

# **Exploring “the strange junction of two extremes of nature”:**

**A comparative analysis of the uncanny within the post-apocalyptic narratives of J.G. Ballard’s *The Drowned World* and Cormac McCarthy’s *The Road* in the context of the modern Anthropocene**



**Maria Bæk Jensen**

**Supervisor: Jens Kirk**

**May 31, 2022**

## **Abstract**

This thesis examines Sigmund Freud's notion of the uncanny appearing within J. G. Ballard's 1962 novel *The Drowned World*, and Cormac McCarthy's 2006 novel *The Road*, looking at how the strangely uncanny manifest within these two examples of post-apocalyptic climate fiction both at the level of discourse, setting and environment within the story worlds, and in the ways in which the apocalyptic changes to the story worlds affects the characters, not only in relation to themselves and the environment, but also in relation to each other. This will be examined in the context of the modern Anthropocene age and the ways in which the uncanny is evoked by the erosion or total destruction of the notion of a nature-culture binary within the novels. Lastly, there will be a discussion of how the novels speak to anxieties about the state of the environment and ecology within the modern Anthropocene age, and the contemporary readers possible concerns about global warming and climate change.

*Keywords:* The uncanny, apocalypse, the Anthropocene, nature-culture binary, J. G. Ballard, *The Drowned World*, Cormac McCarthy, *The Road*.

## Table of Contents

<b>1. An introduction to the uncanny apocalypse .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>2. Naturalness in the Anthropocene .....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b><i>2.1. The modern Anthropocene .....</i></b>	<b>2</b>
<b><i>2.2. The nature-culture binary in the Anthropocene .....</i></b>	<b>5</b>
<b>3. Uncanny apocalypse.....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b><i>3.1. The uncanny and the strange in the merging of nature and culture .....</i></b>	<b>7</b>
<b><i>3.2. The apocalypse and the world after the End.....</i></b>	<b>10</b>
<b>4. Methodology .....</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>5. What is wrong with this picture? .....</b>	<b>14</b>
<b><i>5.1. The Drowned World.....</i></b>	<b>14</b>
<b>5.1.1. Literature review .....</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>5.1.2. The structure of the strange within a drowned metropolis.....</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>5.1.3. “two interlocking worlds” at the End of time .....</b>	<b>26</b>

5.1.4. The last inhabitants of the European lagoons .....	31
5.2. <i>The Road</i> .....	36
5.2.1. Literature review .....	36
5.2.2. Framing uncanny desolation at the End of the road .....	38
5.2.3. A wasteland incinerated to the point of nothing .....	44
5.2.4. The man, the boy, and the spectral memory of her .....	48
6. Uncanny pictures of Anthropocene anxieties .....	54
7. The uncanny at the end of the world.....	58
8. Works Cited.....	60
8.1. <i>Primary sources</i> .....	60
8.2. <i>Secondary sources</i> .....	60

## 1. An introduction to the uncanny apocalypse

In Beatrice Dahl's penthouse apartment within the European lagoons hangs two surrealist paintings, "one of Marx Ernst's self-devouring phantasmagoric jungles creaming silently to itself", and one by "Delvaux, in which ashen-faced women [dance] naked to the waist with dandified skeletons in tuxedos against a spectral bone-like landscape" (Ballard 29). Though they are completely opposite worlds being depicted, they share a common theme in their image of apocalyptic destruction situated at each their own extreme ecological pole; one in which uncontrolled nature has swallowed the world; and the other, wherein nothing is left but grey monochrome death and bones. Much in the same sense, J. G. Ballard's *The Drowned World*, and Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* depicts two wildly different sides of the same apocalyptic coin, meeting in the strange uncanny created within two worlds crumbling at the hands of total environmental disaster.

Despite J.G. Ballard's *The Drowned World* and Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* being written over forty years apart, they both depict strange story worlds brought to their current state by environmental disaster: one, wherein intensifying solar radiation slowly has increased the global temperature, mutating the adapting wildlife and flora, and turning former temperate climate zones into tropical lagoons and jungles; the other, wherein implicit disaster has burned the landscape to the ground, leaving little more than ashes and an increasingly thickening atmosphere for the nomadic survivors travelling the countryside. Reading the novels in the context of the Anthropocene and using the concept of the uncanny, the thesis will look at how the eerily strange and unfamiliar permeates the environments and worlds of the two post-apocalyptic narratives, as distinctions between the human element and the natural environment get blurred in the aftermath of ecological upheaval and collapse, and how the post-apocalyptic narratives can help articulate the hopes and fears connected to our relationship with the natural world in the age of the Anthropocene.

For this thesis, I will be looking at the uncanny within J.G. Ballard's 1962 novel *The Drowned World*, and Cormac McCarthy's novel *The Road* published in 2006, in the context of the Anthropocene. Doing so, I will argue that, despite the fact that the novels deal with instances

of apocalypse which take on polar opposite forms, too much sun and too little sun, too much nature and too little nature, they meet at the uncanny triggered by the erosion of the nature-culture binary, creating weird story worlds wherein nature and culture have merged and become uncanny and unsettling. This comes across both at the level of discourse, in the setting and environment of the story worlds, and the characters inhabiting these altered worlds and their relationship to the deteriorating environments around them. Lastly, I will discuss how these novels speak to anxieties about the state of the environment and ecology in the Anthropocene age, as they depict imaginable futures as the borders between the human and the natural world increasingly blur in the contemporary reality of global warming and climate change.

## **2. Naturalness in the Anthropocene**

The first section of this chapter will be looking at the Anthropocene, the proposed geological epoch defined by humanity's global influence on the ecology of the planet, and the way in which this epoch, through the blurring of the natural and human culture, evokes a sense of the uncanny. This is followed by a section outlining the idea of the nature-culture binary and the trope of untouched wilderness within the framework of the Anthropocene.

### ***2.1. The modern Anthropocene***

Described by the British writer Robert Macfarlane as a “new epoch of geological time in which human activity is considered such a powerful influence on the environment, climate and ecology of the planet that it will leave a long-term signature on the strata record”, the idea of the Anthropocene has come to define the human role in the modern environmental crisis (Macfarlane). First recorded in 2000, when its originator, American biologist Eugene Stoermer, published an article together with the Dutch atmospheric chemist Paul Crutzen, arguing for the specification of a new ecological epoch in the history of the planet, the Anthropocene has become an unofficial marker for the global climate crisis. The coinage of the concept was an attempt to give a name to the period in the ecological history of the earth, wherein human impact

can be said to have had a dominant effect on the geo-ecology of the planet: a time period which Stoermer and Crutzen themselves estimate to have begun at the beginning of the industrial revolution (Matthews). According to Crutzen, the carbon dioxide emitted by human activity throughout this period may have a lasting impact on the global climate and its normal behavioural patterns for millennia to come (Crutzen). Looking at the global change recorded during this period, an increase has been seen in global resource extraction and use, in territory expansion and transformation, and an increase in the world's population by more than seven billion. At the same time, up to twenty per cent of mammal, bird, and fish species have undergone the threat of extinction as of 2014 (Matthews), while the World Wildlife Fund's Living Planet Report of 2020 found that "an average 68% decrease in population sizes of mammals, birds, amphibians, reptiles, and fish between 1970 and 2016" (WWF 6). The Anthropocene is a time of upheaval and a time of crisis, as the sharp distinctions begin to fade and the borders between previously established binaries begin to erode: it "is a truly uncanny time, a time when the proper separation between things – between culture and nature, subject and object, human and nonhuman, life and non-life – is collapsing" (Bubandt 3). This disturbance of the known and familiar, the erosion of established borders separating things within the common understanding of the world, is exactly the element within the Anthropocene which evoke the experience of the uncanny, as the uncanny, in its essence, "is a crisis of the natural" (Royle 1).

Due to the nature of the Anthropocene, a concept that spans not only over human lifetimes but operates on the level of 'deep-time', the planet's broader geological history, it is a time span whose consequences can be hard to grasp in its vast, intangible, slow catastrophe. One of the more pernicious aspects of the Anthropocene, and the history in time that it represents, is the sheer scale, both in a temporal and spatial sense, which lies within its domain. Stoermer and Crutzen place its point of departure in the 18th century, the epoch of the Anthropocene contains actively progressing events which not only already have occurred for over two centuries, but also span the surface of the earth, and beyond, as their effect will leave a mark on the planet's strata record for years to come. (Macfarlane). The Anthropocene is the age of 'hyperobjects': a term used by Timothy Morton to articulate the footprint of long-lasting, and globally expansive objects and conditions that humanity has, in some part, introduced onto the planet. According to Morton, "alongside global warming, 'hyperobjects' will be our lasting legacy", as "materials from humble Styrofoam to terrifying plutonium will far outlast current social and biological

forms” (Morton, *The Ecological Thought*, 130). Hyperobjects are uncanny in their very being: they are both decentralised while moving on temporal lines, reaching both into the past, while expanding far into the future. They are here, have been here, and will be here for the foreseeable future and beyond. With a viscous nature, they cling to us: permeating the food we eat, the air we breathe, the warmth of the sun and the sting of the cold. They are pervasive in their presence, all-encompassing, as nothing can stand outside of them, despite their ghostly and eluding presence in the present. They bear the characteristics of both being deeply intangible and abstract, while at the same time, appearing devastatingly tangible and real in the moment. They are invisible to the naked eye, extending both spatially and temporally to a degree where they are undetectable, unperceivable as a whole, while the symptoms of their presence manifest in concrete, devastating instances. In this sense, global warming is an intangible abstraction, while the destructive floods and expansive forest fires which arise from this condition are symptoms of the hyperobject beyond human comprehension (Morton, *Hyperobjects*, 2013).

