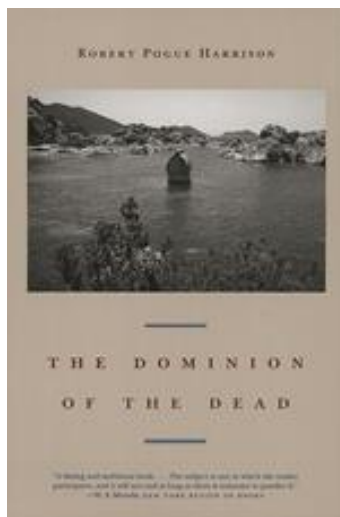


INGL 3300-066--“Post-Apocalyptic Literature and Film” ---Ingl3300-066
UPRM, Fall 2015, Dr. Gregory Stephens (**Lecture 8, Oct. 13, 2015**)
Notes on Ecocide, Language, Memory, and Color

A). Differences from other texts in the genre. We discussed the abundance of food in other post-apocalyptic films. There may also be said to be a lack of hope--or at least the focus is on survival, although this is arguably predominant in most works in the genre. The difference seems to be a lack of hope that the earth can be healed:

“The novel does not simply evoke the ruin of human **stewardship**, but the ruin of nature itself. This is more surprising than may appear at first sight. **It may be difficult to imagine the destruction of the human world, but it is even more difficult to imagine the annihilation of the earth itself.**

In this sense, **ruins usually hint at survival as well as destruction**, ‘the survival not so much of the ruins themselves as of the earth on which they stand’.”⁸ (De Bruyn 2010: 778)

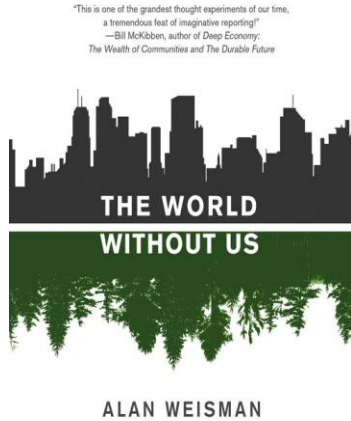


8) Harrison, Robert Pogue. *The Dominion of the Dead*. Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press, 2003. (quote p. 15). Quoted in:

De Bruyn, Ben. "Borrowed Time, Borrowed World and Borrowed Eyes: Care, Ruin and Vision in McCarthy's *The Road* and Harrison's *Ecocriticism*." *English Studies* 91.7 (2010): 776-789.

Humanity’s emergence from the forest into the city may be undone, but according to various writers, that simply returns us to the forest, enabling us to start over. This return of nature is vividly portrayed in Alan Weisman’s non-fictional portrait of the deserted town of Varosha in *The World Without Us* (2007):

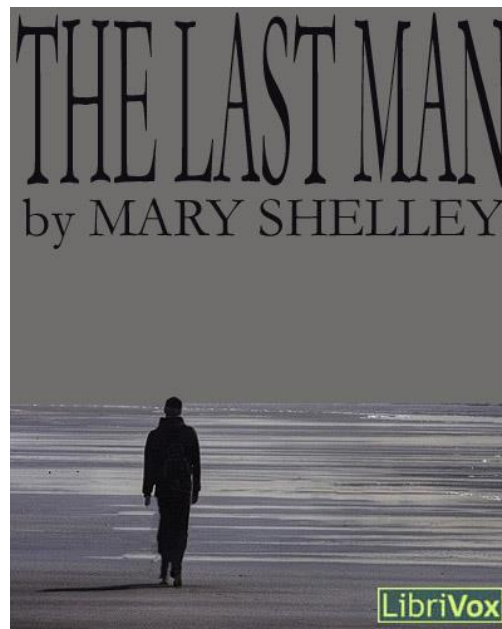
Nature continues its reclamation project. . . . Flame trees [and] thickets of hibiscus . . . sprout from nooks where indoors and outdoors now blend. Houses disappear under magenta mounds of bougainvillea. Lizards and whip snakes skitter through . . . six-foot grasses.¹⁰ (778-79)



10) Weisman, Alan. *The World Without Us*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 2007 (quote p. 97).

