

# **Origins, Endings and the Posthuman Imperative in Dystopian and Post-Apocalyptic Fiction**

by

André James Daniel Kershaw

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Supervisor: Dr. Dawid de Villiers

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## **Declaration**

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## Abstract

In this thesis, I undertake an analysis of five primary texts in the post-apocalyptic and dystopian genres, namely: Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*, George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, Anthony Burgess' *A Clockwork Orange*, Russell Hoban's *Riddley Walker* and Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*. Drawing chiefly upon Frank Kermode's work in *The Sense of an Ending*, in which he argues that imaginings of origin and end are crucial for conferring intelligibility upon being "in the midst" (8), I show how the confrontation of a particular kind of end point characterised by the proleptic spectre of the posthuman, invoked by texts within the post-apocalyptic and dystopian genres, generates what I call a posthuman imperative to reinterpretation. This imperative is implicitly invoked by a text insofar as it raises or gestures towards the possibility of the posthuman and demands that the reader reorientate themselves, in the midst, in relation to this horizon. The process of reinterpretation of being-in-the-middest which occurs in response to the posthuman imperative, drawing upon narratives of origin and end, is primarily mediated through language and story. This process has implications for frameworks of meaning, value, ethics, truth, the self, and relation to the transcendent as well as to time and history.

My analysis draws out a number of generative paradoxes which arise when attempting to write and read the possibility of the posthuman. To do so depends upon language, and yet language is brought into confrontation with its own limits as the limits of the human are approached. Further, while the posthuman imperative to reinterpretation is only generated in the face of the end, and an end in some sense is an essential precondition for the narrative concord of existence to which this process of reinterpretation is directed, the end is ultimately also that which threatens to undermine the possibility of narrative as such.

## Opsomming

In hierdie tesis onderneem ek 'n ontleding van vyf primêre tekste wat hoort tot die post-apokaliptiese en distopiese genres, naamlik: Aldous Huxley se *Brave New World*, George Orwell se *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, Anthony Burgess se *A Clockwork Orange*, Russell Hoban se *Riddley Walker* and Cormac McCarthy se *The Road*. Met verwysing na hoofsaaklik Frank Kermode se *The Sense of an Ending*, waarin hy aanvoer dat voorstellings van oorsprong en einde deurslaggewend is om die bestaan “in the midst” te verwerk en verstaan (8), toon ek aan hoe die konfrontasie van 'n soort terminus gekenmerk deur die proleptiese skim van die postmenslike, aangeroop deur tekste in die post-apokaliptiese en distopiese genres, genereer wat ek hier na verwys as 'n “posthuman imperative” tot herinterpretasie. Hierdie imperatief word implisiet deur 'n teks ingeroep in soverre dit die moontlikheid van die postmenslike oproep of aandui, en vereis dat die leser hulself, “in the midst,” met betrekking tot hierdie horison heroriënteer. Die proses van herinterpretasie van bestaan “in the midst,” wat plaasvind in reaksie op die “posthuman imperative,” wat op sy beurt geskoei is op narratiewe van oorsprong en einde, word hoofsaaklik deur taal en storie bemiddel. Hierdie proses het implikasies vir raamwerke van betekenis, waarde, etiek, waarheid, die self en verhouding tot die transendente sowel as tot tyd en geskiedenis.

My analise stel 'n aantal generatiewe paradokse wat ontstaan wanneer daar probeer word om die moontlikheid van die postmenslike te skryf en te lees. Sodanige projek maak op die taal se ekpressiewe vermoëns staat, en tog word taal met sy eie grense in konfrontasie gebring, soos die grense van die mens benader word. Verder, terwyl die “posthuman imperative” tot herinterpretasie slegs in die aangesig van die einde gegeneer word, en 'n einde in 'n sekere sin 'n noodsaaklike voorwaarde is vir die narratiewe bestaanskonkord waarop hierdie proses van herinterpretasie gerig is, is die einde uiteindelik ook dit wat dreig om die moontlikheid van narratief as sodanig te ondermyn.

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Whom have I in heaven but thee?  
And there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee.  
My flesh and my heart faileth:  
But God is the strength of my heart,  
And my portion for ever.

Psalm 73:25-26 KJV

First and foremost, all gratitude, glory, and praise belong to the Triune God, for He alone is Sovereign Creator of all things, and there is no goodness or truth except that which is in Him and from Him. Whatever beauty, value, and meaning we find in words, our hearts have no rest apart from the eternal Word, Jesus Christ, from Whom, through Whom, and to Whom are all things.

I also offer thanks to those through whom God has worked to sustain me in my academic endeavours. I could not name all of those who have aided me, nor could I fully communicate or even comprehend all the ways in which they have helped. Nevertheless, I would like to express my gratitude to my family, my friends, and my fellow sojourners, especially to Kate, all of whom have supported and encouraged me in more ways than they know. Even as time and death estrange us, I am also grateful for the inspiration I have received from my Oupa André. If I have inherited anything good from him beyond our shared name and penchant for unusual socks, I pray that his legacy would be honoured by my stewardship of it.

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## Contents

<b>Declaration</b> .....	2
<b>Abstract</b> .....	3
<b>Opsomming</b> .....	4
<b>Acknowledgements</b> .....	5
<b>Introduction</b> .....	7
<b>The Posthuman and the Post-Apocalypse: <i>The Road</i> and <i>Riddley Walker</i></b> .....	28
<b>Linguistic Dystopias: <i>Brave New World</i>, <i>Nineteen Eighty-Four</i> and <i>A Clockwork Orange</i></b> .....	48
<b>Narrative and the End</b> .....	74
<b>Conclusion</b> .....	91
<b>Bibliography</b> .....	94

## Introduction

The days sloughed past uncounted and uncalendared. Along the interstate in the distance long lines of charred and rusting cars. [...] The incinerate corpses shrunk to the size of a child and propped on the bare springs of the seats. Ten thousand dreams ensepulchred within their crozzled hearts. They went on. Treading the dead world under like rats on a wheel. The nights dead still and deader black. So cold. They talked hardly at all. He coughed all the time and the boy watched him spitting blood. Slumping along. Filthy, ragged, hopeless. He'd stop and lean on the cart and the boy would go on and then stop and look back and he would raise his weeping eyes and see him standing there in the road looking back at him from some unimaginable future glowing in that waste like a tabernacle.

The road crossed a dried slough where pipes of ice stood out of the frozen mud like formations in a cave. The remains of an old fire by the side of the road. Beyond that a long concrete causeway. A dead swamp. Dead trees standing out of the gray water trailing gray and relic hagmoss. The silky spills of ash against the curbing. He stood leaning on the gritty concrete rail. Perhaps in the world's destruction it would be possible at last to see how it was made. Oceans, mountains. The ponderous counterspectacle of things ceasing to be. The sweeping waste, hydroptic and coldly secular. The silence (McCarthy 292-293).

This excerpt from Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* (2006), in which two unnamed characters, only designated as "the man" and "the boy," journey through a post-apocalyptic America in the aftermath of an unspecified catastrophe, may serve to foreground a number of interesting features that make the experience of reading the novel so challenging and intriguing. The language is manifestly strange, not just in the disorientingly vague designation of the characters, spatial setting and temporal progression, but also in the descriptive and phenomenological language through which the narratorial voice communicates the experience of the focalising character, "the man." The setting is only given imprecisely, as "along the interstate," which is also archetypally designated as "that waste." The passage creates the impression that we are reading an accretion of impressions over an unspecified and unspecifiable period of time, during which "the days sloughed past uncounted and uncalendared."

Amidst death and devastation, the man seems to confront two alternative futures. One is described only as "unimaginable," yet somehow inhabited by the boy, or perhaps inhabiting him, in that he is the carrier of the possibility of such a future, if indeed it is possible. The other, by contrast, is taken for granted as real and imminent, designated as "the world's destruction," and described as comprising "[t]he ponderous counterspectacle of things ceasing to be. The sweeping waste, hydroptic and coldly secular. The silence." In contrast to the cold secularity of this future, which is apprehended as being at hand, the boy who inhabits and signifies the alternative "unimaginable" future is described in overtly religious language, as "glowing in that waste like a tabernacle."

The image of the tabernacle suggests the sacred tabernacle in the Torah, wherein God's manifest presence is said to have dwelt, along with the inscribed tablets of the law which He delivered through Moses (Exod. 25:8). Through observing his son, the man conceives of a hypothetical future, which he cannot precisely imagine, wherein the boy exists as a carrier of divine value. The attribution of divinity, by analogy, to the boy, may be explained by the life-sustaining, ethic-grounding and meaning-generating love which the father has for his son, as well as the boy's youth, which allows him to function as a signifier of potentiality and hope. This hypothetical future, though "unimaginable," is in a sense already infusing the present, because of the presence of the boy with his father, and yet the fact that the son alone inhabits this future world apart from his father means that they are also simultaneously estranged from one another, within the temporal phenomenology of the man's affective experience at this moment.

The religious significance with which the man imbues his son is a consistent motif within this novel, and this will be explained in more detail later in my thesis, but in this immediate context it is worth noting another description of the boy from the beginning of the novel which relates to how the boy figures in the extract above. This description reads: "If he was not the word of God God never spoke" (McCarthy 3). While the conditional "if" crucially leaves open both the possibility that "God never spoke" and the alternative that He may have, the association with the tabernacle by which the boy is depicted in the excerpt suggests that the man is, at this later stage of the novel, entertaining a framework in which God has spoken, regardless of how literally this may or may not be interpreted by the man himself. The boy is thus associated with



Christ in particular, and specifically with Christ as eternal Logos, God's Word incarnate, and God the Son within the Triune Godhead. Through this association, McCarthy prompts us to think about the relationship between word and world, which will become a major concern of this thesis. In the Bible, the Word/Logos is the means by which the universe is created out of nothing (e.g., John 1:1-5; cf. Gen. 1:1-3). The boy in this passage presides instead over the unbecoming of the anthropocentric world, though also the inauguration of a new, posthuman one.

In the excerpt I have been discussing, the man's present experience is framed in terms of a meaning-making structure which makes reference to and presupposes narratives of origin and end. These narrative conceptions of origin and end are negotiated from a present perspective, and yet they also simultaneously give that perspective its structure, reinflecting and reconfiguring present experience by reframing it. These phenomenological principles are especially apparent in the second paragraph of the excerpt, in which the man reflects that "[p]erhaps in the world's destruction it would be possible at last to see how it was made. [...] The ponderous counterspectacle of things ceasing to be." It may be contended that the "destruction" here is only the undoing of the man's own ontic *umwelt*, and a corresponding birth of a future world associated with the boy and the persistence of divine value (McFadden 41, 43), and this is indeed how the reader may interpret the novel's narrative as a whole. However, the stark contrast between the religious imagery at the end of the first paragraph, and the descriptors "sweeping waste" and "coldly secular" in the second paragraph, suggests that there is a tension in the man's own experience at this specific point of the novel, consisting of two different ways of conceiving that which is to come, with different attending narratives of origin presupposed.

These different possible conceptions of origin and end inflect the man's present experience in distinct ways, reflected in the different and opposing discourses which convey his experience. The conception of future which retains divine value in the boy, even if the man himself cannot participate in that future, presupposes an origin in which God spoke, and the man's experience as framed by these narratives is inflected by religious signification, not denying the horror of the waste, but allowing for a potential glow of divinity amidst it. On the other hand, the conception of future as mere destruction entertains the possibility that "God never spoke," and

here the present waste is "sweeping," with no redeeming glow, characterised by cold secularity and "silence." The man's being is thus distinguished by a profound tension, in which two possible narrative worlds stand in superposition, as he finds himself at the confluence of these divergent apocalyptic imaginings.

These considerations bring forward the core problem statement of this study, which is the following: given the necessity of interpreting a present state of being in light of origin and end, which confer upon existence a narrative structure, how might a process of existential reinterpretation play out within literary texts when the end that is confronted includes and is distinguished by the possibility of the posthuman? To the extent that this reinterpretive process, which I shall argue is chiefly mediated through language, is demanded and shaped by the possibility of the posthuman, it makes sense to speak of a posthuman imperative to reinterpretation having been generated within the text. This imperative is implicit within any text that confronts the reader with the proleptic spectre of the posthuman, demanding that they re-examine their own being-in-the-middest in light of an imagined end. Over the course of this introduction, I shall begin to clarify in a provisional way how I conceive of the structure of this reinterpretative process and the significance of origins and ends for it, by referring to some key theoretical interlocutors, especially Frank Kermode. I shall also introduce what I mean by the "posthuman" in the posthuman imperative, though the theoretical conceptions I have begun and will continue to illustrate in this introductory chapter will be developed further in relation to five primary texts throughout the entirety of this thesis. Before proceeding further with theoretical clarifications, however, something ought to be said about the genres of text which I intend to handle in this work.

The concerns of origin and end which have been introduced thus far pertain not only to *The Road*, but in some way or another to all narratives, and perhaps most strikingly to dystopian and post-apocalyptic texts. My focus in the present study will be upon texts within these genres, in light of their special relevance to questions regarding the construction through language of origins and endings, and the fact that a number of major works in these genres make conspicuously unusual use of language; a fact which, as I shall demonstrate in this study, is not incidental, but highly significant when considered in relation to the conventions of these genres and the conditions of the textual worlds with which they are concerned.

The post-apocalyptic genre is by necessity concerned with the existential, representational, narrative and linguistic modes of being which emerge from confronting 'The End,' as well as from the attempt to imagine it. The being available to beings in the post-apocalyptic world is by definition a being-towards-the-end, which can only be made sense of in relation to imagined ends. Moreover, insofar as it approaches being-*at-the-end*, the imperative to reinterpretation and meaning-making can only be answered by establishing a narrative point of origin and conferring a trajectory upon the present in relation to this and the narrative end point, even if the latter is an unimaginable future. This explains the existential mood or attunement of anxiety which pervades these texts (McFadden 45). I shall argue in this thesis that both the post-apocalyptic and the dystopian genres concern themselves in different ways with wrestling with being-towards-the-end, and are necessarily always also haunted by imaginings of that which came before. Origin and end both have a critical bearing on meaning-making, as exhibited in the linguistic and representational acts which the texts depict, and which they themselves instantiate. The dystopian genre, while not as obviously concerned with ends as the post-apocalyptic, is nevertheless a kind of genre of limit, in which the end of a certain way of being and sense-making, typically a humanist mode, is confronted. Like post-apocalyptic texts, dystopian novels may be understood as artefacts which enable the reinterpretation of contemporary social experience in light of the imagined possible end point represented in the novel. The distinctive feature of dystopian novels with regards to the problematic I have begun to articulate is that the kind of end-point they put forward is not necessarily one in which the annihilation of the human species as a result of some extrinsic disaster is threatened, but rather they portray the dawning of a set of conditions which call previous human ways of being into question, and in the case of the particular dystopian texts I have selected, these questions extend to the limits of human being as such. The commonalities and distinctives of these two genres when approached through the lens I adopt in this thesis will become clearer over the course of the work.

In order to approach my core problematic, understood in terms of the constitution of imagined points of origin and end in literature, and the process of orientation and reconfiguration of existence in relation to these arising in response to what I call the posthuman imperative, as depicted in post-apocalyptic and dystopian literature, I draw upon a range of theoretical and critical contributors. These include literary critics who have dealt with my focal texts from

various theoretical perspectives, as well as scholars in the posthuman and posthumanism, narratology, linguistics, philosophy of language, existential philosophy, and other related disciplinary loci. It is through engagement with these contributors that I have attempted to establish a theoretical grounding from which to read my primary texts, while also refining and sharpening my theoretical conceptions in conversation with the novels. In this introductory chapter, I endeavour to highlight some of these contributors and outline key elements of my theoretical framework in a preliminary fashion.

My most foundational theoretical interlocutor is Frank Kermode, who, in his major critical work, *The Sense of an Ending*, explores literary, mythical and other narrative manifestations of the existential necessity for human beings to ground their sense-making, amidst the apparently unbearable perplexity of existence, in a framework that gives an account of origin and end. He develops his argument with reference to Biblical and historical Christian eschatology, especially interpretations of John's Apocalypse, as well as literary works by Shakespeare, Tolstoy, Sartre, and many others.

Kermode argues that both origins and endings are in a sense unknowable, or at least occluded, from our perspective as beings, and therefore they are only accessible to us through fictions (67). At the same time, these fictive origins and ends are absolutely necessary for us to locate and orientate ourselves as beings in "the midst:" our experience at any given moment can only be interpreted in relation to origins and ends which make our being intelligible as a whole (4-8). It is for this reason that humans exhibit the universal tendency to "make considerable investments in coherent patterns which, by the provision of an end make possible a satisfying consonance with the origins and with the middle" (17). This existentially necessary tendency is most clearly communicated in the paradigmatic Apocalypse narrative, the book of Revelation, which is explicitly structured upon the imperative to "'write the things which thou hast seen, and the things which are, and the things which shall be hereafter' [...] and the command to make these things interdependent," but this is also an apt description of how novels function formally (58).

Kermode is primarily speaking of narratives at the level of whole texts, but as my preliminary analysis of the passage from *The Road* is intended to show, this understanding of the interpermeating temporal structure of narrativised experience can be applied to particular episodes and features within texts as well. My interest in this study is in what Kermode's understanding of being in "the midst" in relation to imaginations of origin and end may reveal when applied to literary texts of the post-apocalyptic and dystopian genres. Specifically, I am interested in how language itself, narrative form, and representational structures, are involved in the process of constructing origins and ends, and the interpretation of experience in relation to these; I am interested in examining this process as represented in post-apocalyptic and dystopian literary texts and considering these texts themselves as artefacts instantiating this process. My contention is that, when particular features of and conditions within a text raise the proleptic spectre of the posthuman as characterising the imagined end-point, this generates a posthuman imperative to reinterpretation which inflects the process of reorientation for being-in-the-middest.

To understand what I mean by a posthuman imperative, and why the possibility of the posthuman would have implications for reinterpretation of being-in-the-middest, the contested concept of the posthuman must be clarified. The preliminary formulation of the concept in this introduction is necessary in order to proceed, though it will also be refined in conversation with my primary texts in subsequent chapters of the thesis. The posthuman, as well as the distinct, yet not always clearly distinguished, concept of posthumanism, has been the topic of contemporary debates in literary theory, philosophy, and several other disciplines. Major sources which weigh in on these debates include, but are not limited to: Haraway's "A Cyborg Manifesto" (1985), Spanos' *End of Education: Toward Posthumanism* (1992), Hayles' *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics* (1999), Fukuyama's *Our Posthuman Future: Consequences of the Biotechnology Revolution* (2002), Wolfe's *What is Posthumanism?* (2009), Braidotti's *The Posthuman* (2013), Dobrin's *Writing Posthumanism, Posthuman Writing* (2015) and Thomsen and Wamberg's "The Posthuman in the Anthropocene: A Look through the Aesthetic Field" (2017). Much of the pertinence of my study rests upon the salience of this rich and yet still-contested ground in literary theory.

For now, I take as preliminary the general description of this concept given by Thomsen and Wamberg, which distinguishes stronger and weaker conceptions of the posthuman. Stronger conceptions involve the encroachment of the destructive conditions produced by the human in the technological and environmental Anthropocene into the “last pocket of left-over virginal nature, the inner continent of the human body,” so that there is a decisive rupture between those beings identified as anatomically human, and the beings which replace them or which they become, so that the latter are not recognisable as the same category of beings as the former (4). Though Thomsen and Wamberg articulate this conception in terms of a transition of embodiment, the most complete version of such a decisive encroachment would be one in which there are no remaining beings to which any line of biological continuity from the human may be traced. Both the possibilities of radical transition and total demise are relevant to the texts discussed in this thesis.

Thomsen and Wamberg also articulate a “weaker” version of the posthuman, which “concerns drastic changes of the living conditions of humans who, although anatomically alike by birth, have become totally dependent on technology and consider themselves seriously handicapped without it: prolonged life spans, and thinking, memorizing, sensing and moving abilities enhanced through drugs and intra-corporeal micro-technologies, or just through extra-corporeal extensions to a pervasive internet of things, which thereby become part of a now thoroughly porous body” (4-5). This “weaker” conception of the posthuman reveals that the boundaries of the human can become troubled, or be revealed as already troubled, long before embodiment is altered in an obvious way, by potential means which are inestimably diverse and not always physically tangible.

An important, theoretically distinctive aspect of my work, which will be supported and developed in the course of this thesis, is that, where both the strong and weak versions of the posthuman enunciated by Thomsen and Wamberg emphasise embodiment and technology – and I do give significant attention to these elements – I also broaden the range of environmental factors in consideration to include cultural practices of meaning-making through particular forms of discourse (Badmington 17-18), language games, and interpretive structures, which are not fully ignored but less emphasised in Thomsen and Wamberg’s article. Additionally, I shift my focus to the broader notion of being which is implied in their description of weaker

conceptions of the posthuman; a notion which includes but is not limited to physical embodiment and the incorporation of genetic, mechanical and information technologies. This is not a novel recognition in my work, and here something is owed to Hayles, who recognises the posthuman and posthumanism as incorporating “both the material and the discursive” (Dönmez 105-106), and Nayar, whose interest in posthuman possibilities includes “questioning of the meaning of being human,” which is often tied to notions of “rationality, autonomy, and linguistic ability” (Dönmez 112-113). Likewise, Wolfe commits to an approach that focusses not only upon “a thematics of the decentering of the human in relation to either evolutionary, ecological, or technological coordinates [,but also upon] how thinking confronts that thematics, what thought has to become in the face of those challenges” (xvi). Finally, and most crucially, applying Kermode's ideas to this field, I construe the confrontation of the posthuman horizon as constituting a conceived end for the human being which reframes experience, and thereby generates a posthuman imperative towards reinterpretation of being-in-the-middest by reconfiguring narratives of origin and end, and reinflecting the present being which must narrativise itself in relation to these existential and imaginative coordinates.

While the notion of posthumanism is distinct from the posthuman, any extensive analysis of the human and the posthuman in modern literature will have to acknowledge at certain points the hegemony of the humanist paradigm for defining what is meaning by human. It is at this point that acknowledgement of posthumanist critique of humanism becomes relevant. Shifting for a moment, then, from the theoretical domain of the posthuman to that of posthumanism, I note the distinction outlined by Bart Simon between discourses of "popular posthumanism" and "critical posthumanism." The first category is comprised of discourses which imagine the future as a space of individuality, self-actualisation through the "transcendence of biological limits," and the potential for a liberating reinvention of the social order (2). This category has much in common with transhumanist discourses of the enhancement of the human through technology, which approaches a posthuman condition on the material level via the cyborg, without necessarily challenging the values of Renaissance humanism (Herbrechter “Education” 2; Wolfe xiii). The second category includes interdisciplinary discussions concerned with investigation of the underlying "techno-cultural forces" which both generate and challenge conceptions of the human as opposed to the nonhuman, transhuman or posthuman (Simon 2-3). It is also crucial to note that the mere fact of a particular text being a product of humanism or advancing humanist ideals does not preclude the possibility of

posthumanist discourses also being discernible in the text. Posthumanism does not merely supplant humanism, but rather engages it in complex ways. Indeed, Herbrechter has described posthumanism as “a kind of conceptual parasite that inhabits humanism itself and tries to bring it to address its own contradictions” (“Education” 1). Insofar as my analysis in this thesis overlaps with discourses of posthumanism, it is the critical posthumanist sphere of thought which is more relevant here, as will become evident over the course of this work.