As a concept, both scientifically and discursively, the Anthropocene is contested. In terms of its scientific validity, although it has been in circulation as a shorthand for a broad geological time frame since Stoermer and Crutzen used it in 2000, it is yet to be considered an official geological period by the International Commission on Stratigraphy. This does not mean that the idea is out of the question, as the Anthropocene Working Group, a research group of specialists has, since 2019, been working towards submitting a formal proposal to the International Commission on Stratigraphy for the Anthropocene to officially become a new geologic epoch (Subramanian). In terms of its reception in the cultural and literary world, the concept of the Anthropocene has met opposition to three aspects of its conception. One protest points to the basis of anthropocentrism from which the core idea of the concept derives and argues this as a narcissistic self-centring narrative of the human race as the sole responsible for the ecological state of the planet, and the lone harbinger of nature's destruction. Another critical view of the concept problematises the generalisation inherent in the '*Anthropos*', as this focus on all humans as universally and equally being part of the consequences of the Anthropocene, thereby shrouding possible disproportionality in regards to who can be considered accountable for the global ecological crisis. Lastly, a critique of the Anthropocene as a primary technologically centred narrative, which both blames technological progress for the current state of the world, while also seeing technology as the only possible saviour of the environment and



the ecology of the planet, neglects to take into account the effect which ideology, political economy, and empire have had on the state of the world today (Macfarlane).

The debate about the idea or concept of the Anthropocene does have its importance, as it is a reminder that large, universalised metanarratives quickly can end up deemphasising and erasing specific concerns and perspectives in favour of the broad, overarching idea. As Sy Taffel articulates in the book *Ecological Entanglements in the Anthropocene*, “the narratives we propagate about our past and present actions have important consequences for the future that comes to pass”, as this affects the ways in which we envision what the future and future intervention into the climate crisis and the current state of the planet’s ecology looks like, as “the Anthropocene is one way of naming, defining and thereby shaping perceptions and responses to numerous contemporary ecological crises” (Taffel 219). At the same time, it is a generalised idea that “has administered [...] a massive jolt to the imagination” (Macfarlane), as it has brought with it a heightened cultural interest and fascination with the environment, nature, and the interrelated and entangled relationship between humanity and the natural world, beyond the binary concepts of nature and culture.

## ***2.2. The nature-culture binary in the Anthropocene***

From the perspective of cultural studies, the earliest notions of culture originated from a distinction between human settlement and civilisation, and the wild nature beyond established fences, husbandry, and farmed land. Settlement and cultivation of the land set the foundation not only for new ways of establishing larger communities but also for a sharper division between the human element and the rest of the world. It is a distinction made already in ancient Greece, as a way to articulate the difference between towns and cities and the country beyond their border, while the Roman notion of culture contained an added element of the separation of not only culture and nature in the concrete physical sense but also a separation between mankind and nature in the sense of spirit and mind: a *cultura animi*. In this way, the agricultural division between cultured elements and non-cultured wilderness became a metaphor for a distinction between the natural and barbaric and the development and culturing of a philosophical soul within humanity: regulation and control of the natural and cultural within oneself (Scott

Sørensen). In this sense, this division became not just a practical arrangement born as a by-product of long-term settlement, but also a way of understanding oneself in relation, not only to the surrounding nature but also to oneself and humankind in a philosophical and existential sense, distancing the human, in every sense, with perceived naturalness and wildness.

The idea of the binary distinction between nature and culture has led to the development of nature tropes or ideas of relatively specific natural environments containing characteristics that have shaped nature writing and writing about the natural environment through time. These are ideas about nature which move within the dichotomy of nature and culture, from the very cultured environment of “the domestic picturesque”, with its manipulated and maintained parks and gardens, to the ‘purest’ form of the concept of nature, the natural environment of wilderness, or nature understood as untouched and unexplored, such as oceans, and uninhabited continents (Barry 255). Due to the uninhabited and unexplored nature of the wilderness trope, this is a genre of nature writing which has lent itself to narratives of man's struggle against nature, exploration narratives and tales of discovering one's true self through the struggle and interaction with untouched nature (251-257). Within the trope of wilderness, in its early Judaeo-Christian conception, lies an ambivalence of meaning. Build from the agricultural distinction between cultured environments and wild nature and the struggle against nature which agriculture presented together with religious texts of nature presenting both dangerous struggles and safe havens, wilderness “combines connotations of trial and danger with freedom, redemption and purity”, concepts which, to some degree, still has a presence in the idea of wild nature. Later, with the rise of the scientific revolution, the idea of humanity as “masters and possessors of nature” (Descartes cited in Garrard 69) opened the doors to a view of nature as containing no value beyond what human knowledge and reason bestowed upon it. This was a conception of nature which found a home with the rise of capitalism, as nature understood as pure resource and commodity with no intrinsic value outside of those markers, smoothed the way for extensive natural resource extraction unperturbed by questions of morality or sustainability (Garrard 66-70).

With the articulation of the Anthropocene and the idea of nature as forever changed by human intervention, the original binary conception of wilderness as uninterrupted, ‘pure’ nature is no longer viable, and the clear delineation between culture and untouched nature becomes hard to sustain in a world where every inch has been touched by human influence. At the same time,

these very material changes to the surrounding environments problematise the idea of nature's true value and authenticity being rooted in absolute independence and purity from human touch and intervention. The binary division of nature and culture is put into question, as the line between the cultured and the natural becomes blurred, and while the environmental developments and newfound knowledge of mankind's effect on the ecology of the planet, in the wake of the epoch of the Anthropocene, reveals the concept of wilderness and pure, authentic nature itself to be a fabricated ideal, a cultural narrative, it also gives space for the erosion of the idea of nature and culture as separate and divided entities. While it can be argued that the idea of wilderness and untouched nature in a material sense no longer is viable due to humanity's increasing reach and ecological footprint during the Anthropocene, it is a nature trope that is alive and well in the cultural narrative imagination: sustained by constructed narratives about nature and humanity's relationship to it found in cultural artefacts such as literature, film, tv, and games, together with experiences such as nature tourism, and the cultivation and preservation of some specific types of nature and the eradication of others.

### **3. Uncanny apocalypse**

This chapter begins with the first section outlining the idea of the uncanny, taking the point of departure in Sigmund Freud's articulation of the concept from his 1919 paper "The 'Uncanny'", and from here, moving into a more recent formulation of the concept in the ecological uncanny, a version of the concept of the uncanny looking specifically at the strange and uncanny evoked by the erosion of the nature-culture binary. This is followed by a section on the apocalypse and the idea of the End of the world.

#### ***3.1. The uncanny and the strange in the merging of nature and culture***

At the very heart of the uncanny lies an uncomfortable blurring of lines, an eerie uncertainty in the known and familiar. It is a slippery concept existing through contradictions and unclear borders, as Andrew Bennet and Nicholas Royle articulate it, "to try to define the uncanny is

immediately to encounter one of its decisive paradoxes” (Bennet and Royle 35). Feelings of eerie weirdness and uncomfortable strangeness are often products of encounters with the uncanny, as it is evoked by a disturbance in the known and normal, in that which seemed so certain and unquestionable. The uncanny is a disruption of the familiar by the unfamiliar or a sense of familiarity in what previously was unfamiliar: a fundamental experience of uncertainty created through denaturalisation and defamiliarization. The uncanny is intangible and immaterial: it is an effect, an experience conjured by transgressions of a set, familiar boundaries, creating experiences of weird, undefinable wrongness where clear certainty and familiarity, or unfamiliarity, once were (35-36).

