—rejuvenated—to civilization again. The same pattern

exists in post-apocalyptic fiction, but the "wilderness" is an unfamiliar

manifestation of what men see every day—their homes, their places of work,

shopping centers, etc.—and civilization itself becomes transformed, often through

the work of the male protagonists. It is through this process of defamiliarization

that men in post-apocalyptic texts redefine themselves in relation to patterns and

ideals of masculinity[21]. Texts that draw upon the conventions of post-apocalyptic

fiction, therefore, perform defamiliarization in their own explorations of

masculinity: in *Desert Solitaire*, the desert landscape is redefined as not an

inhospitable wasteland but as necessary for ecologically-centered constructions

of manhood; in *Neuromancer*, Case finds that the once-familiar virtual world of

the Matrix becomes infiltrated by artificial "men"; and in *Fight Club*, the everyday

space of a tavern basement becomes the locus of masculine transformation.

Despite how defamiliarization reconfigures the Myth of the Frontier in post-

apocalyptic fiction, the constructions of masculinity within the genre continually

center around men who use their minds as much as their bodies to thrive in a

post-holocaust landscape. In all of the texts in this study, men who demonstrate

wisdom—a combination of natural intelligence and morality—are privileged as

heroes, in opposition to men who will go to any lengths, including cannibalism

and murder, to survive. In the same way, men in the apocalyptic texts in this

---

[21] In "Art as Technique," Russian Formalist Viktor Shklovsky argues that defamiliarization in modern art and literature acts as an antidote to habituation.

study possess such wisdom: Abbey's environmental ethics, Case's cowboy code, and Jack's eventual opposition to anarchy all echo those constructions of manhood found in post-apocalyptic texts. Like the frontier hunter or the cowboy, only a man of wisdom faces apocalypse and is "revealed" to possess authentic masculinity.

Furthermore, the trope of the man of wisdom carries on beyond the scope of the project and into works of the twenty-first century. One example is Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* (2006), which is the first contemporary post-apocalyptic novel to receive major literary accolades, including a Pulitzer Prize for Literature. The story follows a father and son on their journey for survival in a stark, post-holocaust landscape. The novel's protagonist is frequently framed as being "one of the good guys" in contrast to the many travelers they encounter whose moral degeneration leads them to rape, robbery, and murder. As in earlier American post-apocalyptic novels, such as *Earth Abides* and *I Am Legend*, the father in *The Road* dies at the end of the book, only days before his son is rescued by a group of what the novel suggests to be other "good guys." Just before his passing, however, the father discusses with his son the importance of "carrying the fire":

> You have to carry the fire.
>
> I dont know how to.
>
> Yes you do.
>
> Is it real? The fire?

Yes it is.

Where is it? I dont know where it is.

Yes you do. It's inside you. It was always there. I can see it. (279).

In this passage, "carry the fire" is a metaphor for both the survival skills the boy learned throughout the novel and, more importantly, the need to maintain one's moral compass in a degenerative world. By privileging natural wisdom as a characteristic of authentic manhood, Cormac McCarthy himself proceeds to "carry the fire" in *The Road*, replicating a tradition of masculinity at the crossroads of catastrophe and primitivism and found in contemporary American apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic fiction.

Bibliography

Abbey, Edward. *Desert Solitaire: A Season in the Wilderness*. New York: Simon

     & Schuster, 1968. Print.

---. *Good News*. 1980. New York: Plume, 1991. Print.

Abbott, Carl. *Frontiers Past and Future: Science Fiction and the American West*.

     Lawrence: U of Kansas P, 2006. Print.

Barker, Jennifer. "'A Hero Will Rise': The Myth Of The Fascist Man in *Fight Club*

     and *Gladiator*." *Literature Film Quarterly* 36.3 (2008): 171-187. Print.

Baudrillard, Jean. "The Anorexic Ruins." *Looking Back on the End of the World.*

     Ed. Dietmar Kamper and Christoph Wulf. Trans. by David Antal. New

     York: Semiotext(e), 1989. 1-9. Print.