The initial consideration of Cormac McCarthy's novel, *The Road*, at the beginning of this introduction is a sample of the kind of interpretation which is generative of my core problematic, as well as some of the attendant questions which it implies and necessitates, such as the extent to which a text portrays the interweaving of distinct temporalities. *The Road* is a post-apocalyptic novel, and one which makes use of strikingly distinctive language, which is often intentionally vague, sparse, even desolate, and yet also frequently charged with meaning. It is a text which portrays a wholly unravelled anthropocentric world, in which the protagonists are constantly brought into confrontation with the imminent possibility of their own deaths, as well as the passing away of all that is recognisably human, outside of one another, until the novel's conclusion, which is in a sense hopeful and yet deeply uncertain. It is also a text which is pervaded by lingering signifiers of that which came before, drawing upon textual artefacts and imagistically rich discourses to depict the protagonists struggling to orientate themselves meaningfully as beings in the midst, as they negotiate the tension between the dwindling echoes of a former world which is persistently evoked, but cannot be fully inhabited, and the impending posthuman future to which that former world gave birth, the harbingers of which already brutally impose themselves on the present. *The Road* is my foundational text. My theoretical framework ultimately emerges from my encounter with this twenty-first century novel and my desire to make sense of this encounter, and so the extent to which I can apply the same theoretical framework productively to the other texts in my selection will be the test of the scope and robustness of my approach. Before proceeding with the primary text selection, I shall first briefly note a few secondary sources which have been especially valuable in my engagement with *The Road*.

Thomas Carlson analyses the novel through an existential lens, shaped by Heideggerian notions such as *fürsorgen* and being-towards-death, in conversation with Augustine's views on love,



and on fallen being-in-the-world as leading to a kind of living death. Augustine and Martin Heidegger help the author to think through meaning, relationality, language, temporality and finitude in *The Road*. James Corby's article argues that the apocalyptic reconfigurations of world, culture, values and language in the text are produced through a process of what he calls "originary translation," with the boy functioning principally as hermeneus. This notion of originary translation becomes his key to understanding the struggle of the text as fundamentally one of interpretation. Kristjan Mavri explores the implications of linguistic representation in the post-apocalyptic context of *The Road* in relation to temporality, memory and meaning. He demonstrates how language by its very nature, even as it is changed and ruptured in response to the post-apocalypse, always serves to preserve something of what came before as remainder and reminder "after the end." His articulation of the paradoxes of writing the end is highly relevant to my work. Finally, Anthony Warde engages in a focused linguistic analysis of *The Road*, which concentrates especially on the use of the "doubly deictic you" and other characteristics of ambiguous address in the novel. Warde shows how ambiguous address in this novel achieves a disorienting effect, but also implicates the reader in strategic ways. This article, along with Mavri's, helps me to think of ways in which texts in certain literary genres have the potential to force the posthuman imperative to reinterpretation upon the readers through particular formal and linguistic strategies which produce an interpermeation of temporalities and contexts, including those of the reader and of the textual world before, at and 'after' the end.

Like *The Road*, Russell Hoban's *Riddley Walker* (1980) makes striking use of language in a way that is relevant to questions of origins, ends and the notion of a posthuman imperative, and yet it also differs from *The Road* in important respects. For these reasons, it lends itself to this study, allowing me to test the scope of the interpretive approach and concerns which have arisen from my encounter with *The Road*. *Riddley*, too, is a post-apocalyptic novel, which dramatises the relationship between word and world in the existential-interpretive process which arises in confrontation with the horizon of the posthuman. However, whereas *The Road* leaves the catalysing cataclysm unspecified, *Riddley* does reveal that a nuclear demise forms the precipitating past to the novel's present. We encounter a society in which the language has been stripped down to its rudiments, and yet its limited range of signifiers contains many words which are richly multivalent, and some which accrue new and increasingly esoteric meanings steadily over time, as concepts designated by identical or similar-sounding signifiers become

intermingled and inseminated with ever-emerging and multifarious meanings. It is also a society obsessed with theatre, ritual and liturgy; textual practices, the original meanings of which have evolved beyond recognition, but which implicitly hearken back to the world that came before the sacred, mythologised catastrophe which has become the cosmogeny of this new ontic *umwelt*.

It is in this context that a series of power struggles, which underlie a bizarre quest narrative, emerge, as various characters hubristically seek to regain the same destructive power that undid the world once before, in order that they need no longer compare themselves unfavourably to the lost glories of the imagined past. This novel, first published in 1980, reflects its Cold War context and the cultural anxieties of impending annihilation associated with that time. Of my five primary texts, this is arguably the one which is furthest from canonical status, even compared to McCarthy's much more recent novel, which has received a great deal of attention and acclaim, including within the academy. As such, the introduction of this text in conversation with the others enhances the potential for new insights to emerge from the side-by-side analysis of my selected material.

There are several interesting handlings of *Riddley*, although there remains much space for further inquiry, and none of the analyses I have encountered thus far have emphasised temporal phenomenology as mediated through language, as I do by way of Kermode, Heidegger and others. While I shall cite several other texts in dealing with *Riddley*, a number of which focus on language and signification, there are two which stand out as especially worthy of mention here. The first is Porter's "Three Quarks for Muster Mark:" Quantum Wordplay and Nuclear Discourse in Russell Hoban's *Riddley Walker*." This article begins from Heisenberg's considerations regarding the problems inherent in describing phenomena of quantum physics in language. It explores ways in which language in *Riddley* has been altered in response to the realities of nuclear power and the apocalyptic conditions of devastation which it has produced. The article includes the fascinating concept of "antilanguage," drawn from Michael A. K. Halliday's linguistics, which is applied to *Riddley* and *A Clockwork Orange*. I try to pursue some of Porter's points further, developing ideas concerning language games in the text, for example. Secondly, there is Gannon's "They Speak in Mangled 'Memberment': Miller's, Muir's, and Hoban's Recollective Journeys to the Edge of Incomprehensibility." This article

enables me to understand power struggles between characters within the text as conflicts between competing hermeneutic philosophies, though these are not explicitly formulated by the characters themselves.

To add further nuance and scope to the study, it makes sense to introduce texts from a genre which is distinct from the post-apocalyptic genre, and yet overlaps with it in crucial ways as noted earlier in this introduction: namely, the dystopian genre. It is partly for this reason that I include the paradigmatic dystopian novels, Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932), and George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949). Much has been written about these texts, in scholarly as well as popular circles. It is precisely for this reason, however, that these novels provide an opportunity to demonstrate the efficacy of an interpretive approach that reveals ways of thinking about even such classic texts which are in some way fresh. My focus is not only upon the posthuman as instantiated within a dystopian context, which is by no means a new approach in itself, but rather I also bring conceptions of the posthuman to bear on a framework of temporal phenomenology which draws from Kermode, Martin Heidegger and other such theoretical interlocutors. By means of such an approach, I shall be able to explore how these novels depict textual worlds in which beings have no authentic way to orientate themselves as beings in the midst, because of the very different ways in which the totalitarian states which rule these worlds distort past and future temporalities in order to dominate present experience and enforce a kind of posthuman reality, in which former ways of being human are no longer permissible or possible.

A distinctive, though not in itself new, feature of my work is an emphasis upon language as it functions to mediate being's phenomenal encounter with its possibilities and limits within the context of dystopian and post-apocalyptic fiction. As such, Beauchamp's analysis of language in dystopian literature is of great interest to me. Beauchamp discusses the need for a work of dystopian literature to convey a "future language" which reflects the realities of the future the work depicts (463). Beauchamp analyses Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* and George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* in this light. These are two of the three texts within my selection of primary texts for this thesis which I classify as dystopian. Beauchamp explains in a footnote that he intentionally omits *A Clockwork Orange* from his analysis, primarily because of asymmetries between the status and function of the future language in this novel and those

expressions of future language in the other two texts (475). I include it, because it displays a certain conception of human being that is being thrust into confrontation with its existential limits, and because language and textuality function as mediating this confrontation. Where my approach differs from Beauchamp's, other than the selection of texts, is that my analysis of the future languages within these textual worlds is guided by the concepts I have begun to elaborate above, so that language in my framework is specifically considered as a means of narrativisation and orientation in the face of some kind of limit or end.

Peery (2017) also deals with *Brave New World* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, albeit on a less sophisticated level, and with emphases less consonant with my own than those of Beauchamp. Peery additionally considers Yevgeny Zamyatin's *We*, a text to which the lens I develop in this thesis could certainly be applied with profit, but which I pass over in preferring a selection of texts that is balanced between dystopian and post-apocalyptic material, within the limited space and scope of this study. In my selection of dystopian texts, I have preferred Orwell's and Huxley's works for this particular study, because they have arguably been the more culturally influential texts since their publication, and yet there is much room left for them to be explored further in scholarship, through an approach that not only focusses on language, but also emphasises temporal phenomenology and epistemology.

For the Orwell novel, other than the secondary texts I have already mentioned, the most relevant secondary source has perhaps been Chilton's "Orwell, Language and Linguistics." This article uses theories from the field of linguistics in order to understand the relationship between Newspeak and Oldspeak, and to make sense of how Newspeak, and utopian or dystopian languages more generally, relate to social structures and cognitive frameworks. The author tries to draw linguistic, specifically sociolinguistic conclusions using linguistic methods, with Orwell's novel as a resource, and so this is not a literary analysis of the novel, but it is nonetheless relevant and interesting for some of my concerns in this thesis. My approach differs from Chilton's in the phenomenological approach I take, but also on a fundamental disciplinary level, since, though I do employ linguistic methods such as discursive analysis, my aim is to draw conclusions about the literary text itself and other texts more generally, rather than the sociolinguistic conclusions about the extra-textual world which Chilton pursues.

For *Brave New World*, along with Beauchamp and Peery, the most relevant secondary source which I have identified is Firchow's "The Satire of Huxley's *Brave New World*." Firchow recognises the novel as depicting a possible future in order to satirise the present of the original audience (451). This is consonant to some extent with the view I take of all the texts I have selected, especially the dystopian texts, in that the reader's own positionality in the midst, according to Kermode's logic, is inflected by the possible futures which these texts portray. Firchow is also concerned with the posthuman and posthumanism, seeing the textual world of Huxley's novel as one in which the humanist understanding of the individual is pushed beyond its limits through various technologies, in accordance with Thomsen and Wamberg's weaker conception of the posthuman. My approach to the novel has much in common with Firchow's but becomes distinctive through bringing Huxley's novel into conversation with my other primary texts, and introducing a range of other theoretical interlocutors, such as Kermode and Heidegger.

*A Clockwork Orange* by Anthony Burgess is a dystopian novel which depicts a degenerated future, influenced by the earlier period of the Cold War during which it was first published in 1962. Extreme, hedonistic violence and perversion reign in the streets, and we are introduced to this world through the protagonist, Alex, who is himself a perpetrator of appallingly vicious acts, making us as readers complicit in these acts. The youth of this society are hostile against their peers and elders, operating in roving criminal gangs, who express their opposition to established society through the use of an argot that signifies their alternative group allegiance: Nadsat, a blend of English, Russian, and several other languages, which lexically emphasises the phenomenality of experience, and sociolinguistically marks the user as belonging to the degenerate youth culture which opposes the stated values of the hegemonic society in which they find themselves. This argot however, may itself be a product of subliminal messaging and propaganda, and the youth culture is only another ideological herd swallowing individuals. This novel depicts the weight of determining social forces that threaten to crush individuality, and we witness Alex being subject to an experimental program designed to eliminate the capacity for socially unacceptable actions, but this program is only the most naked manifestation of a pervasive social determinism that drives him into conformity even after he is apparently liberated from his Pavlovian conditioning. *A Clockwork Orange* is significant for my purposes, because of its stark depiction of the undoing of the autonomous individual subject of humanism, and the positioning of language and other text-forms such as music and film as

weapons that hint at the possibility of resistance, but are ultimately the means for this very undoing. The novel also connects the reader to Alex in such a way that his fate is our potential fate, and his present is positioned as our possible future inheritance.

An analysis of *A Clockwork Orange* which is particularly relevant to my purposes is Goh's "‘Clockwork’ Language Reconsidered: Iconicity and Narrative in Anthony Burgess's *A Clockwork Orange*." This article focusses on the language of the text, as well as its narratological form. Goh reads the text as an account of the demise of the authentic individual in the face of deterministic socialising systems which operate within language itself. He concludes that any limited trace of authentic individuality which remains by the end of the novel is constrained to linguistic inventiveness, which the novel has persistently associated with criminality and violence. For Goh, the novel depicts a dilemma in which the alternatives are to exist in moral transgression or to subsist in amoral conformity with deterministic structures. Another relevant text concerning this novel is Sumner's "Humanist Drama in *A Clockwork Orange*." In this article, Sumner draws connections between the protagonist's struggle for individuality in an oppressive and deterministic social context, and the threats which such a dehumanising society poses for the very literary form of the novel itself. Sumner's work exemplifies the kind of metatextual thinking about the relations of word and world which I try to practise in my own analysis.

The core proposal which these primary texts seem to suggest regarding the significance of the posthuman within dystopian and post-apocalyptic literature, which I shall articulate and develop in relation to the texts discussed in this thesis, is the following: confronting the posthuman possibility in literature, both for fictive beings within the text and the reading audience outside it, generates an imperative to reframe and reinterpret the meaning of a present location and orientation by evoking a novel conception of a possible terminus, thus recontextualising our present mode of being and trajectory. This in turn necessitates a renarrativisation and remythologisation of the being's relation to end and origin, in order to allow for reorientation as beings in the midst by establishing coordinates for sense-making in relation to imagined past and future points. This is the overall contention which I aim to elucidate and defend in this thesis, and in doing so, I also aim to explore and clarify the myriad

ways in which this meaning-making process in the face of the end is enacted, expressed and represented through language.

There are many more particular questions which emerge out of my overall contention and problem statement. I shall briefly present several such research questions here, although this exercise will be far from exhaustive. Firstly, how are particular kinds of linguistic acts and artefacts in the texts used to imaginatively construct and represent origins and endings, and to dis/orientate the characters and the reader in relation to them? Each of these texts makes use of language that is to some extent peculiar, and each of them is replete with texts within the text, including songs, poems, rituals, letters, books, and many other such artefacts. It is therefore reasonable to suppose that there may be some connections between these intriguing linguistic and textual forms on the one hand, and the manner in which the texts attempt to evoke possible fictions of origin and end, and to orientate characters within the text and readers of the text in relation to these imaginings on the other hand. It will be an aim of this work to identify and explore such connections. There are several distinct and yet closely related questions by which this line of inquiry may then be pursued further. Why, for instance, would extension or alteration of the representative medium of language occur in the context of the posthuman imperative towards existential reinterpretation which I have begun to articulate? To answer this question requires investigation as to whether the linguistic abnormalities intrinsic to the textual worlds emerge in response to the conditions of those worlds, as a way of negotiating existence in the face of those conditions.

Also similar to this kind of thinking are two opposite sides of the same question. On the one hand, to what extent does the posthuman impose constraints upon the language of narration and expression within the textual world? Simply put, if an author is going to write a novel in which posthuman possibilities are to be explored, does acting in accordance with that intention limit the kinds of language that the author may elect to use, either in the narratorial voice or in the voices of characters within the world? Conversely, to what extent do certain linguistic shifts within the textual world function to construct and reinforce precisely those elements of the represented universe which produce the posthuman imperative? Again, to restate this side of the question differently, are there certain linguistic choices which an author makes, either in

describing a textual world or in providing a language for use within that world, which result in that world already becoming a posthuman one?

On a more fundamental level, how can language invoke a posthuman world? Can it, or does the posthuman perhaps bring language into confrontation with its own limits? Here it must be considered whether there is a paradox at play, wherein the extent to which an imagined posthuman world can be represented in comprehensible language is the extent to which it falls short of truly being posthuman. In this regard, is there a way in which the posthuman challenges the very premises of narrative itself? To ask a similar question of the Heideggerian phenomenology which also informs my analysis, what happens to Dasein's being-towards-death in the apocalyptic context? It is not clear whether authentic being-towards-death, or even Dasein's self-apprehension as a being-as-a-whole could be understood along the same lines under such conditions or not. Another potential paradox to be investigated is whether the framework of temporal phenomenology in narrativisation which I am taking from Kermode may not be frustrated, consigning the being to inescapable tension and anxiety if ever a genuinely posthuman future were to be authentically confronted as the imagined terminus, and indeed whether one can speak coherently of imagining such a state at all.

Finally, given that temporal states within narrative wholes necessarily interpermeate one another, how is language used to link disparate temporalities in the texts, and how do these temporalities inflect one another? It can be investigated whether the text tries to erect boundaries between origin, end and being-in-the-middest, or whether the mutual reconstitution and reinflection of each of these temporalities by the others is embraced by the text. It is inevitable that origins and in particular, endings, will perform essential functions in any literary text, and these functions can be explored on the phenomenological level by examining depictions of being within the text, but also on the narratological level by exploring the form of the text itself.

Having given an initial presentation of my core problematic and attending research questions, I may now say something about two other theoretical interlocutors yet to be mentioned, by way of whose work I intend to pursue this problematic and wrestle with these questions. Related to



the theoretical domain of the posthuman and the apocalypse is Dawid de Villiers' study of the "last man" motif in the literature of the Romantics. My work shares with this article an interest in literary depictions of a human individual or group confronting the passing away of their world or the existence of their kind, as well as the recognition that such a literary apocalypse is usually a radical rupture and reconfiguration of valence, which simultaneously constitutes a "generative turn" rather than an absolute end (27). Indeed, as Warren Wagar notes, the fulfilment of the notion of Apocalypse in its truest sense must be at once the end of the world and the origin of a new one (11). I also take from de Villiers' article the notion that the posthuman dimension of a text may be encountered as a "spectre" of an imminent reality rather than one that is actually depicted as already realised within the text (31). The last key point from this article which I wish to note here, in order to communicate some of the essentials of my preliminary theoretical framework, is the observation that, as long as even a single human remains in the textual world, there is no "actual" end (36-37). This aligns with the key theoretical conceptions which I take from Kermode, including that the end can only be known and encountered as possibility, by means of narrative. My concern then, is not primarily with representations of absolute ends as ends in themselves, but rather with literary depictions of being "in the shadow of the end" (de Villiers 37).

Another important theoretical interlocutor, when considering beings in confrontation with the possibility of their end or limit, is Martin Heidegger. Heidegger's notion of death as that which makes *Dasein* intelligible as a whole, and his descriptions of authentic and inauthentic modes of being-towards-death, are especially relevant to my study (Heidegger 283-284, 310-311 etc.). Heidegger's notion of being-towards death is consonant with Frank Kermode's description of being-in-the-middest depending upon an origin and end point if it is to have an intelligible structure. Heidegger's work is also compatible with Kermode's distinction between the end as imminent and the end as immanent, as Heidegger views death as a possibility which one must stand in relationship with, even when one has no reason to suppose that death is imminent. McFadden (2015) has applied Heidegger's concepts to apocalyptic cinema, and thus his contribution is relevant and noteworthy as well.

The logic of my chapter divisions is such that, having laid some essential groundwork here, I first analyse the two post-apocalyptic novels together, then the three dystopian novels, and

finally all five together. This allows the distinctiveness of each genre to be appreciated before culminating my analysis with a chapter involving all five texts, which will demonstrate that the interpretive approach I take is valid and productive for both of these genres. It will also be valuable for enabling the apprehension of new commonalities as well as distinctives between texts. In the following chapter of this thesis, called “The Posthuman and the Post-Apocalypse: *The Road* and *Riddley Walker*” I consider the productivity of my working understanding of the posthuman applied to these texts. In particular, I am interested in the language of these texts, and how linguistic forms represented in, and instantiated by, these texts function in relation to the posthuman. Why would extension and alteration of the representative medium of language be necessary in the context of the posthuman imperative? To what extent does the posthuman impose constraints upon the language of narration and expression within the textual world? Conversely, to what extent do certain linguistic shifts within the textual world function to construct and reinforce precisely those elements of the represented universe which produce the posthuman imperative? How does language constitute a posthuman world? Can it, or does the posthuman perhaps bring language into confrontation with its own limits, especially given that language is so thoroughly entangled with our understanding of what it means to be human? I consider these questions in light of the construction through language of particular imaginings of that which came before and that which is to come in these fictional worlds. I examine this process of construction, and the process of interpretation and orientation which arises from it, in terms of a language game of religious phenomenology, as well as temporal phenomenology and the peculiar narratorial and linguistic features of the text.

Thereafter, in a chapter called "Linguistic Dystopias: *Brave New World*, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and *A Clockwork Orange*," I consider how language functions in those of my primary texts which fit more comfortably under the heading of dystopia than that of the post-apocalypse; namely, Huxley's *Brave New World*, Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and Burgess' *A Clockwork Orange*. How do particular linguistic forms play a causative role in the construction of dystopia, both within the textual worlds and at the level of the text itself? Conversely, how do dystopian conditions impel shifts in linguistic expression? What is the relation between dystopia and the posthuman imperative, and how should this inflect our reading of these texts?

The dystopian texts are particularly interesting in terms of how they position the reader in relation to the imperative for existential reinterpretation generated by the conceptualisation of the alternative futures which they signify. I investigate how the figure of the 'last man' emerges in these texts invoking the notion of the posthuman in these texts which are not apocalyptic in the obvious sense, and yet very much depict the confrontation by the human subject of its own limitations and the possibility of its ultimate passing away. This confrontation is mediated by the use of particular linguistic forms, as well as attempts to engage in ideological, narrative, religious, mythical and ritualistic discourses in order to orientate being in relation to that which came before and the end that is to come. Yet, in *Brave New World* in particular, the conditions required for the very possibility of narrative and being in relation to temporality are brought into question.

Finally, in my last analytic chapter called "Narrative and the End," I propose to draw upon the analyses in the previous chapters, and to use all five of my primary texts, in order to develop an understanding of how each of these texts represents the process of orientation and reorientation in relation to origins and ends, in light of the posthuman imperative to do so. How does each of these texts reveal to us a world haunted by that which came before, and how do characters in the texts mediate their relation to that actual or imagined past through language? Conversely, how is each of these texts shaped by the notion of an end, and how is being-towards-the-end represented in the texts and manifested in language? How do different temporalities in the text permeate and inflect one another? Finally, what formal functions do beginnings and endings fulfil in the texts, and how are these functions perhaps complicated, at least in some of the texts, by the posthuman?