This description of nature's "reclamation project" is a staple feature of postapocalyptic literature. Consider Mary Shelley's evocation of London in *The Last Man* (1826), one of the earliest precursors to *The Road*:

[The streets] were grass-grown and desert . . . rank herbage . . . had *swiftly* accumulated on the steps of the houses . . . the churches were open, but . . . mildew and damp had *already* defaced their ornaments; birds, and tame animals [had] made their lairs in consecrated spots.¹¹



Shelley, Mary. *The Last Man*, 1826. Broadview Press, 1996, p. 262, author's emphasis

[Class discussion: Shelly's description is part and parcel of the romantic movement, in which rebirth was imagined to require going back to the garden. In the pastoral genre of literature (city folk going out to a romanticized country), nature is imagined to have healing powers, and is seen in pantheistic terms. Therefore, foliage and animals taking over a church is seen as a positive good (washing away the decadence of humanity), just as Tyler in *Fight Club* imagines nature having taken over Chicago, with deer roaming the streets now gone to seed.]

DeBruyn continues: "nature will quickly reclaim the city. Similar scenes occur in several of McCarthy's novels. Both the Anasazi ruins in *Blood Meridian* (1985) and a dilapidated building in *The Crossing* (1994) show animal tracks... indicating that the human indoors is being reclaimed by the natural outdoors. [But] compared to Weisman and Shelley's work, *The Road* is much more pessimistic about the earth's regenerative capacities. The weather may still leave its mark on human houses and artefacts, but there is no return of life (779).

Once a blue cradle of life, the ocean has become a grey and "vast salt sepulchre" (*The Road*, 187) strewn with millions of dead birds and fishes. Is this sea still of the earth or is it "some alien sea" (181), like the father's earth is an alien "planet" (129) compared to that inhabited by the boy? Apparently, the "reliable generosity" of the earth—the nature of the earth itself, we might say—has evaporated.¹⁵ As these remarks suggest, *The Road* questions the assumption of the earth's continued existence operative in more partial scenes of ruin. (780)

[15. Harrison, Gardens, 28. The novel's radically apocalyptic dimension is weakened in John Hillcoat's movie adaptation (*The Road*), as it interpolates a scene in which the boy finds a living beetle. In this version of the story, it seems that nature is not entirely devastated.]

[My conclusion: only gods have such complete powers of destruction. Mankind's advancement in technology was god-like, but was not accompanied by a parallel growth in consciousness.]

B) STUDY GUIDE QUESTIONS:

1). Why does the man get rid of his wife's picture (and ring in the movie)? (51) What is his strategy / attitude towards memories of her (which includes color)? (18; 131; How does this contrast from waking daydreams, from which there is no escape? [Discussion: Ulysses and the fatal song of the Sirens in *The Odyssey*]

2). Why does the father say “curse God and Die” (114)? What led him to this moment? What is his general attitude towards “God”?

3). Why does the boy say “I have to watch you all the time”? (34) What does this express about the nature of their relationship?

4). Discuss how color is tied to memory, and how the disappearance of “things” in the material world leads to the disappearance of language.

5) Contrast the suppression of color and its recovery in *The Giver*—and the role of color (when momentarily brought back or remembered) in *The Road*.

“Everything was alight. As if the lost sun were returning at last. The snow orange and quivering. A forest fire was making its way along the tinderbox ridges above them, flaring and shimmering against the overcast like the northern lights [...]. The color of it moved something in him long forgotten. Make a list. Recite a litany. Remember.” *The Road*, 31.

“He tried to think of something to say but he could not. He'd had this feeling before, beyond the numbness and the dull despair. The world shrinking down about a raw core of parsible entities. The names of things slowly following those things into oblivion. Colors. 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.” *The Road*, 88-89.

6) What use does the child make of his father's memories of a world he has never seen? (12; 53-54; 59-60)

Religious themes:

Loss of faith:

“the absolute truth of the world” (130)

Carrying the fire (83; 128-29)

“This is what the good guys do. They keep trying.” (137)

Class discussion: Conversation with blind old man about if the boy might be a “god.”

Suggested readings (PDF on ecourse page)

Skrimshire, Stefan. "'There Is No God and We Are His Prophets': Deconstructing Redemption in Cormac Mccarthy's *The Road*." *Journal for Cultural Research* 15.1 (2011): 1-14.

Millán Alba, José Antonio. "El Discurso Sobre Dios en *La Carretera*, de Cormac Mccarthy." *Pensamiento Y Cultura* 17.2 (2014): 182-207. *Academic Search Complete*. Web. 2 July 2015.

La garantía de la perdurabilidad del lenguaje, la condición de su realidad es algo exterior a él; se sitúa en la realidad del mundo. En la medida en que este desaparece, desaparece también el lenguaje, y con él la memoria. La realidad “se encoge”, se empequeñece, y el lenguaje queda, así, “rebajado”. Pues las palabras son tratadas como cosas. El individuo quiere entonces “decir”, pero no “puede”. El texto establece una relación directa entre realidad-palabras-color-calor es decir, expresión de vida.

(Millán Alba 195-196)