The effect of the uncanny was first given an attempted shape or form in Sigmund Freud's 1919 essay, “The ‘Uncanny’”, wherein he describes the subject of the *‘unheimlich’* as something that arouses a kind of “dread and horror”: a specific but vague feeling of uncanny operating “within the field of what is frightening” (Freud 219). In the paper, Freud both consults dictionaries, in different languages, in an attempt to map out the strands of meaning which have become attached to the term historically, while also looking at concrete experiences and instances where the uncanny generally is an effect hereof. From the German *‘heimlich’*, Freud points to the dual nature of the word, where the principal meaning relates to the homely and familiar, while at the same time without contradicting this definition, also can be understood as something “concealed, kept from sight, so that others do not get to know of or about it, withheld from others” (223). By adding the prefix to the *‘heimlich’*, the *‘unheimlich’* becomes the opposite of the primary definition of the word, unfamiliar and unhomely, while the second, and more rarely used definition of the hidden, is connected to the *‘unheimlich’* through the philosopher Schelling, noting that “everything is *unheimlich* that ought to have remained secret and hidden but has come to light” (225). When looking at the concrete “things, persons, impressions, events and situations” (226) from which the uncanny is a result, Freud points to, among others, animate beings being inanimate and vice versa (226), the phenomenon of a double (234), repetition and *Déjà vu* (236-237), death and dead bodies (241-242), dismemberment and disturbance of bodily integrity, animism and anthropomorphism, ghosts, and distortion or uncertainty around imagination and reality (244). Freud also takes care to distinguish between instances of real-world uncanny occurrences and the uncanny experiences in literature, as he argues that these two planes create and experience the uncanny differently. Here he highlights

the fact that where literature, depending on genre, may not evoke the uncanny in the same circumstances as it would in the daily life of reality, it is also a realm wherein the possibility space for creating uncanny effects is heightened. Here fictional narratives of fairy tales are stressed as worlds where it is widely known that the fantastical and uncommon rules, thereby leaving little chance for what would normally be considered uncanny to create the effect. This shifts the more the narrative and story world is made to mimic the reality of the real world, thereby creating a space where uncanny experiences evoke uncomfortable strangeness and eerie weirdness. At the same time, narratives with roots in common reality have the advantage that the uncanny can be evoked to a higher degree, making it possible to create stories wherein the uncanny lurks in every corner (249-252).

In the formulation of the Anthropocene and the wider understanding of humanity's influence and role in the change of ecosystems and ecology both locally and globally, the ecological uncanny becomes a way to articulate humanity's relationship with nature in a postmodern world, where human culture can be understood as having an overarching presence in the age of the Anthropocene. In her article "The Terror and the Terroir: The Ecological Uncanny in New Weird Exploration Narratives", Siobhan Carroll looks to Freud's uncanny in order to define the entanglement of nature and culture in the Anthropocene, as the ecological uncanny exposes "the human in the natural and *vice versa*". The lines between nature and culture have become blurred to the point where clear distinctions are becoming difficult, and where culture makes its presence known in nature, while nature appears in cultured spaces (Carroll 67-69). The ecological uncanny can therefore be understood as a deeply postmodern phenomenon, as humanity's footprint on the planet's strata record, and the ecological effect that such a global environmental presence has on the planet, makes "a conception of nature as the realm outside human society becomes difficult or impossible". This is a break with the narrative of a nature-culture binary in which nature and culture is understood as their own separate entities operating in independence from the other, in the wake of "a global human presence that leaves no particle of nature unaltered" (Heise 451). In his book *The Ecological Thought*, Morton looks to Freud's *The 'Uncanny'* as an essential text "for thinking the ecological thought", as it lent itself well to revealing and describing the interconnected nature of ecological entanglement, as he points to qualities of uncanny place as being "at a strangely familiar location - anywhere": 'Here' bears elements of 'there', and "our sense of place includes a sense of

difference” (Morton, *The Ecological Thought*, 52). This way, the ecological uncanny is an experience rooted in the post-natural, as the environment cannot be seen as either entirely manmade or purely natural making the respective unfamiliarity appear once purely familiar, as Rebecca Giggs formulates it: “the ecological uncanny is the experience of ourselves as foreign bodies. The secreted, concealed thing in nature is us, and although we secreted ourselves there, the discovery makes us strange to ourselves” (Giggs 205).

### ***3.2. The apocalypse and the world after the End***

Apocalypse with its world-altering consequences, is a narrative genre which lends itself to the uncanny, as the known in the unknown and the strange in the recognisable, which the destruction of the familiar world brings with it, is fertile ground for evoking feelings of the uncanny. With its long history rooted in religious scripture, apocalypse is a term containing a duality of meaning; a contemporary understanding of complete or widespread destruction and upheaval, and an older and more latent implication of religious revelation and discovery of hidden knowledge, making the apocalyptic both terminal and revelatory. Stemming from the Greek word *apokalypsis*, translating as “revelation, the uncovering of what was previously hidden” (Tate 12), and signifies not so much a full stop to existence, but rather an end to signify a new beginning. In this sense, the contemporary understanding and use of the apocalypse and apocalyptic events have shifted the focus from the regenerative aspect of the End as a start to a new beginning and does instead make the End itself the focal point of the apocalyptic narrative.

Removed from this distinction between the older, eschatological, Judeo-Christian understanding of the apocalypse and the more contemporary notion of the End of the world, the idea of apocalypse provides a temporal function within the creation of narratives. The apocalypse as a future occurrence, provides a stable, intelligible end, as the British literary critic Frank Kermode argues in *The Sense of an Ending*, the apocalyptic narrative, conceptualised through the biblical model of history, of a beginning, with the Book of Genesis, and an end with the Book of Revelation, or the Apocalypse of John, provides an ending point from which it is possible to “project ourselves [...] past the End, so as to see the structure whole, a thing we cannot do from our spot of time in the middle” (Kermode 8). In this way, imagining a possible End, and thereby

predicting a future point of conclusion to existence, helps create a tangible narrative structure about the world, with a recorded past, a lived present, and a projected End. The rhetorician Stephen O’Leary, thinking through the work of Kenneth Burke, presents two frames of interpreting the apocalyptic narrative through: a fundamentally tragic apocalypse, where the End is predetermined to occur, leaving all agency and possible action towards a reversal of the inevitable impossible, and a comic apocalypse, wherein the possibility for change and reversal of the course of catastrophe is posed as possible by addressing previously committed errors. The comic framing of apocalyptic narratives, therefore, leaves the possibility for redemption in the recognition of errors committed by ambiguous and morally conflicted actors able to right these flaws, while the tragic framing of apocalyptic narratives moves unchangingly towards a definite, unavoidable End, leaving behind any possibility for redemption, and placing the actors in a state of diminished agency, as the choices left and the room for action lies within the finite timeline before annihilation (Garrard 94-97). This fatalistic narrative about the End, which the tragic apocalypse envisions, outlines an unavoidable stop to existence wherein nothing will change the final outcome of the eventual full stop that the apocalypse brings.

When looking at stories beyond the end of the world, post-apocalyptic narratives breach this stabilising order of things by continuing after the final annihilation, signifying an “explosive combination of the possible and the unknown: the possibility of transgression and the crossing of a line from what is familiar into unimagined, unimaginable territory” (Lisboa xviii). The post-apocalyptic does not provide a neat closure or demarcate a coherent, structured story of a beginning, middle and end. Rather, it goes beyond the End, crossing the border at the end of the familiar and operates in the imagined space of a world after total upheaval. Life moves on past the apocalyptic event, and the journey of coming to terms with this new reality and the way in which one should move on in the ruins of the apocalypse often become the main focal point. In her book *Postapocalyptic Fiction and the Social Contract*, Claire Curtis examines a range of post-apocalyptic novels which share a common theme around the notion of starting over after the apocalypse, arguing that post-apocalyptic narratives “speaks both to our deepest fears and to our desire to start over again” and that it is a genre of fiction which “describes our fears [...] and like the horror genre, the catharsis of seeing total destruction either relieves that fear or awakens a need to act to prevent it” (Curtis 5), attributing the genre a general didactic function. But it is not all instances of post-apocalypse in which a new beginning is possible, as she notes, “in order for

the social contract to emerge from the postapocalypse there has to be some thought that life can go on” (18). When the post-apocalypse, in a sense, takes on the form of a long, drawn-out apocalypse, wherein no possibility of rebuilding and establishing a lasting life seems imaginable or plausible, the End of the world takes on the form of a warning, as they do not provide possible ways to start over, but rather stands as cautionary tales of the possibility of the End of everything.

Where lines get blurred and the conformably normal gets disturbed, the uncanny is not long behind. It is a weird experience: a sense evoked from the uncertainty found within the known and the recognisable residing within the unfamiliar, which, consciously or unconsciously signals a form of wrongness is afoot. In this sense, it becomes a warning of disruption of the norm, an uncertainty denoting instances or occurrences of defamiliarization and denaturalisation. In its basic form, the apocalypse can be seen as a prime instance of the uncanny, as it at its core is the total breakdown and upheaval of the known and recognisable. Therefore, the uncanny is never far from instances and narratives of apocalypse and the world after the End, as everything is left altered in its wake.