In this final analytical chapter, I am able to demonstrate the consistent productivity with which my understanding of the posthuman imperative can be applied to both post-apocalyptic and dystopian literary works, while recognising the distinctive elements of these genres, and in doing so, I am able to draw implications for theoretical understandings of the posthuman more generally, as applicable to literature. In concluding my thesis, I shall also point to potential directions for future studies, to which end the approach employed in this thesis may serve valuably.

## **The Posthuman and the Post-Apocalypse: *The Road* and *Riddley Walker***

In the following chapter, I shall apply my working understanding of the posthuman and its implications for a narrativised process of existential reconfiguration in literature to *The Road* and *Riddley Walker*. To the extent that the proleptic spectre of the posthuman, as I have begun to articulate it in this work, incites such a process of reconfiguration, I conceptualise it as the posthuman imperative. It is the applicability of this notion of the posthuman imperative to these novels which is my primary theoretical interest in this chapter. These texts are especially generative in that they both present what is in some sense a lost, post-apocalyptic world, and depict the struggle of characters to make sense of their reality with reference to narrativised imaginings of origin and end, and both texts make use of distinctive linguistic forms and narratological devices to situate and dramatise that struggle. I shall begin by exploring formal, narratological and linguistic devices within the texts which undermine the coherent, autonomous individual subjectivity and stable objectivity of meaning championed by humanism, thus showing how the response to the posthuman imperative in these texts involves a reconfiguration of notions of self which troubles particular notions of the human. I shall then turn to the ethical and evaluative dimensions of the reinterpretive process I have been describing, considering how frameworks of value and progress are reinflected, and sometimes upended entirely, in the face of the revelatory potential of the end. From there, questions of value lead me to a discussion of the manifold religious allusions and images in both texts, which suggest a reaching out towards the transcendent, which is uncertain, relational, and profoundly ambiguous. Among the religious allusions in both novels are genesis narratives, which are situated in relation to possibilities of end, and it is with reference to these narratives of origin and end that being-in-the-middest is revealed as being-as-loss, as the human carries along with itself at every step of the way the immanent potentiality of the posthuman.

*The Road* has a number of distinctive formal features, many of which will immediately impress themselves upon the reader. There is the absence of chapter headings, minimal punctuation, lack of quotation marks and reporting clauses to clearly to distinguish the narratorial voice from the voices of characters, and the voices of characters from each other, as well as the complete absence of named characters apart from Ely, whose name is a pseudonym (McCarthy

182). These features contribute towards a sense of alienation and disorientation as readers are confronted with a textual world that is desolate and shorn of conventional reference points. This sense is enhanced by the marked vagueness about places and times in the text, which subjects the reader to the same disorientation that the protagonists face. The days that pass “uncounted and uncalendared” (292), and the boy's perplexity when the man attempts to explain a map and the notion of states to him when “there's not any more states” (43), illustrate the obsolescence of conventions by which time and space may be measured and interpreted as comprising a stable, intelligible arena for human action. At the same time, the calculated ambiguity of the text creates a vacuum which pulls the reader into this disorientating world.

Another key feature of *The Road* which we may situate at the formal level is the narratological unconventionality of the text. We have a third-person narrative focalised through a protagonist, the man, until the boy becomes the focaliser in the concluding pages after the man's death, and finally we arrive at the closing passage, which leaves the reader uncertain as to the perspective from which it emerges. However, because of some of the textual characteristics mentioned in the paragraph above, it is often difficult, and sometimes impossible, to discern with certainty which subjective perspective a particular statement is coming from: whether from inside the story or outside it; whether from the narrative present, a remembered viewpoint or a projected one. This contributes subtly to an undermining of the boundaries of individual subjectivity, and a shift towards a more dislocated and porous notion of self, as the limits of the self as such are confronted in the apocalyptic setting. Consider the following excerpt:

He stood in the doorway to his room. A small space under the eaves. This is where I used to sleep. My cot was against this wall. In the nights in their thousands to dream the dreams of a child's imaginings, worlds rich or fearful such as might offer themselves but never the one to be. He pushed open the closet door half expecting to find his childhood things. Raw cold daylight fell through from the roof. Gray as his heart (McCarthy 26-27).

In this example, the embedding of Free Indirect Discourse within narration creates indeterminacy of interpretation as to when descriptions reflect the man's perspective on his own past in relation to his present condition, and when the perspective belongs to the narrator (Warde 338-339). The first sentence is clearly narrated in the third person, focalised through the man, as most of the novel is. The second ‘sentence’ – really a phrase rather than a sentence

– cannot be assigned distinctly to the narrator or the man, but we might initially presume that the narratorial voice is preserved. The third and fourth sentences are clearly the man's. The fifth, also fragmentary, is in an indeterminate voice, and could be the man's own reflection or the narrator's reflection upon the man's past. The third-person focalised narration certainly returns for the sixth and seventh sentences, but the concluding phrase is again dislocated to some degree. The voice is in the third person, but is the description drawn from the perspective of the narrator, or the man? Whether the man perceives his own heart as "gray," or whether the narrator is asserting this as a true description, or both, is unclear. The impression is created in the mind of the reader that the man's will and affectivity are drained of their vitality, but the reader will need to continue observing the man in order to conclude whether this is an impression he has of himself, and whether the novel asserts this assessment as true or not. This is only one example in *The Road* where perspectival lines are blurred, and these textual phenomena are indicative of the fragility of human subjectivity in the face of a world which humans are no longer able to claim as their own. In places such as this, *The Road* raises impressions without always distinctly anchoring them to a stable perspective, because the world of the text is one in which the notion of perspective, and the possibility of an authoritative human perspective, is being challenged. Given the centrality of the autonomous subjectivity of the individual to the humanist conception of humanity (Dönmez 112-113), we can observe that the formal features of *The Road* hint at the dawning of a posthuman condition, or at least imply a posthumanist critique in which the essence of the human must be reinterpreted within this post-apocalyptic context.

There are also instances within the text of *Riddley Walker* which seem to undermine the legitimacy of individualist subjectivity, which is at the core of the humanist conception of the human being. For example, Lissener, one of the genetically deformed Eusa folk who are treated as scapegoats for the apocalyptic disaster which struck Riddley's world, describes his "gathering dream," in which there is no individuation or particularity of perspective, but simply common participation in Being: "No mor edge where you leave off and the nex begins jus all of us as far as you can see with all the eyes of us it dont matter whose eyes youre looking out of you don't nead none of your oan" (Hoban 184-185). While Riddley intimates that this dream is not known in his own community, it constitutes a moment in this text where the possibility of being apart from individual subjectivity is raised, as something which is a phenomenological potentiality for characters, if only in dreams. There is still some presupposed "you" present in this dream, which reveals the paradoxicality of attempting to describe being beyond individual

subjectivity in language, but the boundaries of this “you” are clearly being undermined. This ties into some other ways that *Riddley Walker* as a novel, and Riddley as a protagonist, challenge the humanist assumption of the heroic autonomous individual.

Also discernible in *Riddley* is a strange, pervading sense of inexorability that attends many events and actions, further pressing on humanist assumptions of individual autonomy and the presumed basis of narrative in heroic agency. For example, Orfing, the “Wes Mincer,” suggesting Westminster Abbey while denoting a deputy Prime-ministerial position, insists to “Big Man” Flinter that, had the “1 Littl 1” not killed Goodparley, something else would have, as it was “his time and come” (396). Orfing also asserts in this conversation that Rightway Flinter will “do what [he is] progammit to” (399). Even Eusa proclaims that the nuclear Fall which precipitated “bad time,” and for which he is at least partly responsible, was inevitable and would have been caused by someone else if not by him (108). Moreover, there is the persistent sense in the novel that Riddley’s movements are governed by forces which he cannot articulate. He seems to be driven on from place to place, shifting from alliance to alliance, often with no clearly articulated goal or justification. Where there is a justification, it is seldom anything other than following paths based on interpretation of received texts, such as the “Fools Circel” game (370). Riddley is thus very different from the privileged protagonist of humanism, who expresses subjective agency by forming and articulating goals and intentions justified by some combination of self-interest and altruism and then pursuing them. Where Riddley does exhibit creative agency, it is not through triumph of will over forces beyond himself, but rather through the cultivation of an interiority that is engaged with the struggle between competing imaginative interpretations of a reality that is thrust upon him; into which he is thrown.

The very ending of the novel, including the Riddley Walker song and Riddley’s commentary on it, suggests Riddley’s acceptance of the mysterious and the inexorable, rather than an assertion of heroic autonomy (414-415). After leaving the concluding Punch and Pooty show, a child begins to sing a song about “Riddley Walkers track.” Riddley begins to reflect on the limits of his knowledge, firstly with reference to the song and then more broadly, as he admits that he does not know how the child heard of Drop John, what prompted him to sing the song, why Riddley himself did not ask these questions of the child, why the Punch character is “crookit,” and why Punch will always “kil the babby if he can” in the shows. Riddley finally concludes “Parbly I wont never know its jus on me to think on it,” accepting the limits of his understanding of self and world in the face of the inexorable, while retaining in tension with

this acceptance a sense of responsibility, not to know, but to think and wrestle with his reality. His final words in the novel are “Stil I wunt have no other track” (415), and the ambiguity of these words is consonant with his uneasy fit into the mould of the agentive hero of the traditional bildungsroman, denoting either that he would not desire his life’s course to be different, or that it could not be different, or perhaps both. The novel here leaves off with no real conclusion, apart from the fact that his community has begun to tell a rediscovered, reinflected, though still fragmentary and ambiguous story to make sense of their reality, and Riddley will continue his course through this unravelled world without any particular sense of mission or resolution.

Where *Riddley* presses against conventional notions of protagonist and plot, *The Road*, perhaps even more radically, does not have a plot in the ordinary sense. It begins in medias res, and the characters have no overarching goals that could drive them towards a denouement. The motif of journey is central to the novel, and yet the traditional significance of this motif is brutally undermined. Michael Titlestad notes that,

Far from the ideals of freedom, self-discovery, even manifest destiny, “the road” has become a site of diminution, on which survival is the best one can hope for. Traveling has become detached from any higher purpose – it is motivated by the inexorable need to keep moving. The “coast” and “warmth,” which might seem to give some shape to the journey, prove chimerical, false promises in this monochrome world which is uniformly obliterated (95).

Titlestad’s analysis here captures the novel’s structural undermining of the preconditions for plot in its traditional sense of narratological development in relation to a goal, as well as its dramatic destabilising of the presuppositions which underly such a vision of development or progression. When the man and the boy accomplish their provisional goal of arriving at the sea, it is described as “senseless,” and a “vast salt sepulchre” (McCarthy 237). In this anticlimactic scene, the desolation of the sea suggests the emptiness of the accomplishment of arriving there. The man’s earlier perplexed response to the boy’s contextually absurd question about “long-term goals” now resonates deeply with the reader (170-171). The world of *The Road* is one in which there is nothing to aim at or orient oneself by, and therefore nothing towards which to progress.

This not only undermines the capacity of readers and the protagonists themselves to conceive



of their journey as one with any meaningful plot, but also renders plot as such impossible. Brooks explains that “[p]lots are not simply organizing structures, they are also intentional structures, goal-oriented and forward-moving” (12), and that “only the end can finally determine meaning, close the sentence as a signifying totality” (22). If there is no end, in the sense not only of a stopping point, but of a concluding point which defines the trajectory of all that precedes it, then there may be actions and events, but there is no narrative progress or trajectory as such to speak of at all, and indeed there is no narrative in the proper sense. These underlying principles are reflected in the narratological form of *The Road* as, though the novel comes to an end in the sense of stopping, there is no formal ending in the sense of a resolution or denouement in the text. Where there are hints of existence made meaningful and intelligible in the text, this is not in relation to an achievable teleological end which frames their journey, but rather a product of their posture towards an apocalyptic end which is not merely imminent, but also immanent as the possibility which confronts them and shapes their experience at every step (Kermode 24-26). For Kermode, “it is not merely the remnant of time that has eschatological import; the whole of history, and the progress of the individual life, have it also, as a benefaction from the End, now immanent” (25). When post-apocalyptic conditions necessitate the confrontation of the end as immanent, to the extent that this confrontation and the attending posthuman imperative are responded to positively by embarking upon the process of existential reinterpretation, the apocalypse is manifested not merely as imminent terminus, but rather in its Biblical sense as revelation.

Confrontation with the end as immanent is the only possible answer to Riddley’s existential problem: “you never wil get to see the woal of any thing youre all ways in the middl of it living it or moving thru it” (Hoban 353). In the face of this reality, the only way to make meaning is to recognise, as Punch asserts, that “[t]he end cud be any part of the way its in every step of the way thats why you bes go ballsy;” to courageously confront the end as immanent possibility through narratives (327). One of the major uses of texts and language in Hoban's novel is in seeking existential coordinates in relation to unknowable origins and ends, by producing fictions of past and future to stand in for those temporal coordinates which are inaccessible to contemporary experience in the midst. Thus, epistemological limitations force meaning-making to be subject to reconfiguration, but do not preclude it. Where there is no teleological end to be discovered, aimed at and arrived at, existence can only be intelligible as a whole in a narrative sense when an end is imagined, not only as something extrinsic to the being, but as something always carried along, already belonging to them as possibility, as yet unrealised.

The post-nuclear-apocalyptic conditions which give rise to the imperative to reinterpret being-in-the-middest in relation to conceptions of an imminent or immanent end in *Riddley* are reflected in the language of this novel, and it is by means of language that characters negotiate their being in relation to visions of origin and end. The language of *Riddley*, *prima facie*, appears to be a language stripped to its rudiments, in response to a world impoverished by nuclear devastation and the consequent loss of technology and cultural vocabulary. The lexicon is sparse, and the syntax is simple. Yet, when considered *ultima facie*, Riddleyspeak is as semantically rich as it is lexically impoverished (Gannon 31; Schwenger 254). For example, Eusa's name emerges as a corruption of St. Eustace, but the corrupted form takes on a significant association with the USA, the first nuclear superpower, which the original name lacks (Gannon 32-33). The "Hart of the Wood," later rendered as the "Heart of the Wud," is another such example of reach and complex meaning, subject to multiple interpretations, emerging from rudimentary language. These homophonous concepts are blurred together, and variously signify a pile of smouldering charcoal, a mystical stag between whose antlers the Little Shynin Man is stretched out in a Christ-like image, and the origin of human desire, the "hart of the wanting to be" (Schwenger 256-257; Hoban 314).

While listening to Goodparley's ridiculous exegetical lecture on the legend of St. Eustace, Riddley laments the lack of a stable, one-to-one relationship between signifiers and referents, complaining that "[h]e were talking so many levills at 1ce I dint all ways know what he meant realy I just wisht every thing wud mean jus only 1 thing and keap on meaning it not changing all the time" (Hoban 278). This is precisely what is revealed as an impossibility in this novel. Words, names, and the texts which are constructed from them, come in and out of existence, lose their original meanings and take on new, multiple and shifting denotations and connotations, and are subject to myriad competing and complementary interpretations. This is revealed constantly throughout this novel, in which various texts and concepts, such as the Eusa legend and the legend of St. Eustace, which is one of its sources, are continuously being interpreted, misinterpreted and reinterpreted. Texts emerge in this novel as sites of struggle and sources of meaning and understanding in confrontation with the past, the future, and the present which trembles between them.

One dimension of the process of reinterpretation and reorientation in response to the posthuman imperative to which I have been referring is the ethical dimension. The apocalyptic disruption

and disfiguration of the world of *The Road* has produced a general obsolescence of universal moral conventions, so that the “good” and “bad guys” are primarily distinguished based on whether or not they are willing to go to the extent of cannibalism in order to survive (McCarthy 136). In the face of this moral tragedy, the boy is especially anxious to maintain the sanctity of moral absolutes, constantly seeking his father's cooperation in a narrative of self in which they are interpreted as “the good guys” (81, 134-136). When this narrative is challenged by the world of experience, sufficient justification must be found, either in the experienced world itself or in imagination, to maintain the narrative of the “good guys.” For instance, the boy seeks confirmation that they are still the good guys, after the man kills the roadagent early in the novel to save the boy (81), and again after they do not attempt to save a group of captives from their cannibal captors (134-135). These choices are justified in terms of the clear absence of alternatives for self-preservation: they lack the capacity to do otherwise without causing their own deaths and one another's.

Where an empirically verifiable justification is not available, however, an imagined one is needed. Such is the case when the man and boy convince themselves that there can be no living rightful owners of the supplies they have taken from the apparently abandoned ship, since, if the people were alive, the good guys would not have taken the supplies (259). Their conclusion may be true, but because of their need, they have had to arrive at it through a priori, even question-begging reasoning. Their reasoning takes their own position as the “good guys” as axiomatic, rather than acknowledging that they may be privileging their own interests over those of others. Similarly, the man reverses his own stated opinion on whether there could be people living elsewhere on another planet or in an alternative world, because it becomes clear that the boy needs to have this possible world affirmed in order to make sense of their continued struggle for survival and the value of their good-guy-hood (260-261). Samuel Scheffler has argued that human beings, even when facing their own imminent death, can justify working and sacrificing for an aim that might be realised through the continued survival of others; a hope grounded in a kind of afterlife, even within a secular framework (76). Yet, for the man and the boy, even the “collective afterlife” to which Scheffler refers cannot be taken for granted. If hope is to be grounded then, it must be grounded in a leap of faith, by the choice to tell a story in which there is an elsewhere, where the fire might always be carried by the good guys, even after the man and the boy die. Therefore, judgements about objective reality are relativised in order that the standards of meaning and morality which they affirm may remain enshrined

as absolute. This reveals the importance of storytelling and imagination for continued sense-making in the face of the spectre of the posthuman.

Far from undermining the legitimacy of this moral storytelling, however, the novel seems to finally vindicate it when the man on his deathbed tells the boy “You're the best guy. You always were” (McCarthy 298). Even as the man’s presence as focalised moral storyteller in the novel is brought to an end, he maintains, and McCarthy does nothing to undermine, their status as good guys. Moreover, the man confers upon his son the preeminent title of “best guy,” and affirms that this has always been a legitimate descriptor of the boy, who has been the initiator of their acts of compassion towards others, and the more zealous of the two for the narrative of carrying the fire. Indeed, it may be precisely this kind of storytelling which is the precondition for moral truth in the novel. If there is any sense in which the man and the boy really do act as “good guys,” the difference between them and those who have dispensed with any moral standards whatsoever, is founded upon the noble fictions they generate and fiercely maintain. They demonstrate self-sacrificial love for one another, as the man frequently gives his son larger portions of their sparse provisions, despite the boy’s protests (34), and the boy insists on remaining with and caring for his dying father (296-301). The boy also takes every small opportunity to offer help to others, and while the man is more reluctant, he sometimes permits this, demonstrating his compassion for his son and, at least indirectly, for others (174-175, 274-277). By contrast, those who fail to engage in a story about goodness are no longer intelligible as moral agents, except as agents of evil through the lens of those who do engage. Even systematic sex slavery, infanticide and cannibalism are not beyond them (96, 211-212) The “bad guys” in the novel are those who have accepted the apocalyptic invitation into a post-moral universe by declining to take on an alternative story for themselves.

The posthuman imperative to reinterpret being-in-the-middest as reconfigured in relation to narratives of origin and end naturally implies a revaluation of values, not only in the moral sphere, but also in the wider sense of that which is valued. That *The Road* depicts precisely such a revaluation in light of the posthuman imperative is apparent, for example, in the man’s experience when paging through a book from the ruined library he discovers: “He'd not have thought the value of the smallest thing predicated on a world to come” (199). As argued by Scheffler, confrontation with the “imminent end of humanity as such” brings about “widespread apathy, anomie and despair [...] erosion of social institutions and social solidarity [...] deterioration of the physical environment [and] pervasive loss of conviction about the

value or point of many activities” (40). The devaluation of instrumental goods which depend upon discourses of progress, success and affluence is a major motif in the novel. The ruin of the interstate, that powerful symbol of American ingenuity, idealism and progress, is congruent with abandoned, now-useless cars, trucks, trains and ships in the novel (11, 45, 189, 239). Stores are looted for food and clothing, but expensive technological equipment is left on the shelves, no longer even worth stealing (195). This is a powerful indicator of a deep shift in values brought about by the novel's unspecified apocalypse.

Such things as money and technological devices have an instrumental value, insofar as they function as means towards ends that may be obtained at some future time. In the face of the ultimate possibility of an absolute end, beyond which no teleological ends may be conceived that would validate such instrumental goods, the instrumental value of these means ceases to be value at all. The end confronted in this novel is indeed an apocalypse in the proper sense of revelation, in that it exposes the degree to which goods may be endowed with a more enduring and fundamental value, or to which their value depends upon artificial discourses which have no transcendent underpinnings, and which are rendered obsolete in the face of the end. Of course, the man and the boy do seek instrumental goods, such as food and other means of sustaining their lives, but it becomes increasingly clear that these are only inscribed with value insofar as they maintain the possibility of experiencing the more fundamental value of the continued relationship of father and son, and the continued carrying of “the fire” (McCarthy 87, 136, 298, 303). They are not justified with reference to conventional capitalist conceptions of progress or success, but rather as means to further relational and narrative meaning-making. Part of what this novel is, is an investigation into what can and cannot retain value when there is no world left to come. If there is value to be pursued in the vanishing world of *The Road*, it must approach the condition of intrinsic value.

An especially powerful image in the text, related to questions of progress and value, is the abandoned ship, named *Pájaro de Esperanza*, or “bird of hope,” which has drifted its way to the American coast, unoccupied and undirected, on its “aimless voyagings” (244). The use of the word “aimless” here reveals something about progress and value. Progress can only be understood in relation to some reference point. Its value is not transcendent, but extrinsic in that it is a measure of increasing proximity to some valued end point. Therefore, progress is one of those values which is “predicated on a world to come,” and rendered absurd when placed in confrontation with the end beyond which no ideal can be posited. When the end as terminus

undermines the possibility of an end as telos, progress becomes devoid of aim, and thus ceases to be progress at all. A related, but especially ironic image in the novel is that of the road itself. The centrality of roads, especially in American fiction, as prototypical symbols of progress towards ideals, particularly the ideal of material wellbeing, enhances the gravity of the existential blow which *The Road* strikes in exposing the fragility of apparently sacred ideals and the symbolic lexicon which preserves them. To be on the road traditionally implies going from somewhere to somewhere else, making progress on a goal-directed journey. On this road, both the possibility of a ‘somewhere else,’ and consequently of progress, are fatally threatened.