Bennett, Robert. "The Death Of Sisyphus: Existentialist Literature And The

     Cultural Logic Of Chuck Palahniuk's *Fight Club*." *Stirrings Still: The*

     International Journal Of Existential Literature 2.2 (2005): 70-88. Print.

Berger, James. *After the End: Representations of Post-Apocalypse*.

     Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1999. Print.

Bly, Robert. *Iron John: A Book about Men*. New York: Addison-Wesley, 1990.

     Print.

Boyle, Brenda. *Masculinity in Vietnam War Narratives*. Jefferson, N.C.:

     McFarland, 2009. Print.

Brin, David. *The Postman*. Toronto: Bantam, 1985. Print.

Brooks, Max. *World War Z: An Oral History of the Zombie War*. New York: Three

    Rivers, 2006. Print.

Burroughs, Edgar Rice. *The Lost Continent*. New York: Ballantine, 1992. Print.

---. *Tarzan of the Apes*. New York: Penguin, 1990. Print.

Bryant, Paul T. "Edward Abbey and Gender." *Coyote in the Maze: Tracking*

    Edward Abbey in a World of Words. Ed. Peter Quigley. Salt Lake City: U

    of Utah P, 1998. 226-41. Print.

Buchbinder, David. "Object Or Ground? The Male Body As Fashion Accessory?"

    Canadian Review Of American Studies/Revue Canadienne D'etudes

    Américaines 34.3 (2004): 221-231. Print.

Buell, Frederick. *From Apocalypse to Way of Life: Environmental Crisis in the*

    American Century. New York: Routledge, 2003. Print.

Buell, Lawrence. *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing, and*

    the Formation of American Culture. Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard

    UP, 1995. Print.

Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New

    York: Routledge, 1990. Print.

Campbell, SueEllen. "Foreword II." *Coyote in the Maze: Tracking Edward Abbey*

    in a World of Words. Ed. Peter Quigley. Salt Lake City: U of Utah P, 1998.

    33-46. Print.

Capp, Walter H. *The Unfinished War*. 2nd ed. Boston: Beacon, 1990. Print.

Carson, Rachel. *Silent Spring*. N.P.: Econo-Clad, 1999. Print.

Chaloupka, William. "Edward Abbey's Inadvertent Postmodernism: Theory, Autobiography, and Politics." *Coyote in the Maze: Tracking Edward Abbey in a World of Words*. Ed. Peter Quigley. Salt Lake City: U of Utah P, 1998. 119-36. Print.

Childers, Joseph, Townsend Carr, and Regna Meenk. "White Men Can't ...: (De)centering Authority and Jacking into Phallic Economies in William Gibson's *Count Zero*." *Science Fiction, Canonization, Marginalization, and the Academy*. Ed. Gary Westfahl and George Slusser. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood, 2002. 151-60. Print.

Clark, J. Michael. "Faludi, Fight Club, and Phallic Masculinity: Exploring the Emasculating Economics of Patriarchy." *Journal Of Men's Studies: A Scholarly Journal About Men And Masculinities* 11.1 (2002): 65-76. Print.

Collins, Suzanne. *The Hunger Games*. New York: Scholastic, 2008. Print.

Cronin, Justin. *The Passage: A Novel*. New York: Ballantine, 2010. Print.

Csicsery-Ronay Jr., Istvan. "Cyberpunk and Neuromanticism." 1988. *Storming the Reality Studio*. Ed. Larry McCaffery. Durham, NC: Duke UP, 1991. 182-93. Print.

Deery, June. "The Biopolitics of Cyberspace: Piercy Hacks Gibson." *Future Females, The Next Generation: New Voices and Velocities in Feminist Science Fiction Criticism*. Ed. Marleen S. Barr. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2000. Print.

Dellamora, Richard. *Postmodern Apocalypse: Theory and Cultural Practice at the End*. Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1995. Print.

Dewey, Joseph. *In a Dark Time: The Apocalyptic Temper in the American Novel of the Nuclear Age*. West Lafayette, IN: Purdue UP, 1990. Print.

DiPiero, Thomas. *White Men Aren't*. Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2002. Print.

Dr. Strangelove; Or, How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb. Hawk Films. Released by Columbia Pictures Corp., 1963. Film.