#### **4. Methodology**

Today, the post-apocalyptic tale of the world after the End is alive and well in the modern imagination, permeating the popular narrative landscapes, from literature and films, to games, tv-, and streaming series. It is a genre of fiction which seems to have a tight grip on the contemporary consumer of fiction and has in the last two decades been permeating culture to a large degree, occupying some of the biggest releases on the biggest platforms of narrative fiction. In 2014, Jeff VanderMeer invited his readers to explore the strange, slow apocalypse of Area X in his novel *Annihilation*, an ecocentric story that later was adapted into a film by the same name, produced by the streaming giant Netflix. Four years before the world of Area X and Southern Reach was revealed to the world, the first episode of the wildly popular AMC television series *The Walking Dead* (2010), was released. Based on a 2003 comic book series by the same name, it depicts the collapse of civilization due to a viral zombie apocalypse, where a small group of survivors tries to re-establish some form of a stable community. During the fourth year of *The Walking Dead*'s, so far, twelve-year run, the critically acclaimed, triple-A, Naughty Dog



developed, zombie apocalypse game *The Last of Us* (2013), hit the shelves, and quickly positioned itself as a modern classic in the videogame space. Much like in *The Walking Dead*, society is breaking apart in the wake of a zombie outbreak, and the player character finds himself tasked with protecting a young girl, whose biology may be the only key to eradicating the zombie virus. Six years before the young girl, Ellie became the key to potentially saving humankind, the post-apocalyptic action thriller *I Am Legend* (2007), based on Richard Matheson's 1954 novel by the same name, presented a similar story, as the protagonist travels through the ruins of New York, on a quest to reverse the effect of a man-made virus, which has wiped out most of the world's population, by using the immunity hidden within his blood.

The titles listed above, just a snippet of the large number of post-apocalyptic narratives released within the last two decades only, show the sheer variety and popularity of the genre, making a lot of different avenues available when choosing the primary texts for the analysis. The two novels were chosen due to their very contrasting depictions of nature and ecology within their respective story worlds. Where one depicts a world afflicted by too much sun and consequently, too much heat, creating the peak conditions for expansive growth for the surviving plant species while challenging the continued survival of the remaining population, the other shows a world troubled by too little sun, wherein its rays have been banished behind and increasingly grey and thickening atmosphere, choking the life out of the ecology of the world, and with it, the rest of the ecosystem relying on nature to survive. While the two novels are contrasting in the fate of their story worlds, occupying each their own end of the spectrum of post-apocalyptic environments, and they were published more than forty years apart, one is regarded as one of the earliest examples of climate fiction, while the other seen as a modern classic of environmental fiction, they meet exactly in the ecological upheaval which has plagued their story worlds, and the strange uncanny which this ecological change has wrought.

The novels are analysed from the context of the modern Anthropocene age and the erosion of the nature-culture binary which is characteristic of this concept of the most recent geological time period of the planet. The theory of the uncanny and the concept of the apocalypse is used as the analytical framework for the analysis of the texts. On this basis, the analysis consists of a comparative reading of the two novels with special attention given to the altered environments, the ecological states of the story worlds, and the ways in which they evoke a sense of the uncanny in the reader. This is done through three main categories of analysis with

the uncanny as the central through-line of analysis; an analysis of the texts at the level of the reading, looking at the structure and plot of the post-apocalyptic narratives; and analysis of the setting and environments of the two novels; and an analysis of the characters inhabiting the deteriorating worlds within the novels, and the effect which these altered story worlds have on them. Lastly, the ways in which *The Drowned World* and *The Road*, as examples of ecologically centred post-apocalyptic fiction, speak to the contemporary anxieties surrounding the environment, and ecology in the Anthropocene age, are discussed, as they, intentionally or not, stand as eerie depictions of the worst-case scenarios imagined and feared in the contemporary reality of global warming and climate change.

## **5. What is wrong with this picture?**

In the following chapter, an analysis of J. G. Ballard's *The Drowned World*, and Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*, will examine the uncanny manifesting within the texts, and the blurring of the nature-culture binary from which it emerges. The two novels present two very different versions of ecological apocalypse within their story worlds that appear polar opposite to each other: an adapting nature, crossing the border between nature and culture, merging and evolving with fallen culture, and the complete collapse of the nature-culture binary as an effect of the destruction of almost all life forms, creating an ecologically uncanny reality wherein nature outside of the non-natural and human no longer exists. The novels are examples of two different manifestations of strange and altered story worlds which provide a perfect environment for the evocation of feelings of the uncanny through ecological upheaval and collapse.

### **5.1. *The Drowned World***

#### **5.1.1. Literature review**

Written in the time of the cold war, when the nuclear apocalypse was the driving eschatological anxiety of the western world, *The Drowned Word* can be seen as a book before its time. Due to

the context of its production, and the psychological aspects that it explores, it is a novel often analysed and interpreted in the context of conflict and war narratives (Clement 28). Because of the rich environment of the story world, extensively described throughout the novel, analysis has also moved towards an environmental and ecocritical direction. Often mentioned as a founding book in the lineage of the genre of climate fiction, Ballard's *The Drowned World* was written "long before climate change became a prominent subject in the popular press" and before 'climate change' as a concept was conceived (Clarke 9).

In his paper "Reading Climate Change in J.G. Ballard", Clarke argues for *The Drowned World* as an early example of climate fiction, written before Wallace Broecker coined the term global warming in 1975, and before the notion of the Anthropocene and anthropocentric blame got a foothold in the popular imagination (9). In this sense, Clarke looks to Ballard and *The Drowned World* as an example of a climate novel written outside of the popular emergence of climate fiction as an established genre, and points to this position outside of climate change discourse as a valuable perspective, as it is not in the same way bound to the contemporary global warming narrative. Here, Clarke argues that, due to the lack of anthropocentric blame within the story, *The Drowned World* differs from modern climate novels, stating that there is "no discussion of blame or responsibility, and no attempts at mitigation or alleviation" (19). Rather, the novel presents a "form of climate change stripped of transient concerns" (19), in which the environment provides an ontological structure wherein change occurring in the environment has an effect, either transformative or destructive, on the inner worlds of the inhabitants (19). Also, Adam Trexler sees *The Drowned World* as an early piece of climate fiction, categorising it as a 'deluge novel', a genre of apocalyptic narratives existing since the writing of the Bible and beyond, describing tales of divine judgement, destruction and creation wherein moral lessons, ethical boundaries, and the limits of humanity could be formulated (Trexler 84). Much like Clarke, Trexler argues that, in the wake of a more active awareness of environmental matters which the concept of the Anthropocene has brought, it is a novel that lends itself to a more material interpretation than has previously been the analytical focus (87). In this way, the possibility for an ecocritical analysis of *The Drowned World* as a piece of climate fiction, despite its context of production and the implied audience being placed before climate concerns became a topic in the public consciousness, does present itself, as its engagement with nature speaks to the modern imaginary of the Anthropocene.

As both Clarke and Trexler note, Ballard's climate fiction has a distinct lack of anthropocentric blame or judgement: an element of the category which Sebastian Groes calls the "apocalyptic-stoic" within ecocritical art and climate fiction (Groes. *Against Nostalgia* 177). It is a form of apocalyptic narrative in which, much like the notion of tragic apocalypse, the narrative depicts a "trajectory of humanity that is too corrupted to offer redemption" (176): the road is set, and it would serve no purpose to evoke guilt or shock the audience into some sort of realisation though cautionary moral tales. Groes describes *The Drowned World* as an apocalyptic stoic climate narrative that subversively evades narrative tools and strategies which would work to incite guilt in the reader, in favour of guiding the reader towards a realisation that "we should accept and embrace the processes we find ourselves in" (182). In this sense, Groes' reading of *The Drowned World* is an anti-anthropocentric one, in which Kerans rejection of Camp Byrd and his journey south, is a rejection of anthropocentric ideals and ideology in favour of the Anthropocene "as simply just another passing phase in the history of planet earth" (183). Also Rudolphus Teeuwen and Tracy Clement read the novel through an anti-anthropocentric lens; Clement re-reads the novel across decades and uses it as a narrative warning "of the dangers of an anthropocentric worldview (Clement 26) in the context of two contemporary anthropocentric eschatological crises, Cold War conditions and the climate crisis; and Teeuwen's reading of Ballard's early disaster novels as an example of 'eschatological jouissance', the "grim pleasure in the failure of the world" (Teeuwen 46), making *The Drowned World* an anti-anthropocentric narrative refusing the humanistic insistence upon seeing "the world from a human point of view" (41). This decentring of the cultured and the human, carve a larger space for the natural and the environment within the novel, while at the same time breaching the idea of a functioning world beyond the human.