In contrast to the exposed emptiness of narratives of progress and goods which have only an instrumental value within a consumerist context, the symbol of enduring value and meaning throughout the novel is the figurative “fire” which the man and boy charge themselves with carrying (87). Carrying the fire is what the good guys do. It is a source of hope and security. It is demonstrated by the insistence upon doing good, or at least maintaining a story about the good and seeking to reconcile choices with that story (136). The fire is real, though invisible, and inhabits the inner self (298). Carrying the fire is also a relational reality. There is always a “we” that is carrying the fire. Even at the man’s death, when he charges his son in the second person to carry the fire, this injunction is accompanied by a promise that communion between father and son will persist after the man dies (298-299). This promise is kept, and the boy also carries the fire in relationship with the group of travellers to whom he attaches himself after his father’s death (303; 306).

Fire imagery is used in other ways in the text, although the carrying of the fire motif is the most interesting and illuminates some of the other uses. The ubiquity of ash in the novel implies a preceding devastation that involved fire, so that the destructive power of fire is also present. The relationship between fire and ash is also used to illustrate the temporal shift from the man’s “former” world to the new, “intestate” world of the boy. The man cannot make his own world, with its memories, hopes, values and reference points alive to the boy, or “enkindle” any of this in him, since this world has already been reduced to “ashes in his own” (163).

Fire also manifests in a more literal way, as a necessity for the preservation of life on their journey, but of course this fire is not empty of symbolic meaning, as it signifies their choice to persevere and sustain themselves in hopeless circumstances, and serves as a reminder of the figurative fire that they are always striving to carry. The fire establishes the domain of safety,

tenderness and healing after the man kills a roadagent, saving the boy (77). At the same time, their reliance upon fire renders them exposed and vulnerable to those who would maliciously intrude into this domain, by signifying the presence of human life and activity. Like the symbolic fire they carry, the literal fires on which they depend are limited in their scope of illumination, and in need of continual effort to maintain in the face of the entropic forces of nature (100-101). Sometimes, the extinguishing of a literal fire hints at the threat of the metaphorical fire being extinguished. For instance, the man and boy awake after the boy has dreamt of a situation in which he was crying, and his father could not hear him, to find that the fire has “burned down” and become “very cold” (194-195). The threat of their connection being severed, and the fire they carry being extinguished, is suggested here. After confronting the thief who steals their supplies from the seashore and sending him away naked, the man and the boy return to a “dry camp with no fire,” as the boy asserts that the two of them are now responsible for the thief’s death (278). In contrast to the earlier encounter with the roadagent, it is not as simple to generate a narrative here in which there was no alternative, and thus this episode is a more severe challenge to the narrative of being the good guys and carrying the fire. It is fitting, then, that there is no fire at their camp, but only a gas burner, as the boy forces his father to grapple morally with the incident.

Another symbolic connotation of fire in *The Road* is that of the Holy Spirit. Biblically, particularly in the New Testament, the Holy Spirit is associated with fire (Matt. 3:11; Acts 2:3). Christian theology places the Holy Spirit within the loving relationship between the divine Father and Son, comprising the Trinitarian Godhead. This novel, as I have already shown, emphasises the father-son relationship as the context within which the fire is carried. This parallel alone is insufficient to establish a connection, but there are other points in favour of this interpretation of the fire. Most obviously, the boy is described Christologically (McCarthy 3, 293). The novel’s penultimate paragraph establishes a connection in the boy’s experience between the man and God, and though the connection is initially presented in contrastive terms, the paragraph concludes by resolving this tension: “the breath of God was his breath yet though it pass from man to man through all of time” (306). That the “fire” they carry has divine significance is a reasonable inference from these associations of man and boy with Father and Son respectively, from the relational nature of carrying the fire, and from the fire’s association with moral standards, meaning, and redemption. The significance of these more overtly spiritual meanings of fire, and *the* fire, is that it reveals that the process of reinterpretation which arises in response to the posthuman imperative has implications for the relationship of

being to the divine and transcendent. While this novel is profoundly ambiguous in its portrayal of the possibility of an objective theistic reality, relationship to the divine is persistently approached by means of religious language, and is a lived reality at least insofar as transcendent significance is attached to the mutual love of father and son. The response to the posthuman imperative in this novel, then, is partly characterised by a relational reaching out to the transcendent via mutual devotion that finds the imprint of the divine upon another.

Indeed, even beyond the spiritual significance of the fire imagery, McCarthy makes extensive use of religious language in this text. The novel makes frequent references to God, though in deeply ambiguous ways that leave the existence and the character of God an undecided question in the world of the text. For instance, Ely announces paradoxically that “there is no God and we are his prophets” (McCarthy 180-181). The world of *The Road* seems to have experienced a Nietzschean death of God. What it would mean to prophesy the word of God in the absence of God is impossible to determine, but the very absurdity of this claim reflects the absurdity of the devastated world of the novel. It is worth noting that Ely’s name, the only personal name in the novel, is a homophone for a Hebrew title for God used in the Old Testament, which is also reflected in the Biblical figures of the priest Eli and prophets Elijah and Elishah. Thus, his name emphasises his absurd self-designation as prophet.

We also have an echo of Job's wife in the man's thoughts about the potential need to perpetrate a mercy killing on his son, when he thinks “Now is the time. Curse God and die” (120; Job 2:9). McCarthy thus invokes the Hebrew wisdom literature tradition of thinking about suffering and meaning in the cosmic context. However, where the Biblical authors are able to conclude “Fear God and keep his commandments” (Eccles. 12:13), *The Road* maintains a tension between Ely's assertion that “[w]here men cant live gods fare no better” (McCarthy 183) and the creed imparted by the woman who is introduced at the end of the novel to the boy, that “the breath of God was his breath yet though it pass from man to man through all time” (306), and of course even the latter does not strictly imply any orthodox theism.

As I have already suggested, there are several associations between the boy and Christ, and the most powerful of these is perhaps the idea that “[i]f he is not the word of God God never spoke” (3). The conditional “if” crucially leaves open both the possibility that “God never spoke” and that He may have. By associating the boy not just generally with Christ, but specifically with Christ as eternal Logos, McCarthy prompts us to think about the relationship between word



and world, and whether or not it is coherent to suppose that either may exist independently of the other. In the Bible, the Word/Logos is the means by which existence is generated out of void, but the boy in this novel presides rather over the unbecoming of the anthropocentric world, and the inauguration of a posthuman one. Yet, *The Road* is a text that demonstrates through the apocalyptic mode how supposedly distinct temporalities may pervade each other, and how genesis and disintegration may each resound with the echoes of the other, as is apparent in the passage from which I take this excerpt:

Perhaps in the world's destruction it would be possible at last to see how it was made. Oceans, mountains. The ponderous counterspectacle of things ceasing to be. The sweeping waste, hydroptic and coldly secular. The silence (McCarthy 293).

The idea that endings and origins may be mutually revelatory is an interesting one indeed. Of course, this passage is striking in that it represents a kind of “in the beginning” in which there is silence instead of the voice of God. There is no clear indication of whether the terminal silence, like the originary silence, might be broken by a new creative utterance. Nevertheless, it stands in tension with a passage immediately above it, in which the boy is described in sacred terms reminiscent of the Mount of Transfiguration as inhabiting a future that is “unimaginable” to the man. The man thus situates himself at the point of confronting two possible visions of the future, one of which is “coldly secular,” and the other of which sees the boy persisting as a carrier of divine value into a future which is rendered sacred, but remains “unimaginable.” The man’s present being remains in a state of tension throughout the novel as these two possibilities are held out before him, but at the conclusion of the text he seems to place his faith in a future world where the boy will live on as “best guy.”

*Riddley Walker*, too, is rich with religious allusions which suggest a reaching out to the transcendent in the face of the end. Eusa, the protagonist of the Eusa shows, is on the one hand presented as the transgressing federal head in whom all of Riddley's people are condemned for his failure in allowing Mr.Clevver, the caricaturish Satan figure to turn his utopian vision of “Good Time” into a hellish “Bad Time” of global war and devastation (Hoban 102). On the other hand, as Gannon has noted, he is also a messianic figure who suffers and dies to expiate the sins of all (33). The Eusa legend is versified, recited and interpreted as authoritative scripture, and the Eusa shows are performed in a ritualised, liturgical fashion. It is from the Eusa legend and Eusa shows that the connexion man, into which role Riddley steps, must make

the connexions which guide the community in their choices and sensemaking. However, while the shows follow a formulaic outline, there is always the potential for malleability and disruption. Given the strong religious overtones of the Eusa legend, which serves as a genesis narrative which Riddley's people constantly revisit and seek to interpret, we may observe that *Riddley* demonstrates the imbuing of a narrative of that which came before with religious and ritual significance. It is with such narratives of origin, along with the possibility of an end by another future fallout should the nuclear technology of the past indeed be recovered, that the characters in Riddley must reckon in order to make sense of their being-in-the-middest.

Similarly to *Riddley Walker*, *The Road* has much to say about the world that came before. In the symbolic, Christological language of the passage which envisions the boy as looking back on his father from an "unimaginable future" (McCarthy 293), the implication is that the man is anchored to a reality that is becoming, and in some sense has already become, past. Many of the man's observations in the novel suggest that he belongs to a world which has already vanished, while the boy belongs to an "unimaginable" future, and that the two can only coexist through a process of tenuous translation, in the transient overlap of the two worlds (163, 192). This novel generally positions the reader as belonging to the man's former world and alienated by the new, apocalyptic one, by means of the narratorial focalisation of the man. At the same time, the novel develops an imagined perspective from the end, towards which the boy carries us, and from which we can finally look back upon our own world as lost (293, 306-307).

Memories, dreams and echoes of the former world abound, along with other lingering signifiers such as the coca-cola which the man and the boy share, the ruined library which the man discovers, and the man's old house; all illusory impressions of a "vanished world returned" (199). These artefacts intimate the fragility of the fictions which defined the former world. The man recognises that, for the boy, he himself is a "being from a planet that no longer exist[s]. The tales of which [are] suspect" (163). His ability to communicate with his son is limited by the fact that his own referential lexicon has been mostly reduced to archaisms and empty signifiers, so that he cannot "construct for the child's pleasure the world [he has] lost without constructing the loss as well," nor can he "enkindle in the heart of the child what [is] ashes in his own" (163). Any language which connects to the former world is now language as debris.

In an especially striking scene, the boy plays a "formless music for the age to come," which is

simultaneously associated with the “ashes” and “ruin” of the lost world at its end, and the impending arrival of an absurd posthuman “spectacle,” which cannot be a spectacle, as “the players have all been carried off by wolves” (81). The boy’s music occupies the interstitial space between the receding world of the man, and his own nascent, stillborn world so that it is both a music for an imagined future, and “the last music on earth called up from out of the ashes of its ruin,” depending on the perspective from which it is considered. The music situates the man’s consciousness in “shadowtime” (Macfarlane 3), as he is aware of experiencing life both within the temporal scale of his own existence, and within the scale of passing ages and worlds. This phenomenon of “shadowtime” may be said to occur in *Riddley* as well. For example, Goodparley recounts a memory of himself sitting in a tree and watching the swaying of treetops, aware both of the present sight before him and the projected future existence of these trees long after his own death (253).

Perhaps the most interesting feature of that which came before in *The Road* is that the catastrophe which brought its demise, and the possible causes leading to that disaster, are never specified. We can surmise from the damage done to the animal environment, and the ubiquity of ash (eg. 292-293), that something like a nuclear disaster is plausible. If the disaster was a nuclear or environmental one arising from human activity, this would instantiate a deep irony in the structure of the anthropocentric world, wherein the conditions brought about by the unchecked domination of humanity over other forms of life and matter at last threaten the continuity of human existence. Ultimately, however, the text leaves the etiological question open. This creates an ambiguity which is combined with other forms of textual ambiguity in the novel to position the reader's own world as that which precipitated the calamity, and ultimately *The Road* asks us to paradoxically look back at ourselves as inhabiting a world that is lost, and which carries within it an end that may be imminent, and is certainly immanent as possibility.

On the other hand, peculiarities of language notwithstanding, it is not difficult to discern that the precipitating disaster in the case of *Riddley Walker* is indeed a nuclear one. Interestingly, the representation of that which came before the nuclear disaster in the novel has a similar logic to the Christian doctrines of the Fall of Man and Original Sin. The pre-cataclysmic world, including its inhabitants, is conceived of as superior in every way to Riddley's primitive present, the people of that time held as “bettern us” (307). In the Eusa legend, the “Littl Shynin Man,” the splitting-apart of whom introduces the nuclear catastrophe, is also elsewhere named

“Addom,” a name which simultaneously suggests the splitting of the atom and the Adam of Genesis, casting the discovery and use of nuclear power as a kind of apocalyptic Fall (107). Fictions of that which came before pervade every attempt at interpreting individual and collective experience and action in the novel's present, as Riddley and his peers necessarily use linguistic and textual tools to locate themselves as beings, and as a society, “in the midst.” Similarly, construction of ends in language is also necessary in order to interpret the experiences and stories which they terminate, seal and anchor. As Punch says to Greanvine, during a puppet show which Riddley performs seemingly for his own amusement and edification, “The end cud be any part of the way its in every step of the way” (327). This statement relates to a key point regarding the narrative confrontation of the end: while narratives which depend upon language can never portray an absolute end, which would also be an end to language, they can bring one into confrontation with the end as immanent possibility which pervades being-in-the-middest and is also inextricably tied to origin, conferring totality and concord and constituting being-in-the-middest as being-as-a-whole. Even as the posthuman remains to some degree only a possibility, it is a possibility which the human carries along with itself with every step. In this novel, competing interpretations of the ultimate direction and fate of their kind, which Riddley's people draw from the Eusa legend and puppet shows, shape the meaning of every event along the way.

Riddley and his peers are constantly returning to the past, as embodied in received texts which are treated as sacred, in order to make sense of present and future. Yet, no past experience or state of affairs is ever available as a “thing” in itself, but only as a kind of fiction coloured by memory, historiography, mythologising and narrativising. In telling the story of his father's death, Riddley muses: “it makes no diffrents where you start the telling of a thing. You never know where it begun really. No moren you know where you begun your oan self” (29). Later in the story, when Riddley asks the perplexing character Drop John the Foller Man why he has omitted the beginning of a folk song, Drop John replies suggestively that “What ever youre after youwl never fynd the beginning of it thats why youwl all ways be too late” (290). Given the epistemological occlusion of origins, it is unsurprising that the accounts in this text of that which came before the nuclear disaster are inconsistent and shifting, bearing all the markings of myth and legend rather than “factual” history; as Lorna puts it to Riddley, “Mosly they aint strait storys any how. What they are is diffrent ways of telling what happent” (50).

It is apparent that this novel is one in which the human world that we currently know has been

radically left behind, and that this effect has been the outcome of the intellectual and technological progress by which Riddley's people define their remote ancestors, with whom we are led to identify ourselves. Riddley's society sees itself as qualitatively different, and inferior, to the world preceding the Bad Time. There is a clear alienation effect operating in this text which limits our identification with its characters. Moreover, Riddley's people no longer enjoy the position of unquestioned dominance over other species and their environment which characterise humanity's self-perception in our own time. They must contend with dogs for life, resources and territory (e.g., 52) and all around them are ruins which signify the ephemerality of human achievement (e.g., 153). The dogs are also consistently treated as having the same order of sentience as Riddley's folk (e.g., 18).

*Riddley Walker*, then, raises the spectre of the posthuman in relation to animal life, but also in relation to plant life. Goodparley's autobiographical accounts which he shares with Riddley include a thought he had when sitting in a tree and looking at the surrounding trees, which he articulates in this form: "They dont take no read of us we don't matter nothing to them. Time on far on wewl be dead and theywl be swaying in the morning wind the same" (253). This observation, in the context of this particular novel, both affirms the ephemerality of humanity relative to geological time, and points towards a truly posthuman future, the conditions of which are already embedded in legends of the past and observations available in Riddley's present.

The interpermeation of origin, end and being-in-the-middest in these texts becomes most apparent, at the level of language, towards the conclusion of *The Road*, if indeed it may be called a conclusion. Though *The Road* does not come to any real resolution, it seems that the narrative of the novel's present at least comes to a stop at the end of the penultimate paragraph, and the final paragraph reads more like a coda, although it is not separated from the preceding paragraphs by any special orthographic division.

Once there were brook trout in the streams in the mountains. You could see them standing in the amber current where the white edges of their fins wimpled softly in the flow. They smelled of moss in your hand. Polished and muscular and torsional. On their backs were vermiculate patterns that were maps of the world in its becoming. Maps and mazes. Of a thing which could not be put back. Not be made right again. In the deep glens where they lived all things were older than man and they hummed of mystery (McCarthy 306-307).

The paragraph-initial word “Once” disrupts the address and temporal flow of the preceding narrative, and introduces a scene that is looked back upon, but there is absolutely no indication of the perspective from which the looking-back takes place. Mavri reads it as a memory dislocated from the novel’s time frame, and points out that the vividness of this description is in stark contrast to the suspect nature of other memories in this text, suggesting a level of clarity and integration that is only held out as a possibility (Mavri 12-13). It is notable that this clarity, imaginary as it may be, is only achieved in relation to other, inhuman, or prehuman forms of life. Something more may be said, however, from the perspective which this paper has been developing. The passage is especially striking for the absence of a discernible subject as speaker, together with the use of a radically ambiguous “you.” By considering these devices, the passage may be interpreted as imagining a kind of impossible perspective from a posthuman future, perhaps inhabited by the boy or perhaps after his death and that of all his kind, looking back upon a distant pre-human past, which the reader is invited to entertain for themselves in the absence of any remaining writeable subject in whom the perspective could be located.

From a hypothetical position beyond the world's undoing, we look on “maps of the world in its becoming;” maps being significant as representational means of orientation (McCarthy 307). Yet, these maps are also mazes, which resist easy navigation. We enter the maze, and are presented with a vision of a pre-human past, illumined by a posthuman end, and are interpolated for a moment into the impossible perspectival position at or beyond the end, rather than our ordinary subjective position in the midst. Being-in-the-middest is thus given the framing which it requires in order to be meaningful and legible as a whole, but the reader is asked to reflect from this impossibly imagined position beyond themselves, from which they interpret their own being-as-a-whole precisely as that reconstructed loss which the man laments (163). In *The Road*, as in *Riddley*, a world has been unmade and recast as loss, and it is from this position of loss, between the origin and the end, that a new story must be told to situate the self, to ground an ethic and framework of value, and to reach out to the transcendent, but this story will always be one constructed upon, and always reconstructing, a loss. At the end of McCarthy’s novel, reflecting back upon themselves from this posthuman view, the reader sees themselves reflected and inflected in the position of Martin Crowley’s “*l’homme sans*,” confronting the figure of the posthuman in the fullness of its absence, and in its light, the constitutive incompleteness of the human (Herbrechter “Rhetoric” 13-14). Instilling a kind of perspectival vertigo, McCarthy reconfigures even the reader's actual being-towards-the-end as

a hypothetical being-from-the-end, a viewpoint which enables and forces the revelation of being-as-loss.

## **Linguistic Dystopias: *Brave New World*, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and *A Clockwork Orange***

The three dystopian novels, Huxley's *Brave New World* (henceforth, *BNW*), Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (henceforth, *1984*) and Burgess' *A Clockwork Orange* (henceforth, *Clockwork*), are all visions of future worlds which foreground language, in different ways, as a site of ideology and of the expression of collective power over the individual. It will be my contention in this chapter that the distinctive features of language in each of these texts reflect, and often contribute towards, a use of such power that pushes the supposedly autonomous human individual beyond its limits, so that the possibility, or actuality, of the posthuman is brought to bear. *BNW* and *1984* are the canonical dystopian texts, but will reward a fresh consideration, emphasising not only the conflict of humanist and posthumanist discourses latent within them, but also how they raise the proleptic spectre of a posthuman world; of an end to the human being as conceived through the lens of a former paradigm. It is by means of the confrontation with this spectre that the posthuman imperative is generated. The process of reinterpretation which arises in response to this imperative is mediated through language and narrative, and there are peculiar implications for language and narrative in these novels, as they come to reflect, and play a part in producing in turn, the conditions which are generative of the posthuman imperative. *Clockwork* stands out among these titles, in part because, although the world which it depicts is indeed alien, it is not clearly so distant as the reified dictatorship of *1984*, or the futuristic consumerist totalitarian society of *BNW*. Nevertheless, here, too, strong challenges to the human are emerging from the social conditions which humans themselves have established, and we are confronted by these challenges through an intriguing narratological and narratorial lens which is colored by a distinct, imagined dystopian language. In this chapter, my aim is to analyse these three novels alongside one another, in order to understand the shared and distinctive ways in which they, as dystopian texts, generate some version of the posthuman imperative, as well as the role which language plays in mediating the reinterpetive response to this imperative, and in reflecting and producing the conditions which generate it.

The dystopian texts are distinct from the post-apocalyptic texts in that we do not find our characters amidst the ruins of social and political structures undone by some cataclysm. Rather,



each novel depicts a relatively intact society, compared to those texts which I have designated as post-apocalyptic, and there is no immediate threat that homo sapiens in any form will cease to exist. Nevertheless, there are social, historical, technological and discursive factors at play which are sufficient to give rise to the posthuman imperative, and so I shall demonstrate that the approach taken thus far in this thesis will be productive when applied to these texts as well. I shall demonstrate this by first considering how each of these worlds see the undoing of the autonomous human individual in some sense, as notions of the autonomous self become disrupted by the conditions of these textual worlds. I then move to discuss how these same conditions are reflected in, and to some extent established by, the distinctive changes to language which have occurred in these worlds. In the process of these analyses, the situation in each of these present worlds becomes clear enough that exploring that which came before in each case becomes possible and necessary for the full application of my framework to these texts. Investigating this question, however, raises further questions about being in relation to time and history which must be addressed, especially concerning *BNW* and *1984*. Addressing these questions will show that the conditions which give rise to the posthuman imperative may have radical epistemological and existential implications for the way in which being can be understood in relation to time and history. These conditions also have implications for notions of truth, sanity, the sacred and morality, all of which are reconfigured by the process of reinterpretation which has been under literary investigation in this thesis.