Ehrlich, Paul R. *The Population Bomb*. New York: Ballantine, 1968. Print.

Fair, Benjamin. "Stepping Razor in Orbit: Postmodern Identity and Political Alternatives in William Gibson's *Neuromancer*." *Critique* 46.2 (2005): 92-103. Print.

Foucault, Michel. "Of Other Spaces." Trans. Jay Miskowiec. *Diacritics* 16:1 (1986): 22-27. Print.

Frank, Pat. *Alas, Babylon*. 1959. New York: Harper Perennial, 2005. Print.

Gardiner, Judith Kegan, ed. *Masculinity Studies & Feminist Theory: New Directions*. New York: Columbia UP, 2002. Print.

Gibson, Pamela Church. "Queer Looks, Male Gazes, Taut Torsos And Designer Labels: Contemporary Cinema, Consumption And Masculinity." *The Trouble with Men: Masculinities in European and Hollywood Cinema*. London, England: Wallflower, 2004. 176-186. Print.

Gibson, William. *Neuromancer*. 1984. New York: Penguin, 2000. iBook.

Graulich, Melody. "'O Beautiful for Spacious Guys': An Essay on 'the Legitimate

Inclinations of the Sexes.'" *The Frontier Experience and the American

Dream*. Ed. David Mogen, Mark Busby, and Paul Bryant. College Station:

Texas A&M UP, 1987. 186-204. Print.

Grønstad, Absjørn. "One-Dimensional Men: *Fight Club* and the Poetics of the

Body." *Film Criticism* 28.1 (2003): 1-23. Print.

Haraway, Donna J. "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-

Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century." 1984. Rev. *Simians, Cyborgs,

and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*. New York: Routledge, 1991. 149-

82. Print.

Hartmann, Doreen. "Space Construction as Cultural Practice: Reading William

Gibson's *Neuromancer* with Respect to Postmodern Concepts of Space."

Futurescapes: Space in Utopian and Science Fiction Discourses. New

York: Rodopi, 2009. 275-99. Print.

Hayles, Katherine. *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics,

Literature, and Informatics*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1999. Print.

Heinlein, Robert. *Farnham's Freehold*. New York: Putnam, 1964. Print.

Hollinger, Veronica. "Apocalypse Coma." *Edging into the Future: Science Fiction

and Contemporary Cultural Transformation*. Ed. Veronica Hollinger and

Joan Gordon. Philadelphia: U of Penn. P, 2002. 159-73. Print.

Huxley, Aldous. *Brave New World*. New York: Harper, 1946. Print.

Jackson, Kristen. "Live at Red Rocks." *The Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* 26

    November 2006, final ed.: H1+. Print.

Jameson, Fredric. *Postmodernism, Or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*.

    Durham, NC: Duke UP, 1991. Print.

Jones, Steven E. "*Second Life*, Video Games, and the Social Text." *PMLA* 124.1

    (2009): 264-72. Print.

Kavadlo, Jesse. "The Fiction of Self-Destruction: Chuck Palahniuk, Closet

    Moralist." *Stirrings Still: The International Journal of Existential Literature*

    2.2 (2005): 3-26. Print.

Kermode, Frank. *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction*. New

    York: Oxford UP, 1967. Print.

Kimmel, Michael. *Manhood in America: A Cultural History*. New York: Free, 1996.

    Print.

King, Stephen. *The Stand: The Complete and Uncut Edition.* New York: Signet,

    1991. Print.

Kirkman, Robert, Charles Adlard, and Cliff Rathburn. *The Walking Dead*. Orange,

    CA: Image Comics, 2010. Print.

Leblanc, Lauraine. "Razor Girls: Genre and Gender in Cyberpunk Fiction."

    Women and Language 20.1 (1997): 71-76. Print.

Lee, Martha F. *Earth First!: Environmental Apocalypse*. Syracuse, Syracuse UP,

    1995. Print.

London, Jack. *The Call of the Wild*. New York: Macmillan, 1963. Print.

---. *The Scarlet Plague*. New York: Arno, 1975. Print.