This perspective of *The Drowned World* as a novel that decentres the human in the meeting between the natural and the cultured, makes space for examining the ways in which the novel collapses the division of nature and culture, an aspect of the novel which has been looked at from different angles. In his chapter "Fossils of Tomorrow: Len Lye, J.G. Ballard, and Planetary Futures", Thomas S. Davis looks at this erosion of the nature-culture binary within the novel in the context of the novel as a piece of cultural production mediating "the idealizations and anxieties attached to shifting notions of human and planetary futures" (Davis 664) in the historical moment in which it was produced. Here he argues for art's ability to conceptualise the

characteristics of what is understood as the Anthropocene and Anthropocene concerns and looks to the novel's placement outside of the historical understanding of the Anthropocene in its engagement with, and conceptualisation of, the merging relationship between nature and culture as an interesting area for analysis (661-662). Adrian Tait also looks to Ballard's nature and natural world within the novel, as he notes that "whilst Ballard is concerned with the psychological, he is also fascinated by the biological" (Tait np) and examines how the changing environment within the story world have affected not only the lives and material realities of the people within the story but also have generated a fundamental change in them as human beings (Tait np). This points to a reading of Ballard's novel wherein the entangled connection between the human element and the surrounding world and natural environment becomes visible and is revealed through the effects that changing circumstances evoke. The uncanny effects produced by the material changes in the environment become a reminder or discovery that the nature-culture binary may be more blurred and tangled than we like to imagine. In her article "'Resurrected from its own sewers': Waste, Landscape, and the Environment in J. G. Ballard's 1960s Climate Fiction", Rachelle Dini, on the other hand, looks at Ballard's erosion of the nature-culture binary from the specific perspective of waste and material devastation as she looks to the tension between "the natural world and the industrial" (Dini 212) within the novel. It is a tension which implicitly, according to Dini, also presents itself as a tension between modernity and the new primordial reality which has established itself in the ruins that once was a thriving London. In relation to this, she notes the fact that "nature here does not so much erase civilization so much as insinuate itself into and ultimately transform it" (212): an entanglement and transformation from which she approaches her analysis of waste within the novel as a point of contact and negotiation between the natural world and the industrial world, creating entities and objects of hybridity which can neither be categorised as fully 'cultured' or fully 'natural'. Her analysis brings into the discussion an interesting perspective of the novel, wherein the apocalyptic disaster and destruction described, understood through a decentring of an anthropocentric worldview, also encompass fundamental creation and regeneration in the meeting between cultured spaces and the natural world. These three articles provide three perspectives on the erosion of the nature-culture binary within the novel, and how this presents itself in the uncanny triggered through this merging of the natural and the human element.

Ballard's readiness to drown London, letting it be broken down and changed, may lie in his general ambivalence with the city and that which it represents. As Sebastian Groes formulates it in his chapter "From Shanghai to Shepperton: Crises of Representation in J. G. Ballard's Londons", Ballard's special antagonism towards the city of London makes itself known in his works, as "since the beginning of his writing career, the author has drowned it, set it on fire, and blown it up" (Groes. From Shanghai 78). In *The Drowned World*, Ballard made way for a reimagining and remaking of the city through the drowning and subsequent merging of the city as a cultural metropolis and the emerging natural environment, transforming it into a new space, anonymous and entangled with the landscape. Both Groes and Umberto Rossi have engaged with the disintegration of the cultured space within *The Drowned World*, focusing on the particular destruction of London as both a material place and a master signifier. In the article "Images from the Disaster Area: An apocalyptic Reading of Urban Landscapes in Ballard's '*The Drowned World*' and '*Hello America*'", Rossi formulates "a fourfold system of mutilations" (Rossi 82) which has robbed the former metropolis of all its signification and in turn, turned it into a dead city, stripped of all the elements which made it signify a distinctly human construction, operating through distinctly human cultural systems and structures. According to Rossi, this is a mutilation of the city committed through the deprivation and removal of "humans, name, form and time" (83), through evacuation, misremembrance, ecological invasion, and loss of chronological time, which renders the once deeply familiar capital into a strange, dead city where nothing is quite as it should be. Groes looks at Ballard's London within *The Drowned World* as a master signifier presented to be broken down and dissolved in the novel. London as an archetype of human civilisation is drowned and "conventional signification is negated" (Groes. From Shanghai 84) in a reality wherein human constructions, such as monetary value and chronological time, have been suspended and become meaningless. It is a reality navigated with Kerans steady indifference as a guide, wherein implied in the deterioration of the capital city lies "a positive regeneration into a primitive state that sees the reconstitution of man at one with the world" (84). With the drowning and ecological repossession of the area emerges a freedom from binding systems of signification, deconstructing civilisation and 'restarting' from a more 'positive' and 'primitive' point of existence, more removed from governing systems of understanding the world. With the drowning of the master signifier, Ballard also asphyxiates

entire systems of thought and patterns of responding to the world, as what once were the primary concerns of life no longer holds any value.

The articles mentioned above contain arguments and analyses dancing on the edges of what could be considered moments or instances of uncanny, as the ecological uncanny lies at the centre of *The Drowned World*: an uneasy weirdness consistently flickering in the corner of one's vision throughout the blurring borders between the natural and the cultured. Despite the many different readings of the environment in J.G. Ballard's *The Drowned World*, there seems to be a blind spot in the explicit analysis of uncanny elements within the novel, and the interconnectedness of the ecological uncanny and Anthropocene apocalypse, as sharp binary distinctions become hard to maintain. A reading of the novel, explicitly using the concepts of the uncanny and the ecological uncanny, reveals the unease that the symptoms of the Anthropocene age instil: an uncomfortable revelation or reminder that nature and the natural as something which lies firmly outside ourselves, may be little more than a narrative illusion. Though the novel was published years before concrete ideas and formulations of global warming, climate change, and the Anthropocene, it operates within an idea of binarism as a flawed thought system of interpreting the material world, as the borders between the environment of the natural world and humanity's cultured spaces are transgressed and eroded throughout the novel, "exposing the human in the natural and *vice versa*" (Carroll 76).

### **5.1.2. The structure of the strange within a drowned metropolis**

In Ballard's *The Drowned World*, the reader is met with an uncanny story of ecological upheaval instigated by a change in planetary trajectory, as the sun's new orbit has altered the story world forever. But it is not only at the level of the story where the uncanny manifest within the novel. Also, at the level of discourse is the strange and uncanny anchored, as the structure and plot framing the story employ uncanny triggers to create a strange experience at the level of the reading.

"Soon it would be too hot" (Ballard 7) the heterodiegetic narrator states, focalizing through the protagonist Robert Kerans, the scientist and resident medical officer within the

testing station, as he takes in the view from the top of what was once the Ritz Hotel, overlooking what was once the city of London. In this short and concise description of the story world lies the ominous prediction of a fast-approaching end. The once temperate capital has been transformed into a tropical lagoon by the sun, described as a “colossal fire-ball” (7), whose changing orbit around the earth has forever altered the conditions of the world. Having been dispatched to the European lagoons together with the rest of the small expedition three years prior, the novel begins as Kerans is made aware that their testing station is ordered to close down its operations. They are to return to Camp Byrd in northern Greenland, Kerans’ birthplace (23), and one of the few habitable places left on earth, where civilization has re-established itself after the deluge-inducing solar flares forever altered the global climate. Kerans rejects the idea of returning to Greenland, and instead stays behind, in order to answer a subconscious need to travel south, embarking on “his neuronomic odyssey” (174) “Towards the sun” (156).

The reader’s encounter with this altered world is instantaneous, as the novel begins in medias res, the reader is transported into the strange, anonymous environment of an unnamed city buried underneath a sprawling lagoon filled with tropical foliage. On the first set of pages, nothing is yet named or specified, and as the protagonist, Kerans, takes in the view from the top of the then nondescript hotel, the heat from the unstable sun is already reaching uncomfortable levels, despite the fact that it is only eight o’clock in the morning. This first meeting with the strangely tropical world of *The Drowned World*, where fragments of familiar descriptors of cultured places, such as hotels and “abandoned department stores” (7), are poking through the vegetation, creates a strange uncanny effect, as they seem to have sprouted from within this dense and humid jungle. As the reader tries to make sense of the contrasting elements of the highly unusual setting presented on the first pages of the novel, the narrator depicts the mundane nature of the picture being painted, by calling attention to the familiar routine that Kerans has developed within the story world and the deep familiarity with the environment which he has achieved through long time exposure to it. In this sense, the protagonist’s implied familiarity with the place becomes strange in itself, as the fact that there has been established a routine wherein “usually Kerans woke up at five, and reached the biological testing station in time to do at least four or five hours’ work” (7) within a version of the world so altered, creates a strong sense of uncanny dissonance from the first page of the book.



Through the progression of the first chapter, this dissonance only becomes greater, as more concrete determiners are attached to the pieces of culture and civilisation littering the landscape: the hotel becomes the Ritz and the drowned city is narrowed down to three possible capitals: “had it once been Berlin, Paris or London?, Kerans asked himself” (9). In step with the familiar geographical placements of the setting becoming clearer, it only makes the view from the balcony more unsettling, for what is a department store doing in a prehistoric lagoon, and what is a prehistoric lagoon doing in a capital city? The defamiliarization of the known quantities is total, but in the spirit of science fiction as a genre, the cause and its effects on the story world do lie within the possibility space of the “author’s empirical environment” (Suvín 8). The world presented is strange but recognizable: an imagined future built from empirical elements within the world and environment of the author. Darko Suvín describes science fiction as the literature of cognitive estrangement, as he, in his 1979 book, *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction: On the Poetics and History of a Literary Genre*, theorising through the work of Bertolt Brecht, saw estrangement, or the defamiliarization of the familiar subject, as having “grown into the formal framework of the genre.” (7). In this way, science fiction distinguishes itself from more fantastical genres, such as fantasy, in its insistence on operating within the possibility space of the cognitive, empirical world as its imaginative framework for the story. When Ballard chooses to defamiliarize the reader's understanding of what constitutes a capital city, and the importance that such a space plays in the cultural imaginary, by abandoning it and burying it under tropical foliage, he creates a deeply strange and unsettling space where the familiar becomes estranged to the reader, and hereby establish a sense of uncanny. Freud himself noted, in his discussion of the uncanny, the power of literature to control and shape uncanny emotions and experiences within a story world. Here, he points to the uncanny effect that operating within a space of “common reality” (Freud 250) brings to a story, as the recognizable, cognitive, and empirical world of the story works to make the diverging elements within that space appear uncanny and estranged.