As different as these texts are from one another, all three of them raise the spectre of the posthuman to some degree, at least insofar as they hail the end of a particular conception of being human. For instance, all of these novels portray the demise of individuality, fundamental to Western humanist notions of humanity, under the wheels of crushing social forces and oppressive regimes. The hegemonic ideology of Ingsoc in *1984* represents such a shift away from the humanist emphasis on the idea of the autonomous individual. Indeed, Ingsoc, insofar as it succeeds in its own objectives, is generative of a society in which the individual no longer exists in any meaningful sense. My analysis of truth and sanity in *1984*, later in the present chapter, will suggest that the epistemological, phenomenological and even metaphysical locus and substrate of knowledge, experience, and reality itself (given that the Party denies the objectivity of reality) is not the individual mind, but the collective mind of the party. This justifies the concession by O'Brien, the Party official turned torturer of Winston, whom Winston once admired and believed to be a subversive agent, that the Party's ideology is characterised

in part by “[c]ollective solipsism” (Orwell 279). At this point, I shall consider some other domains discernible within the novel in which the obsolescent individual is superseded by the collective. This supercession is perceived as a threat from the implicit humanist perspective of the author, pointing to the emergence of a post-individual society, and therefore, arguably, a posthuman society, given the prominence of individual autonomy in post-Enlightenment conceptions of the human. What is gestured towards here is not the optimistic transhumanist narrative whereby the autonomous individual privileged by humanism transcends physical limitations by taking on cyborg qualities, but rather the spectre of the “radically collectivist aspect of the posthuman” (Thomsen and Wamberg 155).

Firstly, this is apparent in the economic domain. In the subversive book attributed to the scapegoat and arch-rebel against the Party, Goldstein, the Party is defined as a collectivist oligarchy, in that “[i]ndividually, no member of the Party owns anything, except petty personal belongings. Collectively, the Party owns everything in Oceania, because it controls everything, and disposes of the products as it thinks fit” (Orwell 215). Thus, similarly to communism, Ingsoc shifts the locus of property from the individual to the collective, while it is unlike communism in unabashedly accepting “the concentration of property in far fewer hands than before” (214-214). Moreover, this collective ownership is not legitimised by appeal to inalienable moral rights, but rather by power itself. The party controls all resources simply because it *can* and *does* control them. The effective possession of property by means of force becomes self-legitimising. Ownership is concentrated in the hands of a tiny, elite minority, but within this minority, wealth belongs to the enduring, collective entity of the Party rather than the individuals which comprise it at any given time, and it belongs to them as a result of, and to the end of, power.

The individual is also superseded by the collective in the domain of political power. The Party conceptualises its own end of self-perpetuating power in terms of the “persistence of a certain worldview and a certain way of life, imposed by the dead upon the living,” rather than “transmitting power to its own children” (218). There is therefore no importance placed on the individual within their conception of power, and even the collective significance of those in power only pertains to them insofar as a ruling group, the constituent elements of which have no special relevance, is needed in order to be a carrier of the worldview and way of life. Thus, the locus of power as understood by Party ideology is shifted from individuals, and even lineages or classes, to the persistence of the ideology itself.

For this reason, the Party need not be concerned with whether their ideology can enhance the quality or prolong the length of lives, even the lives of their senior members, because, as O'Brien asserts to Winston, "the death of the individual is not death[.] The Party is immortal" (281-282). For one thing, this makes authentic being-towards-death an impossibility (Heidegger 283-284, 310-311); death cannot be confronted as one's ownmost possibility if the immortal collective denies and usurps that possibility from the individual's horizon. Indeed, beyond deeming the preservation of individual life unnecessary, the Party conceptualises the individual as a "cell" within the collective organism, which *must* die and be replaced in order for the organism to retain its "vigour" (Orwell 276). The individual's death, though a demise, is not death, because their existence qua individual is not existence in the first place. The individual can therefore only access power through self-dissolution into the collective, through total submission and relinquishing of all that distinguishes the individual cell in its individuality from the Party as collective organism (276-277).

The post-individual society which has been generated by Party ideology constrains even the possibilities for enacting and thinking about resistance to the Party. This is why Winston regards his romantic interest Julia's idealistic stance on rebellion as naïve, in the face of the fatalistic "law of nature" which he has inferred, "that the individual is always defeated" (142). It is on the basis of this principle that even the mysterious resistance organisation, The Brotherhood, makes no effort to preserve the individual lives of its members, and does not aspire to any kind of success that could be measured within the referential frame of an individual life. Rather, it claims to work incrementally towards a dim hope of transgenerational change, culminating in a possible future in which present Brotherhood members will "take part" only as "handfuls of dust and splinters of bone" (183-184; 230). This indicates that the Party has been so successful in ushering in a post-individual society that even those who wish to contest the Party's dominance are constrained to wage their struggle upon these terms.

The erosion of the human individual by authoritarian power and deterministic social forces is also portrayed in *A Clockwork Orange*. Of course, the official regime in *Clockwork* has not established anything like the reified totalitarianism of *1984* and *BNW*. This is obvious, given the rate of crime and general hooliganism among the youth which permeates the world of this text, and to which the government is responding with the new conditioning program which the protagonist undergoes. The world of this text, though it appears foreign and hostile through the

eyes of our “Faithful Narrator,” and through the filter of his language, does not strike the reader as being so futuristic as that of *BNW*, or even as distant as that of *1984* may appear at first glance to many readers. However, its very proximity and comparative familiarity, especially for Burgess’ original audience, is a source of interest. Here, we see the beginnings of a shift towards a more oppressive and authoritarian society, intimidated by the increasing population of prisons, the resistance movement among the intelligentsia (farical as it may be), and most strikingly, the experimental conditioning methods to which Alex is subjected.

Young Alex, arrested at the culmination of a career as a hooligan, gang leader, rapist and thief is subjected to a brutal, experimental conditioning program based upon the so-called “Ludovico technique” which deprives him of his autonomy, in that he cannot enact or even contemplate actions which are considered harmful from the perspective of the powers behind mainstream society (Burgess 94). The novel explicitly frames this as a challenge to the boundaries of the human. Before Alex enters the program, the prison chaplain, referring to him by his inmate number rather than his name, warns him: “When a man cannot choose he ceases to be a man” (63). While the practice of referring to Alex only by his number indicates that his dehumanisation has already been underway, he will now be pushed beyond the conventional boundaries of the human, which the critique in this novel seems to affirm, into the territory of the posthuman. F. Alexander, the author and intellectual critic of the state whose household was tyrannised by Alex and his droogs near the beginning of the novel, confirms this evaluation of Alex’s condition after the program is complete, saying “They have turned you into something other than a human being. You have no power of choice any longer. You are committed to socially acceptable acts, a little machine capable only of good” (115). Although his anatomical being remains *homo sapiens*, his existential being is no longer fully human in the sense of the autonomous human individual of humanist thinking. Moreover, as a result of the conditioning process, Alex’s strongest aversions are experienced in relation to the quintessentially human domains of art, sexuality, and moral cruelty. At the same time, there is a profound moral ambivalence in this novel, because the individuality of which Alex is deprived is criminal and violent in character.

Burgess himself believed that the novel, as a genre, depends upon the individual, which would entail that some last vestige of individuality in Alex at the novel’s conclusion would be a narratological necessity for this work (Sumner 49). However, Sumner shows that Alex’s individual autonomy is in question from the beginning of the novel, even despite his apparently

libertine dispositions and wanton criminality. While Alex boldly asserts “what I do I do because I like to do,” what he likes to do is not unconditioned by his social context and environment; his inability to remake that environment at will to suit his desires provides the impetus for his criminal actions (50-51). For example, Alex and his droogs’ attack on a rival gang, led by his nemesis Billyboy, is at least in part a response to Billyboy’s offensive smell, a “von of very stale oil” (Burgess 13). Alex’s impulse to violence in this case arises from the intrusion of an unsavoury smell into his environment, and it is in the context of his inability to predict and prevent such an intrusion that he lashes out, as a consequence of the disgust that arises in him. Indeed, whatever does exist of Alex’s autonomy is resigned, not only as a result of the Ludovico experiment, but already at the moment he agrees to join this program; a decision which is itself strongly influenced and constrained by the legal, institutional and social environment he finds himself in (Sumner 61). As such, Sumner is able to make the point that this novel belies the humanist assumptions behind it, by not primarily depicting the expression of human agency, but rather the objectification of humans by social structures and institutions which usurp agency from human characters (63). This reveals that the emergence of the proleptic spectre of the posthuman in a novel does not imply that the author of the novel is fully able to delineate or control the implications of the posthuman potentiality within the textual world. In this case, *Clockwork* constitutes a posthumanist critique which challenges the humanist motivations which give rise to it.

This passing away of a particular conception of being human, as expressed for example in the overcoming of the individual by oppressive power structures, is instantiated in *Brave New World* as well, both at the social and biological levels. *BNW* is a novel that demands a questioning of frameworks of value, conceptions of the human being and the individual, the significance of production, consumption and labour, and raises many other intriguing and disturbing ideas. It is set up to elicit ethical and existential reflection, rather than clearly proposing or propagating a particular conception of social organisation. In this novel, “[t]he principle of mass production [is] at last applied to biology” (Huxley 5). Each person is genetically engineered from the point of fertilisation through scientific processes including “bokanovskifying,” a process by which vast numbers of identical siblings can be produced from a single fertilised egg (3-4). Moreover, each person, through their foetal development and early childhood, is imbued with proclivities and desires suitable for the socially predestined position to which they are inescapably assigned in advance (7, 10-12). There is thus no autonomous self-determination for the individual.

Each person is deterministically designated an Alpha, Beta, Gamma, Delta or Epsilon, with “plus” and “minus” substrata within each of these classes. Unless some defect occurs in the system, there is nothing substantive to distinguish any person from any other person in their class, while class distinctions are absolute and allow for no mobility. Each person is conditioned to be conscious of their class (e.g., 22-23), to admire their superiors and view their inferiors with a blend of pity and mild disdain, while feeling entirely satisfied with their own position (e.g., 54), and holding the conviction that the class system itself is to be valued and preserved (e.g., 64). Mond explains that the one experiment in which an all-Alpha society was attempted ended in disaster, and that it is necessary to have people who are content with – even actively desire – subservience, if the social structure is to be stable (195-197). Therefore, on the basis of a vision of perfect social stability, the World State has gone beyond merely maintaining the natural differences in ability and opportunity between human beings; these differences are actually designed, determined and enforced in a way that stretches, and perhaps transcends, the limits of our conception of the human. At the same time, it is only the anomalies which arise within this system, or which intrude into the centre from the periphery, which allow for the possibility of narrative drama in this text at all. This is a point which I shall develop more fully in my final chapter. Within the ordinary bounds of the system, there is only manufactured conformity, in the absence of conflict or alternatives, and this is reflected in the inane compositions which pass for literary content in the *Brave New World*, such as those which Hemholtz is charged with creating (160). As Beauchamp notes, while *BNW* does not present us with anything like a fully formed future language to match its futuristic social conditions, it does at least reflect the tendency of constraints upon “the range of permissible ideas” to “debase the medium of ideas, words.” In this respect, Huxley’s novel may be contrasted with Orwell’s, which not only manages “to convey the stultifying effect that the rigidly controlled society would have on how its citizens think and speak,” but also to show us the beginnings of a new language which reflects “the specific social and technological realities of the projected future” (464).

The social structure of the *Brave New World* is also radically consumerist, in that it does not merely orient itself towards the production of commodities to meet pre-existing demands. Rather, demands and desires are produced to meet projected supply (Huxley 41). The people who populate this world are simply loci of predetermined desires, needed to perpetuate the consumerist system, rather than agents in the conventional humanist sense. Rather than the

romantically imagined free agents within the free market of capitalism, developing, articulating and asserting their own will through choices that shape the world around them, their will is always only that which has already been shaped within them by the social processes to which they are subject from before the moment of fertilisation. As the Director says in explaining the state's mechanisms of predestination and conditioning to a group of students, "[t]he mind that judges and desires and decides [is only the sum] of these suggestions. But all these suggestions are *our* suggestions!" (23). Although there are some correspondences here to the transhumanist narrative of escape from problems such as war, disease and suffering through a decisive evolution or enhancement of the human body by technological means, the crushing of individual autonomy strikes a strong dystopian note which is at odds with the individualistic tendencies of transhumanist optimism (Thomsen and Wamberg 151, 155). All three of these novels, then, join *The Road* and *Riddley* in demonstrating that notions of self and will are radically reinflected in light of the conditions which generate the posthuman imperative. Indeed, this development, a comparatively subtle implication of the narratology and language in the post-apocalyptic texts, is thematically foregrounded in all three of these dystopian texts. This may reflect an intended defence of the humanist conception of the individual on the part of the authors by composing these nightmarish alternatives, but as has been suggested above with regards to *Clockwork*, this does not imply that a latent or overt posthumanist critique could not coexist with such motivations.

Given the centrality of language to the process of existential reinterpretation which I have been discussing, the deliberate effort on the part of these authors to reflect in their work the implications of dystopian conditions for language must be considered. In the case of *1984* and *Clockwork*, the authors have developed fictional languages, and in the world of *1984* this language, Newspeak, is constructed and imposed by the state. As Orwell's appendix to the novel explains, Newspeak is not yet anyone's first language during the novel's present, and the language itself is still in development, but it is the official language of Party business and is gaining ground amongst Party members in everyday use (312). English still exists as the common language of Oceania in the novel, although it is known in Newspeak as "Oldspeak," and is gradually being replaced by Newspeak in an increasing number of contexts. Most Newspeak words and phrases are derived from English, with a tendency towards compounding, abbreviating and, most prominently and deliberately, the systematic eradication of 'superfluous' and potentially subversive lexical items (53-54). Superfluous items would be any items that do not serve, or that positively impair, the utilitarian ideological purposes of the state. Here we

begin to see the emergence of the posthuman threat of a Heideggerian “depoeticization” of language; the reduction of language to mere information (Herbrechter, *Education* 6), which in this case is the ideological information by which the authoritarian machinery programs its instructions into the minds of the masses.

Newspeak is an artificially constructed language, developed by the state with the intention of making “thoughtcrime” impossible; “thoughtcrime” being any conscious thought or subconscious impulse which is contrary to the ideology of Ingsoc. Winston’s comrade Syme, a specialist in Newspeak, explains to him that “the whole aim of Newspeak is to narrow the range of thought[.] In the end we shall make thoughtcrime literally impossible, because there will be no words in which to express it” (55). The assumption operative here is that a diminution in the range of vocabulary will influence a corresponding diminution in the range of thought, so that eventually it will only be possible to formulate such thoughts as are orthodox to state ideology. This is sufficient to explain Syme’s statement that “The Revolution will be complete when the language is perfect. Newspeak is Ingsoc and Ingsoc is Newspeak” (55).

This way of thinking about language reflects the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis of linguistic relativity, which states that thoughts are shaped by the language in which they are formulated. It is not clear that this hypothesis entirely accounts for how Newspeak operates in this novel. For example, there are no Newspeak words for “science,” “democracy,” “justice,” and so on (201, 318), but we do not have enough information in the text from which to derive firm conclusions regarding whether the deliberate purging of these words from the vocabulary has caused the erasure of their corresponding concepts from the minds of the public, or whether the disappearance of the referents of these words preceded the elimination of the words. Nevertheless, Newspeak is clearly and deliberately operative as an ideological mechanism for mental conditioning in accord with state orthodoxy (55, 220, 312-313, 323-325). Orwell explains in his appendix to the novel that Newspeak, once fully adopted, would “not only [...] provide a medium of expression for the world-view and mental habits proper to the devotees of Ingsoc, but [also] make all other modes of thought impossible,” chiefly by the elimination of words and meanings (312-312). We thus have a language that has become lexically impoverished, in a similar trend to that observable in *The Road* and *Riddley*, but here the impoverishment is deliberately imposed by an authority that is ushering out one mode of being human and constituting a ‘new man,’ largely through language. This is not only language as a vehicle for ideology; it is language reconstituted *as* ideology. This also explains why exposure



to foreign languages is strictly forbidden, and why those classic works of literature which have survived are reworked into appropriately orthodox Newspeak versions which are in every way contrary to the originals (56, 204, 325-326). This project goes beyond the ordinary mechanisms of censorship with which we are familiar, by which texts are banned outright and thus invested with a kind of subversive power: here, the texts become something other than they are, something which complies with and even perpetuates the ideology of the state. Indeed, as we shall see, the effect is not just to change what the texts are, but also what they have always been. Clearly, language itself is a means for the accumulation and perpetuation of power in this text, and constrains the modes of thought, and therefore being, which are available to the inhabitants of this society.

In *A Clockwork Orange*, Nadsat, described by some (e.g., Clarke & Vincent 250) as an “anti-language,” is the dialect used by our narrator, Alex, and other young people in the novel. Nadsat serves to distinguish its teenage users from the rest of the population, emphasising their resistance to and transgression against the wider society (ibid.). The lexicon draws mainly upon cockney English and Russian, but also includes several German words (e.g., *Kartoffel* for potato), and elements from a number of other sources, mainly Eastern European. This is contextually significant, since “[f]or the Anglo-American reader [of Burgess’ time] the Slavic words connote communist dictatorship, the society of *Darkness at Noon*, without moral value and without hope” (Evans 409). Goh has argued that the linguistic creativity evident in the Nadsat which Alex still employs at the end of the novel, though his speech has become more patterned and reflective of mainstream social influences, represents the last vestige of a limited authentic individuality in the protagonist. I posit to the contrary that, while the continued use of Nadsat is clearly a vestige of the pre-Ludovico Alex, this earlier Alex’s degree of autonomy ought also to be brought into question, as it has by Sumner. Alex’s Nadsat conforms him to his droogs and other youths. If we are to locate a site of individual expression for Alex, it is not his argot but his aesthetics. Nevertheless, we cannot romanticise this potential site of individuality either, not only because of its morally vicious manifestations, but also because Alex’s expression of these preferences is also shaped by the limits of his ability to control his environment, as Sumner shows, and also because this becomes the very point of entry through which the Ludovico technique reconfigures him as an essentially post-agential being.

McQueen has stressed the phenomenological dimension of Nadsat (228-229, 232). For

example, words like “creech” (for “scream”) emphasise the embodied experience of a sensation itself, rather than the supposed object of the experience. “Creech” resembles the English word “screech,” but also functions at this phenomenological level (232). This relates to McQueen's view of Nadsat as “language-as-consciousness;” as the subjective lens through which our narrator encounters the world, and through which we as readers see it by extension. Given this, one of the most interesting moments in the text is when Dr. Branom characterises Nadsat as “[p]ropaganda” and “[s]ubliminal penetration” (Burgess 86). This may be an inaccurate assertion on Branom's part, reflecting a discursive project of blaming intra-social generational conflict upon extrinsic interventions by a hostile power, but on the other hand it may suggest that while teenagers choose to use Nadsat to perform a particular kind of social identity, the language itself simultaneously shapes their attitudes, beliefs, and ideological tendencies. This again recalls the hypothesis that thought itself is constrained by the particular linguistic system through which the thinker articulates their thoughts. This same principle is suggested by the agenda behind Newspeak in Orwell. Moreover, given that we have no access to the world of the novel except such as is mediated through the “veil of jargon” which Nadsat constitutes, we are subject to the same “subliminal penetration” as Alex is (McQueen 228-229). In my reading, Nadsat as a “language-as-consciousness” is at once an artefact of the demise of a particular kind of social fabric, and a tinted lens through which we view the undoing of an individual, indeed of the very nature of the autonomous human individual as defined from the humanist perspective.

It is an interesting characteristic of texts that they have the potential to not only construct a world in representation within their pages, but also to point beyond themselves to possible alternative pasts and futures. If this is done in such a way that we can imagine our own world as a possible past to the textual world, then we are forced to accept the textual world as representing a possible future of our own. *Clockwork* projects a vision of the future which is haunted by that which precedes it. In this novel, there is often the sense that society has degenerated from some former, perhaps less overtly vicious condition. For example, Alex's father tells him that he and Alex's mother no longer feel comfortable going out in the evenings, because of the presence of “[y]oung hooligans and so on” (Burgess 38). Instead of going out, they stay inside and drink alcohol – and alcohol abuse has apparently become extremely common in the world of this text. There is the implication that there was once a time when it was safe to go out, but that this is no longer the case. It is a dystopian future which seems not

to arise through some catastrophic breach, but to evolve out of what has gone before. Arguably, the most interesting contrast drawn in this novel between the world it depicts and that which preceded it, is that reading has ceased to be a common practice (Burgess 6-8). Books are poorly treated in this world (e.g., 7, 18-19), and Alex associates literary texts with “days when things were made to last” (7). In this world, clearly, things like books do not last. This portrays the world of *Clockwork* as one in which the things of our world are undone, including, as in *The Road*, the very narrative and imaginative resources which might be requisite to grapple with alternatives to the grim reality, even if particular manifestations of such resources seem obsolete within the shifting and eroding social ground.

*1984* is distinctively characterised by the mutability and deliberate, ceaseless falsification of such windows into the past, shrouding any claims about the world preceding the novel's present in a degree of uncertainty, and yet there are a number of such claims in the novel which are significant and worthy of consideration. Winston himself struggles to find out about the world before the revolution which saw the Party rise to power, but in a world in which people and events are constantly being removed from and inserted into history to suit the Party's agenda (e.g., 44, 50), and in which there is no longer anyone living with sufficient mental acuity and interest to compare the past to the present with regards to anything other than unimportant minutiae (96-97), this is a largely hopeless task.

Nevertheless, we do learn that the revolution followed an extended period of war, including atomic warfare, which seems to correspond to our own Twentieth Century (202-203, 213). This time period was also one in which an increase in material prosperity was paradoxically accompanied by an abandonment of utopian visions in favour of unabashedly authoritarian ideologies (211, 213). It is out of this geopolitical context that the three great superstates of Oceania, Eurasia and Eastasia emerged, with Oceania under the rule of the Party, and the other two with their own ruling dictatorships (192-193). We are thus given a perspective of Oceania as a world remade from the ashes of a protracted series of cataclysms, which have brought an end to democracy, capitalism, belief in objective truth, and the humanist conception of the autonomous individual. As with other texts of its kind, it reaches beyond itself, interpolating its readers into a textual past, thereby positioning itself as a revelation of a possible future, particularly one in which the category of the human confronts its limits.

In Huxley's *BNW* there is also a concerted "campaign against the past" (43-44), and yet here again we are given a large amount of information about the world that preceded it. Essentially, the world constructed as the past state of the present world we are given in the text is our own world, or one like it. As I have argued in this thesis, the positioning of the reader as belonging to the past of the text at once compels the reader to confront the world of the text as a possible future, and to retrospect upon their own world from a projected future perspectival position which the text demands that the reader simultaneously inhabit during the act of reading. Firchow observes that Huxley uses a vision of the future to satirise his own, and his readers', present, particularly the "myth of progress," which according to Huxley himself is preoccupied with progress only in a sense which is "external" to the human self, and therefore cannot produce a society which is "genuinely human" (452). Features of the former world which have been eroded in the transition to the Brave New World include parenthood and the family (Huxley 19-20), sexual abstinence until adulthood (27), the notion of "home" (30), monogamy (34-35), prohibition without prior conditioning to align preference with law, "uncertainty," "strong feelings" (35), Christianity, liberalism, parliament (39), democracy (39-40), belief in Heaven and the immortal soul, and God (45).