Matheson, Richard. *I Am Legend*. 1954. New York: Tor, 1995. Print.

May, John R. *Toward a New Earth: Apocalypse in the American Novel*. Notre

       Dame: U of Notre Dame P, 1972. Print.

McCammon, Robert. *Swan Song*. New York: Pocket, 1987. Print.

McCarthy, Cormac. *The Road*. New York: Vintage, 2006. Print.

McDevitt, Jack. *Eternity Road*. New York: Harper Voyager, 1997. Print.

McGavran, James Holt. "Gender Fluidity and Nature Writing: William

       Wordsworth and Edward Abbey." *Wordsworth Circle* 33.1 (2002): 47-52.

       Print.

Messner, Michael A. *Politics of Masculinities: Men in Movements.* Thousand

       Oaks, CA: Sage, 1997. Print.

Miller, Walter M, Jr. *A Canticle for Leibowitz*. 1959. New York: Bantam, 1972.

       Print.

Mogen, David, Mark Busby, and Paul Bryant. *The Frontier Experience and the*

       American Dream: Essays on American Literature. College Station: Texas

       A&M UP, 1989. Print.

Morris, David Copland. "Celebration and Irony: The Polyphonic Voice of Edward

       Abbey's *Desert Solitaire*." *Western American Literature* 28.1 (1993): 21-

       32. Print.

Niven, Larry, and Jerry Pournelle. *Lucifer's Hammer*. 1977. New York: Del Rey,

       1985. Print.

Norton, Andre. *Star Man's Son, 2250 A.D.* 1952. Boston: Gregg, 1980. Print.

Novak, Amy. "Virtual Poltergeists and Memory: The Question of Ahistoricism in

      William Gibson's *Neuromancer.*" *Anatomy of Science Fiction*. Ed. Donald

      E. Morse. Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars P, 2006. 125-145. Print.

Oelschlaeger, Max. *The Idea of Wilderness: From Prehistory to the Age of*

      Ecology. New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 1991. Print.

O'Leary, Stephen D. *Arguing the Apocalypse: A Theory of Millennial Rhetoric*.

      New York: Oxford UP, 1994. Print.

Orwell, George. *1984: A Novel*. New York: Signet Classic, 1977. Print.

Palahniuk, Chuck. *Fight Club*. New York: Norton, 1996. Print.

Percy, Walker. "The Loss of the Creature." *The Message in the Bottle*. New York:

      St. Martin's P, 1975. Print.

Pettus, Mark. "Terminal Simulation: 'Revolution' in Chuck Palahniuk's Fight Club."

      Hungarian Journal of English and American Studies 6.2 (2000): 111-127.

      Print.

Phillipon, Daniel J. *Conserving Words: How American Nature Writers Shaped the*

      Environmental Movement. Athens: U of Georgia P, 2004. Print.

Phillips, Dana. *The Truth of Ecology: Nature, Culture, and Literature in America*.

      New York: Oxford UP, 2003. Print.

Plant, Sadie. "The Future Looms: Weaving Women and Cybernetics."

      Cyberspace/Cyberbodies/Cyberpunk: Cultures of Technological

Embodiment. Ed. Mike Featherstone and Roger Burrows. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1995. Print.

Pumping Iron. Dir. Robert Fiore and George Butler. Perf. Arnold Schwarzenegger. Cinegate, 1977. Film.

Quigley, Peter. "Introduction." *Coyote in the Maze: Tracking Edward Abbey in a World of Words*. Ed. Peter Quigley. Salt Lake City: U of Utah P, 1998. 1-18. Print.

Quinby, Lee. *Anti-Apocalypse: Exercises in Genealogical Criticism*. Minneapolis: U of Minn. P, 1994. Print.

---. *Millennial Seduction: A Skeptic Confronts Apocalyptic Culture*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1999. Print.

Raglon, Rebeca. "Surviving Doom and Gloom: Edward Abbey's Desert Comedies." *Coyote in the Maze: Tracking Edward Abbey in a World of Words*. Ed. Peter Quigley. Salt Lake City: U of Utah P, 1998. 168-83. Print.