By placing the story within the framework of a recognisable reality with identifiable structures and elements, Ballard creates a space where changes to this comfortably known frame of reference will be felt much more acutely than if these changes happened within a more fantastical story. To add to this, the choice to place the origin of this change, the “violent and prolonged solar storms” (Ballard 21), within a persuasive scientific framework only helps to further enhance the effect of cognitive estrangement within the reader. This way, it is not only

the drowned metropolis that appears uncomfortably familiar, but to the contemporary reader, the cause of its destruction echoes the well-known fears of global warming and environmental collapse within the Anthropocene age. Ballard's choice to further specify the city that the expedition is working within, by having Dr Bodkin explain that "part of it used to be called London" (75), only works to further defamiliarize the story and setting of the novel. The story no longer relies solely on the general idea of a possible European capital city to help create uncanny cognitive estrangement within the narrative but also introduces a level of familiarity that only increases the uneasy wrongness felt by the transformation of the sprawling city of London into the drowned remnants of "a level of civilisation now virtually vanished forever" (10).

In a contemporary sense, this uncannily familiar world presented in the context of total climate upheaval takes on an extra dimension, as *The Drowned World* shows a version of a future which does not appear far from the imagined worst-case scenario of global warming in the popular Anthropocene imagination. As both Clark and Trexler argue, the novel can be read as an early piece of climate fiction, in which the story and setting lend themselves to environmental interpretation and analysis, especially in the context of the modern Anthropocene. In this way, the way in which the novel was read and understood by its implied reader, the 1960's science fiction audience, and the way in which the modern audience interprets its content is wildly different. While the story may have been nothing more than an entertaining thought exercise on the effects of planetary misalignment, an imagined future that may only have seemed possible as narrative fiction, to the contemporary reader the picture being painted seem uncannily familiar, as the threat of global warming and rising temperatures has been a reality for decades. Written before global warming was a term through which to understand the changing environment and climate concerns, Ballard created a world which articulates a central fear of the Anthropocene age, the realisation that "soon it [will] be too hot" (7), a reality which has become an increasingly more pressing concern in the modern world, and which only works to strengthen the feeling of uncanny cognitive estrangement felt throughout the tropical lagoon.

The story unfolding within this altered, uncanny world is told from the point of view of the third person heterodiegetic narrator who, with a very sensory language, paints a picture of the humid lagoon so vividly that it clings to the senses. In a mirroring fashion, the language mimics the sprawling nature of the drowned world. It is an environment that, with its flora, fauna, and organic processes, calls for detailed, sensory descriptions to fill out the story world in which "the

volcanic pounding of the solar flares” (71), a heat so pressing that “the water would seem to burn” (7), “the sombre green-black fronds of the gymnosperms” (10), and “the sweet compacted smells of dead vegetation and rotting animal carcasses” (13) equally fill the wilderness of the landscape. The expansive language is obsessive in its insistence on describing and painting vivid pictures for the reader, creating clear sensory images as the narrator guides the reader through this strangely familiar world entrenched in sights, sounds, smells, and tactile elements which appear deeply out of place in the streets of what was once London, and out of time in their prehistoric appearance. In this way, Ballard absorbs the reader into the story world through visual images like the sun rising “behind the dense groves of giant gymnosperms crowding over the roofs of the abandoned department stores” (7) by Kerans’ hotel balcony; auditory pictures such as the “brief piercing squawk” (18) as the inhabitants of the lagoon prey on each other and “the roar of the deepening water” (165) as Kerans re-floods London; the olfactory description of drying kelp, exuding a “sweaty stench” (137) as Kerans is bound during the feast of skulls, and the small observation of a “stale pillow” (113) upon waking after his near-death experience in the planetarium; and lastly the tactile pictures painted of “sharp pulsing explosions” (98) reverberating through the bodies of the spectators, as Strangman’s men clear the waters around the planetarium, and “the immense heat” experienced as Kerans is left in the sun, fighting for his life, while “the air [burns] like a flame” (139). In this way, Ballard appeals to the senses of the reader as he creates clear sensory images within the novel, thereby heightening the level of immersion. The atmosphere created through the narrative voice works with, and enhances, the environment within the story world, plunging the reader into the sensory overload of the lagoon together with the protagonist and the expedition, as they ruminate on the ramifications of this new reality: “Is it only the external landscape which is altering?” (43).

Along with the sensory descriptions used throughout the novel, Ballard also deploys the rhetorical device of simile to make the environment of the story strange and uncanny. When doing so, Ballard entangles the natural and the human as he compares the “sinking civilisations” (20) of the old world to “a discarded crown overgrown by wild orchids” (21), accentuating how wild nature has merged with cultured spaces and objects which once, before the apocalypse started, contained important cultural meaning. The crown, as an important cultural artefact of the old world, is no longer imbued with its original significance, and is instead, in its abandonment, gotten a new function as the framework on which wild nature can climb and grow. In the same

way, old civilisation is redefined and repurposed within the lagoon, taking on functions which, in some cases, veer far from their original cultural intention and purpose. As Dini notes in her analysis of nature and waste in *The Drowned World*, the erosion of the nature-culture binary happening within the story world does not mean that nature erases “civilisation so much as insinuate itself into and ultimately transform it” (Dini 212). What was once London becomes something new and uncanny in the merging with nature. This transformation is repeated, as Kerans gaze at “two white-faced clock towers [protruding] through the vegetation” (Ballard 61) which, in their meeting and merging with nature become “like the temple spires of some lost jungle religion”, ancient and mysterious. But it is not only nature and old culture which merge and intermingle through the use of simile, as the inanimate environment itself also is made strange and uncanny in the interaction with the story world and its inhabitants. Old, worn equipment takes on an even older and more derelict appearance as the cardboard screens in the laboratory of the testing station, bent and crooked with time, are likened to “the peeling hull-plates of a derelict ship, moored against its terminal pier and covered with gnomonic and meaningless graffiti” (40), pointing to the meaningless nature of the expedition's work, as the rapidly rising water has rendered their mapping of the European lagoons worthless. Also, the sun's effect on the perception of the landscape and the things within it is used to evoke the strange and uncanny through simile. The white columns of old public buildings gleam “in the sunlight like a row of huge bleached bones” (67), drawing attention to their position as part of a dead civilisation, while the sun's reflection across the stagnant water of the lagoon is likened to “blazing faceted eyes of gigantic insects” (40), zoomorphising the reflection of the sun, and by doing so, animating both the inanimate “colossal fire-ball” and the still water of the lagoon (7), thereby giving it a hint of awareness and intention.

As the sun continues its altered course and the temperature increase, the narrative moves linearly towards the end, and both the natural world and the human psyche within the story world is going through a metamorphosis in reverse: reverting back towards a prehistoric ground zero of the “Paleocene” epoch (18). This is a descent into a strangely familiar past conjured through dreams and “biological memories” (43), an uncanny ancestral knowledge “that ought to have remained secret and hidden but has come to light” (Freud 225) “in response to the rises in temperature, humidity and radiation levels” (Ballard 42) which the sun has wrought. The more the story progresses, the more the inhabitants within it regress, creating a weird paradox where

every instance of temporal advancement within the story world is mirrored by a de-evolution towards a distant past rooted in deep-time. Word comes in from Camp Byrd, effectively declaring the expedition in the European lagoons meaningless as “the water-level is still rising” (15), hinting at the fact that the sun’s changing of the global environments and ecosystems, which has transformed temperate Europe into a tropical wilderness, is still steadily occurring. This is a regression to a prehistoric landscape which had made its “first impact some sixty or seventy years earlier” (21) and most likely will continue “for the next three million years” (15) to come. In this sense, the sun, and its relatively sudden instability, takes on the form of a hyperobject: a globally expansive object stretching over a massive temporal expanse both from the past and into the future. An uncanny object both abstract and intangible and at the same time deeply present in the moment, as the landscape slowly has devolved over a lifetime, becoming routine for its residents, while at the same time, its immediate disaster presents itself clearly in the present, as “the water would seem to burn” (7) in the afternoons.

The sun casts the ecology of the world into the past, as the flora and fauna “are beginning to assume once again the forms they displayed the last time such conditions were present” (42), a change which seems to have both a physical and psychological effect on the characters in the story. Through this regression, both biologically and psychologically, the novel ends at the Judeo-Christian story of the beginning of the world, by referring to Kerans as “a second Adam” (175) as he wanders the jungles to the south. While this reference points to old Apocalypse’ need for a revelation, a new beginning after the End, the open ending of the story does not leave a lot of room for optimism. The world in which this new beginning would take place is already existing on borrowed time: it is only getting hotter, and most of the remaining population on earth has emigrated to the Arctic Circle in an attempt to re-establish some form of prior civilization, making the prospect of a healing and recuperating earth, after Kerans’ suicidal “neuronic odyssey” (174) southwards towards the sun, seem bleak. The foundation for life and liveable habitats is burning, and outside of a sudden divine *deus ex machina* intervening after Kerans disappearance, any chance of a new beginning after the apocalypse seems unlikely.