The novel also provides us with a concrete historical event which is presented as the pivotal moment in the transition from the former world into the Brave New World. This event is referred to as the "Nine Years' War" (40-41). In Mond's telling, the war thrust upon society a moment of existential choice between "stability" based on "World Control" on the one hand and, apparently, "destruction" on the other (41). This functions as the inciting incident for a transvaluation of values. In a deeper explanation of the war's significance later in the novel, Mond explains that the extreme devastation of that war imposed a kind of limit situation, undercutting belief in truth and beauty as "sovereign goods." As a result of this situation, these goods are relinquished as currency to "pay" for happiness and "a quiet life" (201). This account is intriguing, because it reveals the possibility for human activity within history to create conditions which are generative of the very forces which push the category "human" to its limits, and perhaps beyond those limits.

With respect to the 'former world,' it is also worth noting the presence of the Savage Reservation as time-capsule and collage, outside the Brave New World, and yet attached to it. Here "dead languages" such as Spanish, and dead institutions such as parenthood, art, and

spirituality (albeit in syncretised form with dislocated elements of Christianity and Native American spirituality intermingled) persist. The reservation, which is described from the perspective of the Brave New World as exotic other-world, is in many ways far more familiar to the readers than the Brave New World itself. This leads the reader to identify with John, and to occupy the strangely bivalent position, both of exotic other and inhabitant of the perspective from which the other is judged *as* other and as exotic. It is John's otherness which allows us to properly enter the drama of the Brave New World and to recognise its antagonisms, and as will become clearer in my final chapter, he is a necessary element for our capacity to understand the events of this world within the framework of a narrative drama at all.

Having spoken of the narratives of that which came before, which inform our understanding of the present worlds of these novels, a deeper consideration may now be given to the problems of history and temporality which arise for characters negotiating their being-in-the-midst in these novels, especially in *1984* and *BNW*. Firstly, regarding *1984*, the ideology and behaviour of the state in this novel renders the past mutable, subject to destruction and reconstruction in accord with present ideological interests (e.g., 36, 38, etc.). As I shall explain further on in this chapter, the mutability of the past is a function of epistemological problems pertaining to the knowability of the past: the past is only accessible through memories contained in human minds and through records, and the Party has absolute authority over both minds and records. While the ideologies of those who wield power in the present determine the interests into conformity with which the past is transformed, the continually reconstituted narrative of the past also becomes a source of reified power in the present, which in turn creates the capacity to shape the future (37). Indeed, the Party's monopoly on authoritative narratives of the past, and the present and future dominance which both establishes and derives from that monopoly, are so complete that they are able to threaten their enemies with annihilation, not only from present and future reality, but also from the past. O'Brien informs Winston that the Party's threat against him is that he will "never have existed" (266-267). This reveals the interwoven nature of temporal states within the phenomenology of power, and the integral significance of narrative for this interweaving.

Given the expression of the state's domination in its epistemological and ideological mastery over past, present and future, it is interesting that while Winston stands at odds with the state, he is represented by Orwell as increasingly incapable of orientating himself in time (e.g., 9, 233, 273, 287, etc.). In this regard, it is also noteworthy that, when studying Goldstein's book,

Winston's sense of having a moment outside of the Party's surveillance (whether or not he is correct to have this sense) is specifically described as an intimation of eternity (192). Since the Party alone has the capacity to establish the reference points in relation to which the orientating impulse in temporal phenomenology can be satisfied, to step outside of the ideological structure established by the Party is also in a sense to step outside time, if only, paradoxically, for a time.

Until Winston's eventual total submission to the Party, much of his resistance can be understood, not as a direct attempt to undermine the Party's present grip on reality, but rather as an attempt to conceptualise alternative narratives of that which came before and that which is to come, distinct from the narratives imposed by the Party, extending imaginatively his own sense of potential as an individual. By constructing alternative visions of past and future, he could conceivably instantiate a kind of being in relation to temporality which transcends or resists the total dominance of the Party. With regards to the future, Winston tries to construct a future as a space of possibility which may hold a freedom from the Party that cannot even be coherently envisioned in the present. Winston tries to relate to this construction through his seditious attempts to engage with the Brotherhood, and most interestingly through keeping a diary. Nevertheless, Winston does not dare to place any concrete hope in the aims of the Brotherhood, and recognises that any future audience for his diary would find itself unwilling to listen or unable to understand, depending on whether the Party remains in power or whether the fundamental nature of society radically shifts, rendering his attempt to communicate with them across time absurd (see e.g., 9, 30, 84, 183, 222, 230).

Winston also tries to establish, perhaps rediscover, an alternative narrative of the past, independent of the Party's manipulations, and this theme is in fact far more prominent in the novel than Winston's concern with the future. However, beyond the memories and records of which the Party has control, there are still dim traces of a past independent of the distortions of Ingsoc, which are embedded "in a few solid objects with no words attached to them" (162). Given the lack of words, the traces of the past in these objects require interpretation, and therefore they are not an unproblematic portal to objective truth; but nevertheless, Winston is frequently drawn to them. These objects may be conceived of as carriers of the elsewhere, and while Winston's diary fulfils this function in relation to the future, most of these carrier objects in the novel pertain to the past.

Examples of these carriers include a coral paperweight (99, 167) and wine (179). The coral

paperweight, which Winston encounters in Mr. Charrington's shop, is at least one hundred years old, and therefore comes from a time before the Party's rule, and is consequently at least "vaguely suspect," but Winston is clearly intrigued by it, and he purchases it (99). Later, Winston has a dream of his own childhood, in which the paperweight is a dome which frames the events of the dream, cementing the connection between this object and the past world which the Party has destroyed (167). However, this object, too, is destroyed when the Thought Police apprehend Winston, suggesting the shattering of his attempt to connect with this past beyond Party control (232). Similarly, wine is encountered at Winston and Julia's subversive meeting with O'Brien as "belong[ing] to the vanished, romantic past, the olden time as he liked to call it in his secret thoughts" (178). Winston therefore raises the glass of wine to his mouth "with a certain eagerness," anticipating a flavour that will be "intensely sweet," and a delightful effect that will be "immediate[ly] intoxicating," but instead finds the drink to be "distinctly disappointing" (178-179). It is revealed that "years of gin-drinking" have made it impossible for Winston to appreciate wine (179). In this case, as with the paperweight, the Party has thwarted Winston's naïve attempts to meaningfully connect with an alternative construction of the past, even when he is able to discover carriers of that past. Winston's struggle with the Party is therefore in part a contest over constructions of that which came before, and that which is to come, in relation to which present being might be oriented. Ultimately, his struggle is unsuccessful.

Where Winston fails to escape from the Party's total hegemony at least for a moment through forbidden sensual gratification, the civilisation which we encounter in *Brave New World* is one that emphasises present experience, particularly experiences of consumption associated with immediate sensual gratification. This is reflected, for example, in the wholesale rejection of everything associated with the past. "History is bunk" has become an aphorism espoused with quasi-religious fervour, and the "Bottomless Past" has replaced "hell" in the popular lexicon (29, 85). Similarly, with immediate access to all that their conditioned desires may crave and complete social stability, the inhabitants of this society have no cause for anxiety about the future, nor anything to hope for or aspire towards that is not immediately theirs. This emerges as a consequence of the explicitly articulated aim of the state to collapse the "time between desire and its consummation" (37). Spierings and Van Houtum have observed that consumerist ideology situates the consumer within the "timeless time and space-less space of the consumer paradise," and this describes the permanent state of being of those in the Brave New World, whether they are intoxicated with soma or not (Spierings & Van Houtum 902). The consumer

is entirely absorbed by the present action with which they are engaged, and is at every turn disincentivised from taking a metacognitive step backwards to orientate themselves in relation to a frame of reference characterised by an awareness of possibilities elsewhere and 'elsewhen' which could inform their perspective. This is a post-historical condition, embracing the most vacuously sensual realisation of an end to history and the inauguration of a race of Nietzschean 'last men' (Fukuyama *End* 305-307; Nietzsche 117-119, 164).

That the mode of being in relation to time evinced in this novel is one which is insulated from confrontation with past and future is also revealed in the ways in which characters in this novel relate to death and ageing. The fact that the inhabitants of the Brave New World do not undergo the physical process of ageing, as a result of their genetic engineering, signifies as a physical manifestation of their general existence, insulated from an authentic encounter with temporality. This insulation is demonstrated, for example, by the repulsion with which Linda, who bears the physical signs of ageing, is regarded when she returns to her society of origin (Huxley 133). Of course, this disgust is largely a product of the conception of motherhood as abomination, but her aged appearance is clearly also a factor.

This insulation also prevents the inhabitants of this world from experiencing an authentic being-towards-death (Heidegger 283-284, 310-311). From childhood, all citizens of the state participate in conditioning exercises to habituate themselves to death (e.g., Huxley 142, 177-178), but as Lenina's comments regarding the social usefulness of dead bodies reveal, the death of the individual being *as* individual in itself cannot be regarded as significant within the collectivist conceptual framework through which it is encountered. Given Heidegger's analysis of death as, among other things, one's "ownmost" ultimate possibility, it is both the collectivist ideological framework and the consumerist mode of being in insulation from temporalities other than the present (and therefore from an adequate conception of possibility) which together make authentic being-towards-death impossible for these beings.

It is also illuminating to compare John's encounters with death and the idea of death to the way death is viewed within 'civilisation'. John expresses grief and distress at the prospect of his mother's death, for example, and this is incomprehensible to the inhabitants of the Brave New World, because death is an entirely different phenomenological category within the framework of collectivist consumerism (174-175). Unlike the 'civilised' people, John actually needs to



confront and struggle emotionally with death, and he employs a mythical, religious and literary framework in order to make sense of this struggle (eg. 134). For the reasons explained above, those produced by the Brave New World have no perceived need for such a framework. In the absence of the suffering, frustration and anxiety which produce and are in turn produced by an existential understanding of and relation to temporalities beyond the present, these people have no authentic being-towards-death, and no sense of faith, art, myth and mysticism upon which they might draw were they to experience such being. It is thus pertinent that John, emerging from a suicidal state brought about by an emotional and social crisis, discovers “Time and Death and God,” three phenomenological categories which are in an important sense excluded from the Brave New World (118).

The process of existential reinterpretation which I have been speaking about, and the imaginative conditions which instigate this process by generating the posthuman imperative, do not only have implications for notions of self and individuality, and the relationship of being-in-the-middest to past, future and history as such. As implied in my previous chapter in considering the centrality of story to a reconfiguration of ethics and values under these conditions, notions of truth are also at stake. *1984* has much to say about truth, as well as the attending psychological concept of sanity. Indeed, that *1984* is a novel which is concerned with conceptions of truth is intimated within its first few pages, when we discover that the protagonist is employed in the Ministry of Truth, or Minitrue, in Newspeak (5-6). Specifically, he works in the Records Department, which engages in the alteration of public records to suit the party's interests. For example, incorrect military predictions by party officials are retroactively altered to be accurate (40-41). This reflects the twin fundamental axioms of state ideology with regards to truth claims about the past: “the past is alterable,” and yet “it never has been altered in any specific instance” (222).

The party's control over reality extends beyond merely that which is, encompassing also that which has been. Therefore, when a record is altered to say that at some particular time Oceania was at war with Eastasia, it becomes the case that Oceania has always been at war with Eastasia, if this is what the Party wishes to establish. Consequently, once erasure of any evidence of the alteration is complete, the fact of the alteration itself is also gone from the party's authoritative narrative of reality. Each new claim by the Party becomes the only epistemologically available standard against which claims might be measured, and thus is self-verifying and unfalsifiable

(e.g., 96-97). Reality becomes a closed discursive system, which the Party speaks into existence. In the absence of any independent set of known facts against which the party's claims may be measured, a correspondence theory of truth has no practical relevance, and there is no ground upon which to contest the Party's narrative of reality. Instead, “[t]he past [is] erased, the erasure [is] forgotten, the lie bec[omes] truth” (78).

This context makes the significance of Winston's momentary possession of evidence of a past that runs counter to the Party narrative, in the form of a dated photograph which undermines the false confessions of three alleged Party dissidents, comprehensible to the reader (81). However, as Winston himself realises, the continual reconstruction of an infinitely malleable past might already have altered the set of contextual facts necessary to interpret this evidence as evidence (82-83). For example, the very records of their confessions might have been changed beyond recognition in any case, and had this not yet happened, it could be accomplished at any moment. Moreover, whatever apparent contradictions could not be covered by the rewriting of the past could be sufficiently covered by the pervasive power of doublethink.

This shift in how truth can be understood in the world of *1984*, while clearly related to problems of temporal phenomenology and epistemology, is not limited to the Party's continual renarrativisation, reconfiguration and reconstitution of the past. Rather, the epistemological conditions which give rise to the Party's total power over the past extend beyond mere temporal epistemology and also become a de facto metaphysics, in which the very existence of objective reality is denied. Moreover, this metaphysics cannot be contradicted, because of the same essential epistemological problem articulated in relation to the past: there is no reality we can ever hope to access other than that which is accessible through the mind, with its apparatus of reason and memory, and each individual mind is radically under the control of the party (83-84).

Indeed, at least insofar as it can be known, reality only exists in and by the “mind of the Party which is collective and immortal” (261). Therefore, “[w]hatever the Party holds as truth, *is* truth” and “[i]t is impossible to see reality except by looking through the eyes of the Party” (261). As such, truth and sanity can only be attained by an act of submission of the individual will, by which it may be conformed to the will of the Party. The Party can infallibly declare that “[t]he earth is the centre of the universe. The sun and the stars go round it” (278). Winston

accepts these epistemological, phenomenological and metaphysical axioms as a result of his torture at the hands of O'Brien, as reflected in the internal soliloquy in which he thinks: "how could the immortal, collective brain be mistaken? By what external standard could you check its judgements? Sanity was statistical. It was merely a question of learning to think as they thought" (290). Here, we find that Winston has denied his previous, contrary assertion that "Sanity is not statistical" (226-227), and fully embraces the Party's way of interpreting and experiencing reality.

Given the power of the state in this novel to determine and define reality, and consequently truth, the question of what qualifies as sanity becomes an interesting one. Early in the novel, Winston briefly doubts his own sanity, because he cannot understand the motivation behind the state's systematic falsification of the past, in which he is a participant by profession. He reflects that a lunatic may simply be "a minority of one;" not someone whose perceptions and beliefs conflict with objective reality, but one who differs in their thinking from society at large (83). In accord with this way of thinking about sanity, the label "insane" may become part of the repressive state apparatus, as a category into which those with the power to sway the minds of the masses may place those who differ from them. Ironically, the intellectual climate in which society at large must subsist for "the High [...] to keep their places" perpetually is precisely one of "controlled insanity," but this condition is paradoxically redefined as sanity, so that the label "insane" may be used to silence any non-conformers (225). Winston quickly disposes of these thoughts, however, as his deepest concern is not whether he may be labelled insane, but rather whether or not he is right in his conclusions (83). Nevertheless, Winston does oppose this way of applying the concepts of sanity and insanity, as most clearly exemplified in his reflections before falling asleep, and after reading two chapters of Goldstein's book:

[...] after reading it he knew better than before that he was not mad. Being in a minority, even a minority of one, did not make you mad. There was truth and there was untruth, and if you clung to the truth even against the whole world, you were not mad. [...] He fell asleep murmuring 'Sanity is not statistical,' with the feeling that this remark contained in it a profound wisdom (Orwell 226-227).

Later, when Winston is being tortured and mentally reconditioned by O'Brien, the state's notion of sanity is explicitly foregrounded, as O'Brien asserts that Winston is "mentally deranged," and frames the torture as cure (258). This corresponds to a degree with the conditioning to

which Alex is subjected in *Clockwork*, which situates him as criminal and aims to remedy his criminality by means of this intervention, which is conducted by doctors. According to the ideology of the state, it is only by submitting to the vision of reality contained within and imposed by the collective “mind of the Party” that Winston may “become sane” (261). Towards the culmination of his torture, the success of this agenda is revealed in Winston's thoughts: “how could the immortal, collective brain be mistaken? By what external standard could you check its judgements? Sanity was statistical. It was merely a question of learning to think as they thought” (290). Winston's stance on sanity has been reversed, and he has been compelled to accept that the view of the world which has been constructed by the Party is a priori the only way in which a “sane” person can see the world, and any deviation from that vision is therefore also a priori insane.

I have already spoken briefly about the transvaluation of values which is instigated in the text-world of *BNW* by the Nine Years' War, and in particular the devaluation of truth in favour of happiness. Having subsequently discussed the implications of the conditions which bring the human to its limits for truth and sanity in 1984, the analysis may now proceed by making some further observations pertaining to truth in *BNW*. One is that what passes for truth in this world is simply whatever has been repeated an adequate number of times by the representatives of the state, as succinctly expressed by Bernard, when he says that “Sixty-two thousand four hundred repetitions make one truth” (40). Of course, the presence and force of these “truths” do not contradict the devaluation of truth by the World Controllers, since these are not truths at all in the sense of propositions held to correspond with reality or to cohere with other propositions already held to be true. They are simply axioms, and rather than being measured against reality, they constitute the a priori framework within which reality is interpreted, simply because they have been given this status within the conditioned consciousness of the consumer (see e.g., 34).

Truth, in the correspondence sense, has been thoroughly devalued in the ideology of the Brave New World. The values of truth and beauty do not fit into the framework of the state ideology, which cannot allow the anchoring of meaning “outside the present human sphere; [...] the maintenance of well-being,” and demands active censorship of any idea that could produce tendencies contrary to this agenda (154). Terms of validation such as “pneumatic” (e.g., 37) do occur, but this term is only an example of the state-sanctioned pursuit of casual pleasure and approval of those qualities in people which lend themselves to this end, rather than a sense of

aesthetic appreciation or even human passion and desire beyond the purely sensuous. The World-Controller Mond takes a paradigm view of morality, and regards truth and beauty, along with heroism and all “noble” values, as belonging to a past paradigm, and no longer meaningful under conditions of perfect comfort and efficiency. When John asserts, citing Shakespeare to make his point, that such conditions have degraded the inhabitants of this world, Mond denies the objectivity of such values, and asserts instead that paradigms of value are like shifting alternative games that one might play, and that what is degraded according to the 'rules' of one such value game may be esteemed within another (208-209).

Along with truth, the family, and other aspects of the former world which are absent from the Brave New World, as I have already noted, the notion of God is also treated as a thing of the past. Nevertheless, we find a very substantial quantity of references to ritual, religion, spirituality and God in this text. Rather than denying the existence of God, Mond reveals that he thinks God very plausibly does exist, and is willing to grant, at least for the sake of argument, John's assertion that the essential nature of God is eternal and unchanging. Nevertheless, he asserts that people and societies are malleable and always shifting, and that God therefore manifests in changing ways because of the mutable and dynamic frameworks through which He is encountered. Intriguingly, he posits that God's manifestation within the Brave New World is precisely manifestation as an absence (206). To some degree, this is consonant with the ambiguity with regards to the divine which is discernible in *Riddley* and, even more so, *The Road*. Yet, it is a claim which ultimately is at least deistic if not entirely atheistic. It is a statement which is true to the discursive structure of the Brave New World, in which an end to history and narrative is embraced, and in the face of this, the outliers who are still able to enter into existential narrative drama confront world and being in terms of loss. As the Brave New World reifies itself, all the preconditions for distinctively human modes of being are conquered and lost, and thus it is concordant with these conditions that even God would be encountered, if at all, only as a loss.

Within the cultural lexicon, God has been entirely usurped by Henry Ford (hence A.F., “Our Ford,” “Ford knows,” etc.), although the latter is indeed imbued with semi-divine, messianic significance. Christianity is derided as obsolete, and “[t]he ethics and philosophy of under-consumption,” no longer perceived as necessary or desirable within the new world of perfect efficiency, comfort and endless consumption (44-45). According to Mond, the religious impulse arises as a response to ageing, suffering and solitude, and in the world as it has become,

people never have the experiences related to these phenomena which could lead them to seek God (205-207). Nevertheless, some cultural practices in the Brave New World, such as the language around “Our Ford,” and the especially the bizarrely liturgical structure of the “orgy of atonement” (69-74), suggest that some need for ritual drama persists, even if there is only a very impoverished mythical structure underlying the ritual, though these quasi-religious practises are shorn of transcendent reference and reduced to merely utilitarian mechanisms to maintain social comfort and cohesion.

In contrast to the inhabitants of the Brave New World, John keenly perceives a need for God and religion in his own life, and articulates this need explicitly, insisting that, among other important functions, “God's the reason for everything noble and fine and heroic” (209). However, he frequently finds that even his impressive literary and religious vocabulary is inadequate to express coherent propositions about the divine (e.g., 119, 203), and so he can only reach out towards the transcendent without being able to claim verifiable certitude. Nevertheless, John struggles to contend with these aspects of existence, while the Brave New World simply seeks to water down or abolish them.

Moreover, John enacts ritualistic practices with overtly religious significance, in order to make sense of his reality and pursue meaning. While he is denied access to the crucial rites of passage by his fellow Malpais natives, he engages in the ritualistic psychodramas of self-whipping and adopting the posture of the crucified Christ (117, 119). In this way, John is able to express through embodied action what he cannot convey in language: commitment to the voluntary confrontation of suffering and death, and the consequent possibility for redemption and transcendence. Of course, as will be clear by this stage in the thesis, it is quite impossible for the inhabitants of the Brave New World to comprehend the need for such rituals, not to speak of understanding their meaning. It is thus unsurprising that the savage's self-whipping is only legible to them as a kind of morbid theatrical entertainment (225-227). For the reader, who has in some ways been encouraged to identify with John and to see the Brave New World through his eyes until this point, there is a sense of horror at his self-mortification, and we are tempted at this moment to look back upon him from the perspective of the metropole, as strange and savage. Nevertheless, his desperation to experience the drama of authentic feeling, if only through suffering, in this world of posthuman comfort and complacency, reflects for the reader a deeper sense of horror at the world which prompts this response than at the response itself. The degeneration of this practice into an orgy of atonement at the end of the novel, and John's

subsequent suicide, confirms the power of the transformations which 'civilisation' has effected in its denizens (228-229). The savage, with his romantic values of truth, beauty and faith, is ultimately destroyed by the Brave New World, which is able to continue while remaining fundamentally unaffected by all of his protests. His suicide simultaneously signifies his refusal to participate any further in this civilisation, and his admission of his inability to change it.