Remlinger, Stefanie. "Fight Club: The Most Dangerous Movie Ever?." *The Aesthetics and Pragmatics of Violence*. Passau, Germany: Stutz, 2001. 141-153. Print.

Robinson, Douglas. *American Apocalypses: The Image of the End of the World in American Literature.* Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1985. Print.

Robinson, Sally. *Marked Men: White Masculinity in Crisis*. New York: Columbia UP, 2000. Print.

Ronald, Ann. *The New West of Edward Abbey*. 1982. Reno: U of Nevada P,

    2000. Print.

Rosen, Elizabeth K. *Apocalyptic Transformation: Apocalypse and the*

    Postmodern Imagination. Lanham, MD: Lexington, 2008. Print.

Rotundo, E. Anthony. *American Manhood: Transformations in Masculinity from*

    the Revolution to the Modern Era. New York: Basic, 1993. Print.

Scheese, Don. "*Desert Solitaire:* Counter-Friction to the Machine in the Garden."

    The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology. Ed. Cheryll

    Glotfelty and Harold Fromm. Athens: U of Georgia P, 1996. 303-22. Print.

Schivelbusch, Wolfgang. *The Railway Journey: The Industrialization of Time and*

    Space in the 19th Century. Berkeley: U of Calif. P, 1977. Print.

Schultz, Robert T. "White Guys Who Prefer Not To: From Passive Resistance

    ('Bartleby') to Terrorist Acts (*Fight Club*)." *Journal Of Popular Culture* 44.3

    (2011): 583-605. Print.

Shklovsky, Viktor. "Art as Technique." 1917. *Literary Theory: An Anthology*. Ed.

    Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan. Malden: Blackwell, 1998. 17-23. Print.

Seed, David. *Under the Shadow: The Atomic Bomb and Cold War Narratives*.

    Kent, OH: Kent State UP, 2013. Print.

Shute, Nevil. *On the Beach*. New York: W. Morrow, 1957. Print.

Slotkin, Richard. *Gunfighter Nation: The Myth of the Frontier in Twentieth-*

    Century America. New York: Atheneum, 1992. Print.

---. *Regeneration through Violence; the Mythology of the American Frontier,*

 1600-1860. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan UP, 1973. Print.

Slovic, Scott. *Seeking Awareness in American Nature Writing*. Salt Lake City: U

 of Utah P, 1992. Print.

Spurgeon, Sara L. *Exploding the Western: Myths of Empire on the Postmodern*

 Frontier. College Station: Texas A & M UP, 2005. Print.

Stephenson, Neal. *Snow Crash*. New York: Bantam, 1992. Print.

Stewart, George. *Earth Abides*. New York: Ballantine, 2006. Print.

Strombeck, Andrew. "The Network and the Archive: The Specter of Imperial

Management in William Gibson's *Neuromancer*." *Science Fiction Studies*. 37

 (2010): 275-95. Print.

Swanstrom, Lisa. "Landscape and Locodescription in William Gibson's

 Neuromancer." *Foundation* 35:98 (2006): 16-27. Print.

Torgovnick, Marianna. *Gone Primitive: Savage Intellects, Modern Lives*. Chicago:

 U of Chicago P, 1990. Print.

---. *Primitive Passions: Men, Women, and the Quest for Ecstasy*. New York:

 Alfred A. Knopf, 1997. Print.

Vaughan, Brian K., and Pia Guerra. *Y: The Last Man*. New York, NY: DC

 Comics, 2003. Print.

Wister, Owen. *The Virginian: A Horseman of the Plains*. Pleasantville, NY:

 Reader's Digest, 1988. Print.

Yu, Timothy. "Oriental Cities, Postmodern Futures: *Naked Lunch, Blade Runner*,

    and *Neuromancer*." *MELUS* 33.4 (2008): 45-71. Print.

Zelazny, Roger. *Damnation Alley*. New York: Putnam, 1969. Print.

Žižek, Slavoj. "The Ambiguity of the Masochist Social Link." *Perversion and the*

    Social Relation. Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2003. 112-125. Print.