The frame on which the plot of the novel is built, creates an uncanny structure on which the strangeness of the narrative can unfold, making the novel uncanny not only on the level of the story but also in the way in which the plot is shaped and presented. By plunging the implied reader into the familiar yet unfamiliar world of what once was London, Ballard forces an

uncanny sense of cognitive estrangement in the reader, as they are presented with an imagined future of reality wherein something went disastrously wrong. In the context of the Anthropocene reality of the contemporary climate crisis, this is an imagined future which may be dancing dangerously close to valid concerns and fears for the contemporary modern reader of the novel, as global temperatures slowly but steadily rise, and once snow-covered landscapes have become areas of exposed bedrock and grassy tundra. The narration helps to further present the strangeness of this former London, as the vivid and tangible descriptions of the world make the reading of the text a sensory experience, mimicking the diverse and sprawling natural environment, which has made itself at home in the former metropolis. Even in the linear trajectory of the plot lies an opportunity to engage in the strange and unsettling, as the story seems to operate on two distinct parallel lines of time. While the plot moves steadily forward through the narrative, progressing from the beginning to the open ending, the world within that narrative seems to regress, as the wayward sun is the cause of a de-evolution of not only the organic but also the psychological. In this way, the temporal advancement of the story is mirrored by a digression of the environment and its inhabitants towards a prehistoric endpoint in deep-time. Lastly, the open ending of the story serves to create unease, as the reader is denied a definite conclusion, and instead is provided with two conflicting scenarios: a hinting to a revelation or a possible new beginning in the reference to Adam and Genesis, and the quiet sense, accumulated throughout the story, that the End is eminent, the world will most likely not miraculously recover, and that it is only a question of time before the hyperobject of the wayward sun slowly boils the European lagoons, and the rest of the world along with them.

### **5.1.3. “two interlocking worlds” at the End of time**

The setting within *The Drowned world* is one of ecological entanglement as nature and old culture has merged together into an uncanny environment in which recognisable culture is behind every leaf but at the same time merged and altered into something somewhat foreign as the tropical, pre-historic jungle has reclaimed the old capital city.

The setting of *The Drowned World* is a place infused with contrasts, as the drowned city both holds the spectre and remains of a deeply recognisable symbol of human civilisation, while at the same time, has given way to a new era and new inhabitants, as the natural world has merged with, and overtaken the space. The area has become a patchwork of what is and what once was, suspended in the passing of deep-time, as “the sombre green-black fronds of the gymnosperms, intruders from the Triassic past, and the half-submerged white-faced buildings of the 20th century still reflected together in the dark mirror of the water, the two interlocking worlds apparently suspended at some junction in time” (10-11). What once was London has undergone a massive transformation, one which is deemed irreversible at the beginning of the novel, as Kerans and the rest of the expedition to the European lagoons are ordered home: “the water-level is still rising” and all the work that the testing station has done mapping the lagoons “has been a total waste” (15). Camp Byrd’s ambition of returning the European lagoons back into recognisable civilisation, the state before nature flooded the area and nature merged with and transformed the old metropolis, comes increasingly across as wishful thinking as the environment within the story world only seem to further encroach and expand in the steadily increasing heat.

Within the setting of *The Drowned World*, the collapse of the nature-culture binary takes centre stage, as every inch of former culture has merged with the organic world around it. Even within Kerans’ home at the top of the Ritz, a preserved time capsule of a bygone time, the organic has started to creep through the cracks, as “rich blue moulds sprouting from the carpets in the dark corridors” (10) have blended themselves with the space. It is an environment that, as discussed earlier in the context of language, clings to the senses as it brims with water, heat, and organic life. Like a hothouse, the wayward sun has created the optimal conditions for growth, which the humid environment is characterised by. What once was a scene of concrete and brick, shaped in sharp and level angles, now bears a semblance of Mayan temples poking through lush green foliage. “60-feet-high plants” gets toppled by sudden, heat-induced tornadoes (8), while other “massive plants [...] seem to dance in the heat gradients” (17), and the buildings emerging from within these plants and trees seem “millions of years old” (47) in their integrated state within the wilderness. Any hard distinction between nature and human culture within the story world is difficult to pinpoint, as the natural finds a way to occupy every inch of the landscape, and the human becomes a sturdy foundation on which nature flourishes.

The setting is ecologically uncanny, as the borders between the natural and the human are washed away in the merging between old civilisation and rapidly expanding nature. It is an environment which, to the implied reader, most likely would have come across as an interesting and surrealistic setting to place a science fiction story within, but which, for the modern reader becomes uncomfortably uncanny, as the cognitive estrangement evoked in a reader of the Anthropocene age of climate crisis and global warming may seem a bit too real. It becomes the scene of ecological reclamation as nature encroaches upon the manmade structures littering the area, slowly establishing some form of post-natural wilderness: reintroducing a lack of human control and manipulation into an area which formerly had been a master signifier of human achievement and mastery over the natural. In a story world where nothing has been left untouched by human culture, much like in the real world of the contemporary reader within the Anthropocene age, the concept of wilderness as pure and untouched nature takes on another form within *The Drowned World*. In a reality where untouched nature no longer exists, desolate culture becomes home to uncontrolled Anthropocene wilderness as it adapts to and reclaims cultured space and territory. In the lagoon that once was London, it takes the shape of a pre-historic, pre-human nature, ironic “intruders from the Triassic past” (10), merging with the remnants of the metropolis as “the sombre green-black fronds of the gymnosperms [...] and the half submerged white-faced buildings of the 20th century still [reflect] together in the dark mirror of the water, the two interlocking worlds apparently suspended at some junction in time” (10-11). There is a sense of hostility towards this free-moving nature which dares to encroach onto cultured spaces: a wilderness invading a master signifier of western civilisation, re-forming and re-defining its purpose and significance in the process. the capital city of London has been transformed into “an immense putrescent sore”, and as it is observed from above, “the jungle lay exposed below the open hatchway of the helicopter. Giant groves of gymnosperms stretched in dense clumps along the rooftops of the submerged buildings, smothering the white rectangular outlines” (52-53). In this contradictory sensibility toward the natural world depicted within *The Drowned World*, where nature both is an encroaching intruder, smothering culture, but at the same time bears “a strange dream-like beauty” (18), appears a very human ambivalence towards the natural. While the idea of wilderness may seem appealing in theory, the inability to grasp and control it, to manipulate it like the domestic picturesque, quickly brings that appeal into question.



The heat and the rays of the sun have mutated the flora and fauna within the lagoon into something prehistoric, “mutations completely transforming the organisms to adapt them for survival in the new environment” (42), making nature not only uncanny in relationship with its merging with culture and the human within the setting, but also within the understanding of nature itself, as it is altered and made strangely unfamiliar. “Huge horse-tails” (8), a genus of fern and a remnant from the late Palaeozoic forest floor, is recognisable to Kerans in the context of the variations of the plant he is familiar with, yet also contains uncanny aspects, as they bear characteristics which makes them both familiar and uncomfortably unfamiliar at the same time. Nature no longer fits neatly into the taxonomy of ecology, it mutates at a rapid pace, eluding categorisation and mastery and appears “distinctly anomalous” (42) to what nature was, before the beginning of the apocalypse. Current variations of species within the story world have mutated and devolved, making the setting uncanny and weird, as the foliage and its inhabitants express the qualities of their distant, prehistoric, early ancestry while still retaining genetically familiar traits. In this sense, much like the testing station’s failed mission to map out and survey the lagoon, strategizing ways to refamiliarize and reclaim the area, the flora and fauna also elude capture through categorisation and classification, making previously tangibly material nature weirdly slippery, unstable, and hard to control.

It is not only the environment of the story world which takes on an eerie and elusive form within the novel, as time itself also appears strange. The setting occupies a strange space in time, as it is intermingled in a now and a then and a much larger, overarching past and future. With the hazy timeline of the setting, the Hotel Ritz, and the things within it, become a guide from which the reader, to some extent, can orient themselves. The London hotel was built in 1906, and the paintings hanging in Beatrice’s apartment by Ernst and Delvaux were most likely produced in the surrealist period, sometime between 1920 and 1939. Given that the novel itself is from 1962, it may be reasonable to assume that Ballard placed the beginning of the End, in the form of “gigantic geophysical upheavals which had transformed the Earth's climate” (21) somewhere near his own context of production, around the latter part of the 20th century. This point of no return for the planet and its ecology occurred “some sixty or seventy years” (21) before sixty-five-year-old Dr Bodkin was born in London, “and even during Bodkin’s childhood the cities had been beleaguered citadels, hemmed in by enormous dykes and disintegrated by panic and despair, reluctant Venices to their marriage with the sea” (21). This places the transformation of

the European lagoons, and the rest of the world, within the timeframe of approximately 130 years. In the context of geological time, the end of the world within the novel happened in the blink of an eye: in the span of two lifetimes the world's climate altered to the extent of imminent extinction, and the flora and fauna have mutated and (de)evolved past certain and established taxonomy.