*Clockwork*, too, includes frequent references to God (or "Bog," in Nadsat) and religion. In Alex's musing on the nature of good and evil, Bog is identified as the transcendent author of human nature who instils our fundamental propensities (Burgess 31). Yet, there is never an indication of the real presence of God in the novel, which calls the grounding of our nature and propensities into question, at least according to Alex's logic, thus making the borders of the human, and the human way of being, more porous. Rather, God, or Bog, functions as a kind of place-holder signifier for conventional explanations of states of affairs, and a hypothetical authority by which to curse (99). Alex becomes an assistant to the prison chaplain and enthusiastically reads the Bible, but his participation is motivated by expedience, and the Bible is only valuable to him as a source of a pornographic thrill in the literary description of violence (60). The chaplain frames the question of Alex's participation in the conditioning program in terms of what may accord with or contradict God's will, but this is only a way of articulating the problem; there is no answer explicitly given, nor is one clearly sought (71). Dr. Brodsky later celebrates Alex's transformation in religious terms, claiming that Alex will be a "true Christian," and yet the meaning of this phrase can only be vacuous in light of the discursive context which has been established thus far in the novel (96).

Newly "freed" but unfree, Alex drowns his sorrows in milk-plus, and has a drug-induced vision of God, with His angels and saints, but these figures only shake their heads at Alex, refusing to offer any illumination or assistance, and Alex returns to reality in a suicidal state (104-105). It seems that God and the framework of Christian language and symbolism is present in the world of this text only as a system of open signifiers, adapted to express a range of ideas, interests and motives, without any strong hint of a referential reality outside of language. Nevertheless, it is notable that a transition like the one Alex undergoes transgresses the boundaries of the human, and thus brings ordinary descriptive language towards its limits. At this point, a religious symbolic vocabulary becomes functionally necessary, even if it is without empirical grounding in the world of this text. Religious language becomes a medium through which beings attempt to make sense of their limits, even as this language becomes increasingly

ambiguous and problematised in the dystopian and post-apocalyptic contexts we have been considering.

As I illustrated in my previous chapter, the conditions which give rise to the posthuman imperative have implications for the reconfiguration of value, and particularly moral values. This applies not only in the post-apocalyptic cases, but in the dystopian as well, and *Clockwork* provides a poignant illustration of this. While Alex commits brutal and atrocious crimes, he is not devoid of an understanding of meaning, purpose and standards of behaviour. His assertion that we are “not put on this earth just to get in touch with God” (5) is an assertion of value which implies that there is some purpose for which we exist, even if this is not primarily a religious purpose, in his view. Even while leading his gang in their violent behaviour, he often expresses shame or disgust with how they conduct themselves (e.g., 10-12, 19, 22-23, etc.). For example, Alex has no qualms about assault, but insists that it is unacceptable to appear afterwards as one who has been fighting. He clearly holds standards of “proper” behaviour, and it is not apparent that a clear distinction between the ethical and the aesthetic can be drawn in such a way that categorises these standards as purely aesthetic and not ethical, even if they are framed more in terms of propriety than goodness.

As well as judging actions based upon his own framework of standards, Alex recognises that there are frameworks other than his own according to which his actions are wrong. It is not clear, however, whether he assents to this valuation. He seems rather to view “badness” as an alternative to “goodness” which may be chosen according to the tastes of the individual. He recognises that his disposition could not be rationally universalised, but does not seem to draw the Kantian inference that it is therefore intrinsically worse than other moral orientations. Rather, he conceptualises the good as that which aligns with the interests of the state, and the bad as those aspects of individual choice which are in conflict with the uniform designs of state power (31). State power has an a priori interest in undermining the capacities of the individual to act independently, and thus the conflict between good and bad, when each is defined from the perspective of power, is a necessary entailment of the incapacity of the state to “allow the self.” Alex's view is validated, to an extent, when he encounters the conditioning videos of horrible crimes which the state-sponsored program has prepared in order to kill the criminal impulse in its subjects. He initially assumes that “the Good or the State,” which are functional synonyms from his perspective, could not have truly orchestrated these things, and that they



must be produced through tricks of editing (77). However, it becomes increasingly probable that these films are displaying very real content, based on Alex's coming to the conclusion that those behind the films must be "more cally and filthy" than the most wicked of inmates he encountered in prison (79). There is thus a blurring of distinctions of 'good' and 'bad' if these categories are preserved as aligning with that which the state does and opposes.

This is a novel which articulates difficult moral dilemmas. The most obvious dilemma (63, 71-72) pertains to the importance of free will for moral goodness. The question arises whether it is better for people to have the capacity for choice, and to use it to do evil, or not to have the capacity for choice at all. In other words, the novel asks us whether conformity to moral standards is desirable and valuable if it is achieved by the removal of the possibility to do otherwise. An extension of this dilemma in the novel, as articulated by Goh, is the further dilemma between criminality and mechanical conformity. The world of *A Clockwork Orange* is one in which deterministic social systems have developed to the extent that there is no possibility for individuality without criminal transgression. As such, this is a world in which the category of moral goodness has been stripped of all plausible content. One either falls beneath the level of morality as such by slipping into blind conformity, or one must resist these mechanisms through criminality.

The analysis in this chapter has shown that the same framework, emphasising a process of existential reorientation in relation to narratives of origin and end, arising in response to the posthuman imperative which is generated when conditions threaten the continuation of the human and human modes of being as previously understood with the ushering in of the possibility of the posthuman, is applicable not only to post-apocalyptic texts, but to dystopian texts as well. The characters in these texts are seen to respond to the threat, or actuality, of influences which push the category of the human beyond previously understood boundaries. These responses, and the conditions which necessitate them, have implications for the individual self, being in relation to time and history, truth, ways of thinking about the religious and the divine, and morality.

## Narrative and the End

Thus far in this thesis, I have argued that both dystopian and post-apocalyptic literatures may confront characters and reader with the passing away of a notion of the human, with this passing away serving as an imagined end point in relation to which an imperative emerges to reinterpret the location of one's being-in-the-middest. This is what I have termed the posthuman imperative in my work. The imperative is posthuman insofar as it is raised by the spectre of an end to the human, or at least the human as construed from within the framework of humanism. In *The Road* and in *Riddley Walker*, there have been apocalyptic disasters, destroying many aspects of human ways of life, and threatening to finally erase humanity altogether. In *1984*, *Brave New World*, and *A Clockwork Orange*, more gradual social shifts have ushered in realities in which particular notions of humanity, especially at the individual level, are being challenged and superseded. In all five novels, it is the confrontation with or anticipation of the end of humanity which generates the imperative to reinterpret being in relation to this catastrophic possibility, both for the characters and the reader. This process of reorientation is portrayed in, and carried out through narratives, and yet the same conditions which generate the imperative to reorientation simultaneously challenge the means and meaningfulness of sense-making as such. The absurdity which confronts the writer and reader who attempt to construct, through distinctively human means, imagined worlds in which humanity is lost, reflects the absurdity of being encountered as loss. On a narrative level, there is no story without the end. The end of all ends, then, is paradoxically both the foundation for the supreme story of being, and the yawning chasm beneath the foundation, which threatens to swallow story and reader alike.

In this final chapter, I try to draw together argumentative threads and thematic concerns from the previous chapters, making reference to all five of my primary texts, in order to develop an understanding of how each of these texts represents the process of orientation and reorientation in relation to origins and ends, in light of the posthuman imperative. I begin by focusing on the centrality of narrative as chief mediating resource in the process of reinterpretation and reorientation in the face of the end, and move from there to the rich metatextual commentary on language that novels such as *The Road* and *Riddley* offer, revealing language and narrative as both extremely significant and yet extremely vulnerable. *BNW* also has much to say and

show about narrative; particularly the conditions which threaten its very possibility. Both *1984* and *BNW* present different categories of ‘Last Man’ and these are analysed, leading to a narratological discussion which culminates in reflection upon Alex’s complex relationship with the reader being developed over the course of his torturous reconditioning program, so that Alex takes us with him into a posthuman reality in which ethical lines are fundamentally blurred. The primary goal of this chapter is to articulate the central role of narrative in negotiating being-towards-the-end, and at the same time point towards some ways in which the end can profoundly threaten and undermine the very bases of the narratives which are generated in encountering the horizon of the posthuman,

Each of these novels portrays characters navigating the process of reorientation, as beings in the midst, in relation to possible ends which confront them. This is most obvious in *The Road*, as the spectre of an absolute end to humanity is clearly raised in this text. In the face of this possibility, the man and the boy must negotiate for themselves a way of being which is justified by the narrative of the good guys who carry the fire. Apparently, the majority of survivors in this devastated world have declined to compose such narratives for themselves, instead accepting the apocalyptic invitation into a world without transcendent purpose or morality. It is the possibility of an absolute end which upends all values. As the man intimates, “He’d not have thought the value of the smallest thing predicated on a world to come” (McCarthy 199). The possibility of an end to all possibilities, of the absence of a world to come, threatens to swallow up all things, emptying them of value. At the same time, it is the possibility of an end which makes existence intelligible as a whole, in narrative terms, and so the paradox is that the very possibility which threatens to undermine the foundation of all values is simultaneously the precondition for the telling of a story through which values can be made sense of.

In the face of the end, the man and the boy elect to tell such a story, but it is an inherently paradoxical story, in that it is generated in the face of the possibility of an end to their world, and yet relies upon the imagination of a world beyond the end. There must be some kind of elsewhere and elsewhen in order for their story to be justified. This becomes apparent when the man reverses his own stated opinion on whether there could be people living elsewhere on another planet or in an alternative world, because it becomes clear that the boy needs to have

this possible world affirmed in order to make sense of their continued struggle for survival and the value of their good-guy-hood (McCarthy 260-261). When the man initially denies the possibility of life elsewhere than on the devastated earth, the boy responds: “I don’t know what we’re doing” (261). This is in line with Scheffler’s argument that, at least within a secular worldview, confidence in the values that confer meaning upon our pursuits, even in the midst of suffering, depends upon the belief that there will be other humans surviving when we have died (108-110). In order to continue living and striving with a sense of significance in the face of the end, the man and the boy depend upon a narrative in which there is at least a possible elsewhere, where other good guys might continue to carry the fire after them. It is the embrace of an absolute end of history implied in the refusal to imagine an alternative which differentiates the bad guys from the good guys. Indeed, for the bad guys, there is no longer any basis upon which such a distinction could even be articulated. Where Fukuyama speaks of an end to history as a “coherent, evolutionary process” characterised by dialectical process, brought about when “all of the really big questions had been settled” (*End* xii), the bad guys in this novel embrace a different kind of end to history in which dialectical process ceases with the failure to create narratives which signify and generate alternatives; in which these “big questions” simply evaporate with nobody left asking them, and imminently nobody left at all. Discernible in *The Road*, then, are the paradoxical functions of the end, specifically a posthuman end, in the adoption of particular modes of being-in-the-middest, and the crucial role of narrative, with its reliance upon the end and yet also upon conflict and tension arising from imaginative alternatives, as the mediating force through which this process of reconfiguration and reinterpretation is conducted.

We have seen, then, the necessity of narrative in mediating the process of reinterpretation and meaning making which arises in response to a confrontation with the end in light of the posthuman imperative, and begun to discern some of the paradoxical elements of the place of narrative in this process. At the same time as a narrativising response is prompted by confrontation with the end, and ends are essential to narrative and narrativised existence, the posthuman end is also that which threatens to undermine the very basis for language and narrative as such. We may come to a deeper understanding of the relationship between narrative and the end by continuing to consider *The Road* as a novel characterised by multidimensional metatextuality. This is a novel which frequently reaches out beyond its own boundaries in providing metatextual commentary about the nature of language and of texts, as well as about

their limitations. The fading advertisements and billboard signs, some repurposed and reinscribed as warning signs, function as palimpsests, which simultaneously speak of a world and system of values which have essentially vanished, and of the brutal, devastated reality which has replaced them (McCarthy 20, 135, 138-139). Indeed, even the warning signs have themselves already become obsolete, as there is no longer anywhere to turn for safety. Texts, as products and sources of meaning-making systems, are shown to be ephemeral, though they may linger for a time beyond the demise of the very systems that once made them intelligible. Moreover, insofar as they do linger, they are inevitably reinflected with meaning within shifting contexts.

Other passages which are metatextually suggestive are abundant. The city of sand which the boy builds on the seashore, a representation of the world in microcosm, is doomed to be erased by rain, tide or time, and the letter which he considers writing to another, imagined, group of “good guys” would be effaced in the same way, and perhaps disclose their location to the murderous “bad guys” before then (261-262). The map which father and son carry with them raises, imaginatively, the possibility of a path through this world other than futile path of the eponymous road. Yet, this path is only available to proverbial crows, recalled in the man’s use of the idiom “as the crow flies,” and crows in all probability no longer exist except in books (166-168). This signifies that the only alternatives remaining to one who would transcend the absurd and dangerous reality of this world are fictive alternatives, and yet books, the receptacles of such fictions, are decaying in charred and ruined libraries (199). This is a world in which only fictions can bestow hope and meaning upon being, but the preconditions of fiction are being eroded by the proleptic spectre of the posthuman to which these hopeful fictions respond.

Arguably the most powerful passage for commentary on the relationship between language and the novel’s apocalyptic story world includes the following excerpt:

The world shrinking down about a raw core of parsible entities. The names of things slowly following those things into oblivion. The names of birds. Things to eat. Finally the names of things one believed to be true. More fragile than he would have thought. How much was gone already? The sacred idiom shorn of its referents and so of its reality. Drawing down like something trying to preserve heat. In time to wink out forever (McCarthy 93).

Natural language as we know it is exposed for what it truly is: not a transcendent edifice, but a contingent semiotic system used to meet distinctly human needs of communication and sense-making in shifting contexts. When these contexts shift beyond the limits of what the human being can endure; as the set of available discursive objects dwindles and the very practice of sense-making as such is threatened, the semiotic system is uprooted. Its functioning becomes absurd, as the disappearance of referents empties out functional signifiers, reducing them to “zero symbolic value” (Schwenger 252-253), and we encounter language as debris awaiting its inevitable clearing-away in the face of a truly posthuman world.

An interesting parallel to McCarthy’s “names of things slowly following those things into oblivion” (93) is found in Hoban’s novel, when Lissener proposes to Riddley an eschatological myth in which an “Other Voyce Owl of the Worl” swallows all the sounds of the world, and each thing follows the sound of itself into silence. This demise of everything, including at last the owl itself, is only delayed as long as there is someone dedicated to “lissening every thing back,” but as Lissener asserts, the owl is bound to succeed eventually, causing the end of all things (168-171). This is in turn paralleled in *The Road* by Ely’s hypothesis of an end to all things, culminating in an end to death itself: “When we’re all gone at last then there’ll be nobody here but death and his days will be numbered too. He’ll be out in the road there with nothing to do and nobody to do it to” (McCarthy 184). Both of these visions recall, and in some sense subvert, the victorious Christian eschatological vision in which “[t]he last enemy to be destroyed is death” (1 Cor. 15:26; cf. Rev. 20:14). Lissener’s myth is one of many texts within the text of *Riddley*, an eschatological fiction within fiction. It contrasts McCarthy’s account of “[t]he names of things slowly following those things into oblivion,” since if we suppose that the sounds of things in Lissener’s myth correspond to the names of things in *The Road*, the order is reversed. In one case, it is a shift in ontological context which renders signifiers obsolete. In the other, it is the demise of signifiers which pre-empts the demise of the signified. One possible explanation for this contrast is that the world of *The Road* has disintegrated further than that of *Riddley*. In *Riddley*, for example, there are still complex societies with discernible social structures, institutions, pastimes and traditions. In *The Road*, all of this has already dissolved. In the text-saturated society of *Riddley*, it is easy to observe how what is, and has been, said and written comes to shape and reshape reality. In devastated, barren and brutal world of *The Road*, that which can be said is constrained by what *is*, since the loss of so many referents renders many signifiers senseless, and many of the relationships and institutions which contextualise language are no longer possible. World and language are deeply

intertwined, and each influences the other, but it may be that the differing conditions of these two text-worlds are consonant with emphases on opposite sides of the mutual world-language interaction, manifesting in differing eschatological accounts of the demise of both world and language.

The idea that listening can shift ontological realities is accompanied by the corresponding idea that speaking can do the same. Claims such as those which Goodparley makes to Riddley, that “[w]ords in the air print foot steps on the ground for us to put our feet in to,” and that words will “move things you know they will do things. They will fetch. Put a name to some thing and you are beckoning” indicate the power of narrative to reconfigure reality (Hoban 236). Language becomes especially significant, in the existential sense, when the unravelling of the human world is unfolding, because of its sense-making power. At the same time, as we have seen, the very conditions which generate the imperative to tell a story through significant language in order to reinterpret reality also threaten to possibility for language to signify at all.

Nevertheless, these novels are themselves of course texts, and can therefore only approach the end of language, and speak of the onset of its demise in a possible world; they can never actually go beyond language. This relates to the ultimate problem and paradox of fictions which gesture towards a posthuman world. To write a text in natural language is already to concede defeat on some level if the intention is to represent a truly posthuman world. Indeed, to write the end of the world is a Sisyphean endeavour, as language by its nature always resurrects the buried world, at least in echoes, memories and dreams. As Mavri has argued with reference to *The Road*: “Language carries with it vestiges of the past, memories of things thought long gone, traces of beauty. The remnant, battered, charred, or blackened though it may be, still glows beneath the ashes. [...] *The Road* is therefore a highly ironic work, proclaiming the end of language, of beauty, and of ethics, all the while acting as a witness against itself” (11).

Crucially, the man and the boy sustain their lives and their journey through stories as much as physical action, and the interpretation and production of signs in stories, dreams and experiences is the last bastion of meaning-making available to the protagonists. The existential necessity of interpretive and symbolic structures is expressed from an ambiguous perspective, either the narrator's observation or the man's reflection, during an incident in which the man is simply drying his son's hair by the fire, but it is framed in terms of a ritual drama: “All of this

like some ancient anointing. So be it. Evoke the forms. Where you've nothing else construct ceremonies out of the air and breathe upon them" (McCarthy 77-78). The man and the boy must make sense of their being-towards-the-end and preserve, or perhaps author, relational meaning. It is in confrontation with the end that they find themselves with "nothing else," and yet their response is not to acquiesce to the postmoral turn which the roadagents have taken, but rather to respond affirmatively to the posthuman imperative to reinterpretation by composing a ceremony; a ritual that points towards a lived story of relational narrativised being. In this story, and in one another as participants in and partakers of the story, they find a telos, enacted without always being articulated, for their being in the face of the end. Though this end, if realised, threatens to undermine the very possibility of story as such, the end as imminent and immanent possibility is also a catastrophically "generative turn" (De Villiers 27), prompting the composition of such ceremonies as episodes in their meaningful drama of being.

It will already have become clear by this point that *The Road* provides a rich metatextual commentary on language and narrative. It is a text which sometimes manages to stand outside of itself or reach beyond itself to the reader in order to reveal something about the nature of texts and the reader's participation in them. It often does this subtly yet dramatically, by coercively interpolating the readers into the text-world in such a way that we are forced to confront the existential and interpretive problems of the text directly, rather than merely through the protagonists as proxies. This is accomplished by features such as ambiguous address (the "doubly deictic you," lack of reporting clauses, etc.), the generic names of the protagonists, and the fact that the precipitating calamity is left unspecified. These features not only allow, but actively compel the reader to encounter the text as an open-ended literary artefact which subsumes their own contexts as possible pasts and paths to the bleak future world which is the novel's present. To some degree, this is a characteristic of all the texts which I have been discussing, although arguably it occurs most persistently in *The Road* and is most fundamental to what *The Road* is doing as a text. There is a deep structural ambiguity and open-endedness which allows these novels to equivocate and interweave temporalities, contexts, and interpretations. They speak to what came before the end, the end as 'now,' and that which remains 'after' the end, often troubling the boundaries between these categories and perpetually threatening to import the reader into any of these spaces, or all at once.

As in *The Road*, the characters in *Riddley Walker* conduct all their sense-making by means of narratives. It is a novel littered with texts within the text; shored against the ruins of their



society, though sometimes threatening yet greater ruin. The most prominent narratives are those transmitted in the puppet shows, chiefly the Eusa Show, but a proliferation of other texts including the quasi-Scriptural Eusa Legend, songs such as “Fools Circel 9wys,” and numerous ritual forms are discernible in the novel. Even apparently random clusters of events are narrativised and interpreted, ploughed for “blips” and “syns,” by means of “connexions” and “tels.” For example, when the death of Riddley’s father, a dog pack leader deliberately allowing Riddley to kill him, and a dead baby being found at “Widders Dump” all occur on the same day, Riddley determines that there must be a significant “connexion” to be made, and an interpretive “tel” to be made of it, and so with the aid of Reckman Bessup, he arrives at the “tel:” “The far come close took by the littl come big” as an aphorism to account for all these events (Hoban 39-40). Most of these texts within the novel are concerned, whether those rehearsing them are aware of this or not, with the world which came before. The prime example is the Eusa show mentioned in my second chapter. At the same time, it is the obsessive longing to return to the lost glories of a former world unmade which threatens to finally undo the present world in the same way, as Goodparley seeks to regain the nuclear technology of the “1 Big 1” which was instrumental in bringing about the apocalyptic “Bad time,” through his interpretation of the Eusa legend (274). Interpretation, reinterpretation and misinterpretation of received texts guides the characters as they retrace or resist the steps which brought about the calamity that ended the former world and inaugurated their own.

In a world which takes its directives from textual exegesis, the introduction of a new story produces an imperative for change, and it seems that the Punch and Pooty play functions in this way. Punch is a vulgar, id figure whose carnivalesque revelling in all that is depraved about human nature, whether it be unbridled sexuality (405) or violence (407), allows the audience to acknowledge what is debased in themselves, and yet to simultaneously affirm their capacity to rise above what Punch represents, signified by their laughter (Gannon 34). In fact, Punch is not an entirely new discovery, but rather a rediscovery of a lost tradition, “the oldes figger there is” which, when revealed again, challenges the stasis into which society has settled (Hoban 251). Punch therefore suggests something akin to the dialectic of transcendence and return, identified by Jewel Spears Brooker with reference to Modernist literature: “namely, the tendency to move forward by spiralling back and refiguring the past” (54). Though, in Punch’s case, if he does indeed afford Riddley’s people an alternative by which to move forward, the dialectic might better be rendered as moving forward by spiralling back to be refigured by a

figure of the past. There seem to be at least two possibilities for Riddley's people, however: they might indeed move forward through this refiguring with reference to the past; or they might fall into the trap of seeking to reappropriate the technology of a greater past, with the outcome of a true nuclear terminus for all their kind – a kind of transcendence into nothing, which is no transcendence at all.