CURRICULUM VITAE

DYLAN BARTH

P.O. Box 413, UW-Milwaukee, Milwaukee WI 53201
djbarth@uwm.edu

EDUCATION

University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Milwaukee, WI
Doctor of Philosophy in English, December 2013
Dissertation: *Carry the Fire: Apocalypse, Primitivism, and Masculinity in American Literature, 1945-2000*

Illinois State University, Normal, IL
Master of Arts in English, 1999
Thesis: *Surveying Nature: Postmodernism and Ecology in Pynchon's* Mason & Dixon
Bachelor of Arts in English Education, with honors, 1997

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Milwaukee, WI
Teaching Academic Staff, 2010-present
Independently design, prepare, and teach professional writing and first-year writing courses, including the first blended composition course at UWM.
Graduate Teaching Assistant, 2001-2009
Independently designed, prepared, and taught first-year composition courses and introductory literature courses, including twentieth-century American literature, American short stories, women's literature, and Native American literature.
English 101 Course Coordinator and Mentor, 2004-2005
Provided guidance to instructors new to UWM's writing program, planned and conducted new instructor orientation before each semester, maintained administrative D2L site, conducted weekly practicum meetings, coordinated practice and end-of-term portfolio assessments, assisted the Director of Composition with program administration and curricular development, supervised a textbook selection committee, and responded to student questions, concerns, and complaints.
Coordinator for Mentoring and Professional Development, 2003-2004
Provided guidance to instructors new to UWM's writing program, assisted with new instructor orientation before each semester, conducted weekly practicum meetings, and assisted the English 101 Course Coordinator with course administration.

Marquette University, Milwaukee, WI
   Instructor of English, 2007-2008
      Independently designed, prepared, and taught introductory composition courses.

RELATED WORK EXPERIENCE

University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Milwaukee, WI
   Learning Technology Consultant, 2010-present
      Provide Desire2Learn and rich media support to faculty and instructors, assist with D2L site administration, coordinate and participate in the Online and Blended Teaching Program, serve as UWM's Online Programs Coordinator, maintain LTC department website, coordinate online and blended teaching users' group, participate in Sloan-C Blended workshops, and create and maintain a repository of tech tools.

PUBLICATIONS

Book Review of *Hope's Horizon: Three Visions for Healing the American Land* by Chip Ward. *ISLE: Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and the Environment* 12.1 (Winter 2005).

Book Review of *Winter Creek: One Writer's Natural History* by John Daniel. *ISLE: Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and the Environment* 11.1 (Winter 2004).

PRESENTATIONS

"Apocalypse, Masculinity, and Space in Chuck Palahniuk's *Fight Club.*" Gender, Place, and Space Conference, University of Notre Dame, Notre Dame, IN, 2010.

"Rethinking Ecological Theory in the Wake of the Word Revolution." Association for the Study of Literature and Environment, Boston University, Boston, MA, 2003.

"The Luscious Brook Grassleggings: Hermaphroditic Identity in *Black Eagle Child.*" Midwest Modern Language Association, Minneapolis, MN, 2002.

"'Isn't this supposed to be the Age of Reason?': The Ecological Implications of Fantasy in Pynchon's *Mason & Dixon*." The Twentieth-Century Literature Conference, The University of Louisville, Louisville, KY, 2001.

"Duck, Duck, Goose!: Evolution and the Simulacra in Pynchon's *Mason & Dixon*." Association for the Study of Literature and Environment (UK), The University of East London, London, England, 2000.

"Dr. Arrowsmith's Retreat: Redefining Science in the American Wilderness." Sinclair Lewis Society, Sauk Centre, MN, 2000.

"The Ideology of Hunting: Human Anonymity and Animosity in *Bambi* and *Green Hills of Africa*." Midwest Modern Language Association, Minneapolis, MN, 1999.

"Giving Voice to the Monster: Storytelling and Ecology in Gardner's *Grendel*." Association for the Study of Literature and Environment, Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo, MI, 1999.

RELATED PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCES

Composition Advisory Committee, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 2003-2005.
College of Arts & Sciences Curriculum Committee, Illinois State University, 1998-1999.
English Department Curriculum Committee, Illinois State University, 1998-1999.