Like *The Road* and *Riddley, BNW* is metatextually rich in that it is a novel with much to say about the possibility, or impossibility, of composing narratives under posthuman conditions. The most interesting points in this regard are expressed by Hemholtz, John and Mustapha Mond, all of whom are anomalies in the system to some degree. As I have briefly suggested in my previous chapter, such anomalies are crucial to the possibility of narrative drama within the text. Hemholtz is characterised as an individual, and thus an aberration in the Brave New World, because of his excess mental acuity, which renders him superior even to other Alphas and makes conformity increasingly difficult as the novel progresses (Huxley 57-58). His occupation is the composition of rhymes for propaganda and conditioning purposes, but he is chronically unfulfilled in this work. He has the sense that he has “something important to say and the power to say it – only I don't know what it is, and I can't make any use of the power” (59-60). He recognises that his rhymes are vacuous expressions of state-authorised platitudes, simply not “important enough” as they instantiate only his duty-bound efforts to “say something about nothing” (60). They are not intended to express or evoke depth of experience or intimations of the transcendent, but simply to serve as utilitarian fodder for the cannons of politically correct hedonistic consumerism. As John later says of such texts: they are “told by an idiot” (194), invoking the famous passage from *Macbeth*, which refers to “a tale told by an idiot [...] signifying nothing,” and Mond admits that the texts simply “mean themselves.” Naturally, when Hemholtz does make his first attempt at composing a real poem, about the notion of solitude, he comes up against the aggressive machinery of state censorship which crushes his creative venture (157-158).

In the Brave New World, then, there is no literature, in the traditional sense that John and the reader might anticipate, and even the very poor and limited steps in the direction of it, of which a few exceptional persons may be capable by some mysterious fluke, are suppressed. The Brave New World has thoroughly impaled itself upon its preferred horn of the dilemma: “You've got to choose between happiness and what people used to call high art. We've sacrificed the high art. We have the feelies and the scent organ instead” (194). Further, as Mond explains, not only

could a great work such as “Othello” not be produced under the conditions of the Brave New World; such a work could not be interpreted or understood even if it were made available (193-194). In the absence of social instability such works cannot be created or understood, nor is any need for them experienced. There is no experience of existential tension to drive people to imagine, create, and search for meaning. This point, which is developed in some detail in the novel, is finally and succinctly confirmed when Mond and Hemholtz agree that a “thoroughly bad climate” somewhere on the periphery of the World State would enable genuine writing which could not be done within civilisation proper (201-202). Within the Brave New World, “high art” is simply one more dangerous superfluity which is eschewed in favour of stability and happiness (194). The inhabitants of the Brave New World are last men in the Nietzschean sense. Just like Nietzsche’s last men, they live in material comfort, supremely complacent, jaded into a state of being ‘beyond’ truth and values, and inwardly hollow (Fukuyama, *End* 305-307, 312; Nietzsche 117-119, 164). Yet, these ‘last men’ are also legible as figures of the posthuman. For Kojève, “if man is defined by his desire to struggle for recognition [...] then ‘Man properly so-called’ will cease to exist because he will have ceased to work and struggle” (Fukuyama, *End* 310-311).

My contention is that the post-narrative condition of the Brave New World points towards its posthuman character. To the extent that vestiges of narrative remain, in the form of propaganda, ritual, and entertainment, these are forms without substance, rigidly utilitarian, and intended only to maintain stupor and incite pleasant sensations. For Brooks, narrative as such depends upon desire as the mechanism that moves it forward (37-39), and hence a world devoted to satisfaction and climax without deferral, in which the “time between desire and its consummation” is collapsed and whatever gaps do occur between these are filled by the mind-numbing drug soma (Huxley 36), the very basis for narrative and narrativised being is threatened. Indeed, the very possibility for this text to be read as a paradoxical narrative description of a post-narrative world is entirely dependent upon the presence of abject elements which do not properly belong to this world's self-articulation: the defective Bernard and Hemholtz, the savage John, and we the savage readers. Without such aberrant elements, there could still be mere information about the Brave New World, but virtually no narrative in the proper sense, because the preconditions for narrative, and thus for human being, are precisely what this civilisation designates as aberrant and abject, and what its most foundational mechanisms function to erase.

The figure of the “last man” is also raised in *1984*, during the climactic torture sessions to which O’Brien subjects Winston, though here it is used in the sense of the last of a kind: that kind of human which exercises a way of being which is recognisably human from within the paradigm of humanism. O’Brien announces to Winston that “If you are a man, Winston, you are the last man. Your kind is extinct; we are the inheritors” (Orwell 282-283). Winston’s ostensible role evokes the motif of the saving remnant of the chosen people in Old Testament redemptive history (1 Kings 19:18; Isa. 1:9; Jer. 23:3; Joel 2:32, etc.), except that here it is intimated that he will not re-establish and redeem his own kind, but will pass out of history, as has all else which could challenge the Party’s narrative. O’Brien also declares Winston “the last man [...] the guardian of the human spirit” before ordering him to undress and look at his withering body, presumably in order that Winston may see that what he regards as the essential human spirit is something that is finite, fragile, and decaying away, shaking his sense of identity and value (283-284). This sense of the demise of the human comes through most strongly the final time that O’Brien addresses Winston in this way:

'You are rotting away,' he said; 'you are falling to pieces. What are you? A bag of filth. [...] Do you see that thing facing you? That is the last man. If you are human, that is humanity. Now put your clothes on again' (Orwell 285).

In this way Winston is forced to encounter himself as a thing, as self-estranged, in a portrayal which is a direct assault on the humanist ideal of the human. His physical transformation signifies the mental and emotional transformation, spreading inwards, which will only be complete on the novel's final page, by which Winston is being gradually pushed beyond the limits of the human. Since Winston is positioned as emblematic of humanity as a whole, his undoing signifies the undoing of humanity as it has formerly been understood.

Yet, this is a point of rupture with humanity and society as understood from within a previous paradigm, rather than an absolute terminus, and “open-ended potentiality” can emerge even precisely out of conditions of demise (De Villiers 37). The demise of Winston and what he represents is the confirmation that a new, dystopian race has inherited the earth, and far from being overthrown, their dominion has only begun. The logic of *Doublethink*, “the power of holding two contradictory beliefs in one’s mind simultaneously, and accepting both of them” (Orwell 223), is discernible in O’Brien's arguments. Winston is the last man, but “we [the party] are the *inheritors*” [emphasis mine]. Thus, while the “curing” of Winston is represented as the

end of a kind, and therefore by definition a discontinuity, there is also some sense of continuity between the world that passes away with Winston, and the world of the Party, signified by the image of a “boot stomping on a human face forever.” The decaying “thing” Winston has become is humanity, but simultaneously “Humanity is the Party,” and the Party “create human nature” out of “infinitely malleable” material (282). Winston is the last man, but man, in another sense, will always exist as whatever the Party defines as man, and the “[t]he rule of the Party is for ever” (274). Winston's own mind and body are the site of this continuity and discontinuity, in his decay and subsequent regeneration as a conforming Party man with fresh dentures, eagerly awaiting the bullet that will bring him to a second end (311).

This novel cannot entertain an absolute end, because, as O'Brien asserts to Winston in denying any historical reality extrinsic to human consciousness and dismissing the evidence of the fossil record: “Before man there was nothing. After man, if he could come to an end, there would be nothing. Outside man there is nothing” (278). In the contradictory logic of Ingsoc, while no individual person is recognised as having any importance, the ideology is nevertheless highly anthropocentric, because it denies objective reality, instead grounding reality in narratives. These narratives are generated by the collective mind of the Party, which is comprised of humans, and imposed upon a society of humans. The narratives of Ingsoc are at once misanthropic and anthropocentric. The Party will abolish humanity as represented in Winston, and yet the Party and its world will be the immortal “inheritors,” perpetually creating and recreating humanity in their image. In Fukuyama's terms, such an uncanny inheritance, not entirely discontinuous with prior humanity, and yet radically distinct from it, may conceivably be understood as our irresistible “destiny as creatures who modify themselves” (*Posthuman Future* 6). However, if we afford human nature a high importance as our “source of values,” arguably as the “very grounding of the human moral sense,” and accept the grim representation in *1984* of such a decisive, perhaps even apocalyptic reconstitution of the boundaries of the human as “threat” (6-7; 100-102), then Orwell's novel confronts us as a vision of a possible future, in relation to which we must re-interpret our own present modes of being and their consequences.

Similarly to *1984*, *Brave New World* depicts the passing away of the autonomous human individual of the humanist paradigm. The spectre of the posthuman condition is raised more obviously in this novel than in *1984*, in that it portrays the incursion of the totalitarian state

apparatus not only into the human mind via the socio-ideological sphere, but also into the human body itself, as “bokanovskification” and other means of developmental manipulation allow for deterministic transformations at the genetic level, introducing a new, radically determined and stratified kind of human being, which bears only a superficial resemblance to the self-determining, organic human individual of humanism. The utopian, transhumanist dream, in which such technologies might expand the horizons and serve the interests of this notion of the individual succumbs to a posthuman nightmare. All normal persons in this society lack the capacity to envision alternative possibilities for themselves beyond their socially predestined functions. Only those who are aberrations in the system, such as Bernard, Hemholtz, the savage John, and Mustapha Mond, are able to enter into a narrative drama in which they can make meaningful decisions as they orientate themselves in relation to a society which will inevitably bring about the end of individuals like them, whether by exile or death. Characteristically for the novels in this study, the posthuman imperative to reinterpretation which is generated by the conditions portrayed in this text, is also levelled at the readers. Indeed, most of the characters in this novel have already entered into a condition in which existential sense-making as beings in the midst confronting the end is no longer an intelligible possibility, because they lack the capacity to conceive of alternatives. For the reader, the world of this text confronts them as a possible posthuman end, in relation to which we might experience the reconfiguration of our own being-in-the-midst, although the text gives us no clear didactic prescriptions as to how this ought to be done. Those abnormal characters with whose condition the reader finds resonance represent potential paths of grappling with the posthuman world which confronts them, though the novel in no way communicates to the reader that any of these particular paths are to be regarded as proper or successful. For the reader to wrestle independently with these problems is to respond to the posthuman imperative and engage in reinterpretation of one’s own being in relation to a possible end.

*A Clockwork Orange* is an outlier text in my selection in that it depicts a temporal setting which would not have been perceived as especially distant from its original readers. Nevertheless, by means of estrangement devices such as Nadsat, Burgess distances the reader sufficiently from the events in the novel so that they are able to perceive this as a possible future world which is not yet quite their own, and yet disturbingly proximate. Again, as in *1984*, we do not have an end to humans as such in view here, but rather the threat of the undoing of the humanist

individual. Unlike *1984* and *BNW*, however, the forces which would bring about this undoing are still in an early form, limited in scope. Alex is made subject to them by virtue of his status as a criminal, and he alone is selected for the first full experimental trial of the new conditioning process. The widespread criminality and youth degeneracy in the world of *A Clockwork Orange* are themselves evidence that the state is so far unable to realise its social vision, in contrast to the highly-reified totalitarianisms of *1984* and *Brave New World*. However, the state's intention to rapidly expand this conditioning program, despite criticism and resistance, is made apparent to the reader (Burgess 98). There is some indication, then, that Alex is only the first of a new category of being, anatomically human, and yet decisively distinct from the autonomous individual of humanism.

In considering the problems and paradoxes of narrative in contexts where the human preconditions for narratives recognisable as such are being challenged, more thought ought to be given to the reflection of such challenges in the formal features of a novel. *A Clockwork Orange* is particularly interesting to consider in this regard. The brief novel is divided into three parts, with each part consisting of seven chapters. Each of these parts begins with a refrain of "What's it going to be then, eh?," with this phrase differently contextualised in each case. In the first instance, Alex and his droogs are at the bar, deciding what kind of hooliganism to pursue with their evening (3). In the second case, Alex is in prison as a result of these actions, and the prison chaplain is asking him whether he will continue with a life of crime or follow a contrite religious path (57). The final part-initial refrain sees Alex standing outside the prison, asking himself what the next step in his life will be now that he is free from incarceration (97). This neat, logical division suggests a nightmarishly perverse rendition of a classical hero's journey structure, but the strong causal connections between each phase both explicitly highlight and implicitly undermine Alex's power to shape his journey through his own autonomous choices. Goh has proposed that the highly structured, cyclical and repetitive form of the novel suggests the rigid conformity of the deterministic socialising structures at play within the world of the novel (263-264). This would be formally consonant with Alex's loss of autonomy in the text.

Burgess makes use of first-person narration from the past-tense perspective of an older Alex, looking back upon the events of his life. This is interesting in a number of ways. This means that we have no access to the world of the text apart from that which is filtered through Alex's

lens and coloured by his linguistic palate (McQueen 228-229). If indeed Nadsat is a language of propaganda and subliminal penetration then we are in a sense having our minds corrupted even as we read the text from the fundamentally unreliable perspective of the protagonist. Intriguingly, Alex himself insists that he is a “Faithful Narrator” (Burgess 33). He also describes himself as, for example, “Humble” and “handsome” (e.g., 48, 51). Moreover, since the perspective from which we view the textual world is one of looking back, we are in the position of the post-conditioning Alex. Therefore, we are looking back upon a world which is already facing a kind of demise, in the face of an epidemic of degenerative violence and the emergence of mechanisms of social engineering which have the potential to move those who are subject to them beyond the limits of the human as traditionally conceived. Moreover, we look from a view that has already been distorted by these processes to the extent that, while some familiar cultural practices render it an identifiable view, it is uncannily other than human. Alex’s view, in that it has been subject to these processes, is in some sense a posthuman view, which we are compelled to occupy as we gaze upon a world that represents the entropic unravelling of our own.

Narratologically, Alex’s reconditioning is presented in such a way that we as readers observe it at once from the perspective of the later Alex (through his narration), and yet also from a voyeuristic view similar to that of the doctors who study him. We thus witness and participate in the process that pushes Alex beyond the conventional boundaries of the human, while also encountering this moment and the text as a whole as filtered through a consciousness which has become in some sense posthuman. Like Winston, Alex will be transformed into something compatible with the interests of the state through a brutal and dehumanising process. However, our sympathy with Winston is simpler to account for. Despite his morally grey character, Winston is essentially being victimised merely because he desires a sphere of freedom from the pervasive tyranny of the Party. Alex, on the other hand, is clearly a vicious criminal, and so there is at least an instrumental justification for the state’s intervention. Yet we do sympathise with Alex, partly because he is our first-person protagonist with whom we are made to identify, partly because the means employed by the state are so disturbing, and partly because of an intuition that Alex is being violated in his human essence; that which we share with him is being transgressed against here, and so we are made to confront the posthuman possibility which becomes his actuality. It is also interesting that he is turned into this other-than-human being through a conditioning process which employs filmographic art and music. Rabinowitz argues that Alex’s appreciation of music throughout the novel challenges our revulsion against



his violent personality, and makes us dependent upon him as our only guide to beauty in the world of *Clockwork* “for the audience wishes, at least with regard to this aspect of Alex’s life, to be where he is and to hear what he hears” (110). This effect adds to the profound moral ambiguity of our identification with this protagonist, and the intriguingly uncomfortable experience of reading the novel, further unsettling us and enhancing our sense that something violent is happening to us as we read this portion of the novel in particular.

Another interesting aspect of the novel's narration is that Alex frequently breaks the narratorial spell by inserting his retrospective voice diegetically into the text. He constantly refers to himself by titles such as “Your Humble Narrator” (e.g., 48). Elsewhere, he makes comments directed at the reader, such as “that's where you came in,” and “I didn't enjoy being with them [...] any more than you do now, but it won't be much longer” (63-64). He also constantly refers to the readers as “my brothers” (e.g., 3, 64). Such devices interpolate the reader into the text-world, much like the ambiguous deixis which has been identified in *The Road*. Sometimes they serve to situate the reader in relation to spatio-temporal contextualisations of events, or inform us of what is to come. Elsewhere, they serve to enhance the feeling that we are undergoing this transformative journey along with Alex. He compels us to identify with him, and therefore to recognise that both his transgressions and the dehumanising social systems to which he is subject are things which we have the potential to share, whether we like it or not. He forces us to retrospect upon a world to which we cannot bear to look forward, but perhaps must, as he brings us face to face with the posthuman horizon.

I have already described some ways in which this text reaches beyond itself. Some other metatextual features deserve mention in their own right however, so I shall make some further observations here. Firstly, there is the novel within the novel. We are introduced to the author F. Alexander, a victim of one of Alex's crimes, who is the author of a text called *A Clockwork Orange* (Burgess 18-19, 117). This text, like the novel we read, engages with questions around free will, social determinism, the nature of the human being, and so on. However, this text is derided as being written in pompous, quasi-profound prose. Alex intriguingly identifies with F. Alexander as “another Alex,” creating the implication that this description may apply also to the real author of the novel, Burgess, and perhaps also to we readers, who are elsewhere called Alex's “brothers.” At the end of the novel, Alex's concluding words are directly addressed to the reader, and are fascinating to read. He emphasises how we as readers have shared his experiences and participated in his journey, further underlining our implicit identification with

him as narrator-protagonist. He also, simultaneously, asserts the boundaries of the novel we hold in our hands, and points to a hypothetical continuity of the text-world into a future time after the novel, into which we cannot follow him (141).

This closing speech highlights the phenomenology of reading, through which we encounter an actual representation of a bounded fictional world, which nevertheless implies possible past and future extensions which may bleed into possible worlds of our own. Literary representations may interpolate us into imaginative perspectival positions from which we may look back upon our own world anew, either as parallel to the fictional world, or as a possible past, the trajectory of which the representation may describe. In this way, the act of reading becomes a mode of being in relation to temporal possibilities, which we may not otherwise have conceived, but which a literary text, because of its peculiar phenomenological nature, may invite us to “try on” and inhabit for a time. In the case of the ending of *Clockwork*, Alex is the perspectival locus of this invitation, with his uncanny consciousness as ambivalent site of the familiar, if tenuous human self, and the new, posthumanised constitution, with lingering questions regarding the degree to which the latter has usurped the former. The ending of *The Road* is more radical, inviting us to look back upon a world unmade from a perspective without a discernible locus, which gestures towards an unimaginable being-*from-the-end* which reconfigures being-in-the-middest in terms of catastrophic loss. However, texts such as *Clockwork*, *The Road*, and the other works discussed in this thesis do not promise that this “trying on” will be a merely recreational exercise. All of these imaginings of an end to the human position us as readers in confrontation with the posthuman imperative, as we look back upon our own worlds and our own being as loss, and are called to tell a story that makes sense of these things anew.

## Conclusion

Existence, like narratives, can only be made sense of as a whole when structure and concord are conferred upon it by the invocation of a point of origin, as well as an ending (Kermode 4-8). Yet, origins and endings in the ultimate sense are always to some extent occluded from us as beings, and therefore we can always only approach them through fictions (67). Humans, therefore, in orientating themselves as beings in the midst "make considerable investments in coherent patterns which, by the provision of an end make possible a satisfying consonance with the origins and with the middle" (17). What, then, if the end point which is imagined, provided or confronted is a posthuman end? To the extent that a literary text establishes conditions within its textual world which raise the possibility of the posthuman, which then serves as a potential imagined end point in relation to which understandings of origin and being-in-the-middest are reconfigured through a process of existential reinterpretation, it may be said that this text has generated the posthuman imperative. This is an imperative which characters in the text may be seen to be grappling with, and the reader may partake sympathetically of this struggle, though often certain narratological and linguistic features of the text serve to directly confront the reader in a more coercive fashion with the imperative and demand of them the same kind of process of reinterpretation. The process of reinterpretation which arises in response to the posthuman imperative is chiefly mediated through language and story, and has wide-ranging implications, including for frameworks of meaning, value, ethics, truth, the self, and relation to the transcendent as well as to time and history.

I have focused on the dystopian and post-apocalyptic genres because of their distinctive preoccupation with ends and, as this study has drawn out, with origins as well. Texts from both the post-apocalyptic genre and the dystopian genre may in fact have an apocalyptic character in the original sense of "apocalyptic" as "revelatory." All five texts in this selection have represented worlds other than our own where some event or trajectory has reconfigured or disfigured reality in a way that is revelatory of the limits of the human. Under such conditions, the human may be threatened or even superseded by the possibility or actuality of the posthuman. The posthuman need not always be inaugurated by genetic or cybernetic technologies which reconstitute the body, although *Brave New World* for example does speak to the embodied dimension of the posthuman. The posthuman may be ushered in through

discursive means as well, by social, political, and ideological acts and structures which can also threaten to end human ways of being. Likewise, confrontation with the end need not mean that the end is imminent. It may or may not be imminent, but the end is always immanent as possibility at every step through the midst.

In narratives where one world is giving way to another which takes its place, the inhabitant of the former world may be prompted to look back upon themselves, and encounter their own being in terms of being-as-loss, and this effect may also be produced in the reader who confronts the end from a perspective other than their own through literary devices which prompt them to look back over their own world as that which is lost. Yet, to approach through fiction the total loss of any world at all automatically generates the paradoxical problem that the language of fiction is inherently world-creating and reviving, and so the ultimate terminus can only be approached rather than apprehended by literature. A deeper paradox lies nearer to the matter of the posthuman imperative, which it has been my special theoretical interest to develop in this study. The imperative is one to reinterpretation and renewed sense-making, chiefly by narrative means, in the face of catastrophe. Yet, the very conditions which give rise to the imperative threaten to undercut the process of sense-making which it prompts, precisely by threatening the possibility of narrative as such. The end is necessary for narrative, and for existence, which shares that narrative structure, but at the same time it is also that which threatens to swallow both story and reader entire by defeating all alternatives and trajectories. It is the centrality and, simultaneously, the problematising of narrative in these works which has been a major focus for the chapter immediately above.

I have developed my argument in conversation with five primary texts: *Brave New World*, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, *A Clockwork Orange*, *Riddley Walker*, and *The Road*. This selection has been sufficiently broad for the limited purposes of this study. However, the conclusions, paradoxes, and many lingering questions raised in this thesis point towards fertile ground for further investigation by means of the interpretive approach and emphases employed here, as well as further development of, and critical engagement with, the approach itself. There are many other novels which may be responsive to a similar approach, with one of the most obvious candidates being Yevgeny Zamyatin's *We*, which I have only neglected to engage here because of the necessary constraints of the thesis. I could also point towards other novels such as Ray

Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451*, Stephen King's *The Stand*, William Golding's *The Lord of the Flies*, Nnedi Okorafor's *Who Fears Death*, Mary Shelley's *The Last Man*, and countless others.

There is also much to explore in the realms of film, poetry, and other genres of text which have been wholly beyond the scope of this study. Admittedly, my primary texts here have all been limited to the Anglo-American oeuvre, and to the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. It remains to be explored what further insights the approach might yield, and in what ways it might be challenged and complicated, by examination of texts from other literary localities and eras. What I hope to have accomplished in this study is to have set forth a way of looking at texts in light of origin and end and investigating whether the posthuman imperative is present and how it is responded to with the implications for being-in-the-middest. I hope that this approach will prove generative when applied to a variety of texts in a variety of contexts.

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