The sheer speed with which human civilisation collapsed within the story world speaks to an anxiety within the modern consciousness of the Anthropocene, as the warning of an approaching point of no return has been a central talking point among climate experts for decades, most recently in the 2022 climate report compiled by the UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, IPCC, warning that "time is running out" (Spring) to change the world's current climate course. This rapid change which has happened to the story world within the novel merges with the strange experience of time within the setting of the lagoon. At once, the change which has happened seems ancient, as Kerans, born in Camp Byrd in what was once the Arctic Circle, has no interest in what once occupied the European lagoons. "Apart from a few older men such as Bodkin there was no-one who remembered living" in the former cities (Ballard 21), reducing them to ancient history in a single generation. The former world, and the remnants of it, which litters the landscape of *The Drowned World*, take on a ghostly presence within the environment, as the new world of heat and growth, a moment in time which itself is encroached upon by a prehistoric deep-time, overtakes and intermingled with the ruins of human civilisation. Due to this, time within the lagoon takes on an uncanny presence, as three moments in time seem to melt and combine into a strange, suspended time zone; the remnant of former civilisation, lost and abandoned so fast that they are left relatively untouched in the landscape like ghosts; a now, wherein the last humans have adapted to the climate change, where catamarans have become the logical vehicle of choice within the former European city, and former culture holds no real value; and a pre-human, pre-historic deep-time brought on by the heat and the solar rays, which spans and surrounds the past, present, and future mutating and morphing the world into something strange and uncanny.

Kerans himself has settled in the top of the Ritz: "savouring the subtle atmosphere of melancholy" within this time capsule of a not-so-distant past, the rooms standing as the "last vestiges of a level of civilisation now virtually vanished forever" (10). These relatively untouched rooms at the top of the Ritz stay as a testament to something that was, a museum

exhibition of a once valued “19th-century dignity” (10), from which Kerans can watch the altering and intertwining of the rest of the world as nature takes its course, slowly erasing any notion of a nature-culture binary and occupying the abandoned capital. The rooms in the Ritz become a conserved picture of what once was within the lagoon, and within the world, a version of a human civilization lost to time, and with its preservation, the sense of loss only comes across that much more vividly. It is a reminder for the reader of the last moments before the apocalypse, preserved within the remaining ruins of the capital city of London, which Ballard has drowned and destroyed, both as a material place and as a master signifier of human civilization. As both Rossi and Groes argue, with this destruction of London, comes the erosion of distinctly human structures and cultural systems, as “conventional signification is negated” (Groes. From Shanghai 84) within a world where such constructions no longer exist or hold any of its former value. The drowning of the city is therefore not only the end of its former material presence but also the end of a way of life, a mode of thinking about and understanding the world, embedded within the fabric of the civilisation which the capital city stood for. The ghostly London within *The Drowned World* becomes a symbol of the disintegration of human civilisation, human culture, and the strong distinction between the human and the rest of the world. The established fences between wild nature and human settlement are no more, and the remnants of what once was, have been transformed in its meeting with wild, uncontrolled nature, reshaping the relationship between nature and culture, and with it, evoking a sense of the ecological uncanny in the process.

#### **5.1.4. The last inhabitants of the European lagoons**

The characters within the European lagoons exhibit very different ways get on within the tropical story world of *The Drowned World*, as they navigate the uncanny post-natural wilderness. In this way, the uncanny nature of the apocalyptic lagoon imprint upon and influence the characters relationship, not only to the ecology of the setting, but also to themselves and each other.

The slow apocalypse which the misalignment of the sun brought down upon the earth within *The Drowned World*, has not only affected the story world, but also the last inhabitants

within it. As temperate areas became too hot and inhospitable, the last population of the world found refuge at the Arctic Circle, a number estimated at “fewer than five million people” (Ballard 23) colonising the polar caps. The protagonist, Kerans, was born in these new settlements: as a child of Camp Byrd, located in Northern Greenland, he is also a child of the post-apocalypse, of migration and resettlement, born into a world well on its way toward extinction. Due to his birth and upbringing occurring after the beginning of the apocalypse, Kerans relationship to the areas which he and the rest of the expedition are exploring is one of indifference. He does not harbour any particular feelings about the former city as “despite the potent magic of the lagoon worlds and the drowned cities, he had never felt any interest in their contents and never bothered to identify in which of the cities he was stationed” (20). Removed from the memory of the place, he only knows about the old world insofar as what he had read about them “as a child in the encyclopaedias at Camp Byrd” (20). For Kerans the charm and beauty of the old cities “[lies] precisely in their emptiness, in the strange junction of two extremes of nature, like a discarded crown overgrown by wild orchids” (21). They hold no immediate meaning or emotional connection for him as he has never been a part of their world, the structures, or the cultural systems which these cities signify. In this sense, the lagoon, and the disintegration of the nature-culture binary happening within it, becomes an aesthetic experience for Kerans: the ecological uncanny is seen as “a strange dream-like beauty” (18) as long as he is able to ignore the presence of the less picturesque elements within the wilderness, such as the insects, reptiles, and “the terrible stench of the water-line, the sweet compacted smells of dead vegetation and rotting animal carcasses” (13) disturbing his view.

His colleague, Doctor Bodkin, on the other hand, has memories of traversing the city of London in his childhood, which, despite having to leave it at age six, he describes as the only home he has ever known, as existence thereafter took on the form of nomadic migration (76). With the deployment of the expedition to the lagoons, Dr Bodkin has been reunited with the place of his childhood, now very different from then, but still containing tangible places connected to his early years. This is a connection that he pursues, especially after colonel Riggs and the rest of the personnel on the testing station return to Camp Byrd, leaving behind Dr Bodkin, Beatrice, and Kerans in the lagoon. The three last inhabitants gradually start self-isolating, each dealing with their own individual descent “into the neuronic past” (44) of deep-time, which, for Dr Bodkin, clashes with his memories and attachment to old civilisation, as he

searches for “the submerged world of his childhood” (84). The lagoon that was once London is a point of contention between his lived experience and memories and the psycho-biological memories of all neurological existence throughout deep-time, which they begin to experience within the lagoon, as Dr Bodkin both wanders aimlessly through the landscape to relive his childhood memories, while also claiming not to remember anything of his time in London, stating that the “immediate past is of no interest” to him (92), despite also finding the draining of the lagoon, and consequent re-emergence of London, “fantastic!” (121).

Where Kerans is not bound to the lagoon, or anywhere for that matter, Dr Bodkin’s connection to London tethers him to an immediate past which he does not want to be connected to or interact with, despite, “in his private reverie”, he is feeling an urge to explore nonetheless (84). In this generational difference lies two different relationships to the world around them: Dr Bodkin, despite his relatively short stay in the old metropolis, has a material connection to London, and in some sense, old culture, while Kerans’ approach to, and connection with, the world is much more detached and untethered. He does not mourn the disintegration and loss of old culture, but rather finds a sense of pleasure in being among the last people to witness it before it disappears. “In a curious way it satisfied him to think that he was the last guest” who would occupy the Hotel Ritz (9) and found himself “savouring the subtle atmosphere of melancholy that surrounded [the] last vestiges of a level of civilisation now virtually vanished forever” (10). The old world within the lagoon is something to be admired exactly due to the finite nature of its inevitable passing, which is why it evokes such a strong negative response from both Kerans and Beatrice as the remains of the city are unearthed from beneath the watery grave of the lagoon, the open and now exposed windows breaching the surface “like empty eyes in enormous drowned skulls” (120). The scenery of the old capital city takes on the form of a vanitas piece, as beauty is found not despite but because of the decaying remains of old civilisation, a memento mori reminding the characters within the story, and the reader, of the fragility and transience of life and the certain inevitability of the end: in the case of *The Drowned World*, both the end of life and the apocalyptic End of the world.

With their preoccupation with deep-time, the remaining three move within a fatalistic mentality as they aimlessly occupy the lagoon. For Kerans and Dr Bodkin, the reason behind the testing station was established within old London, the “biological mapping” of the European lagoons, is nothing more than a “pointless game” (8), of which the results follow a predictable

path to the point where Kerans doubt that their colleagues at Camp Byrd even bother to read or process their results. In the same way, Kerans himself has stopped listening to the transmissions coming from Northern Greenland, as the nature of the apocalyptic event occurring is so clear that the “news for the next three million years” can be predicted in advance (15). Beatrice also resigns herself to the neurological metamorphosis that the lagoon instils in its inhabitants, as she chooses to stay in the lagoon instead of being evacuated to Camp Byrd, a decision which Kerans, paradoxically, reads as “self-destructive impulses” (27), despite he himself chose to stay behind as well. Within her decision to stay, much like in the case of Kerans and Dr Bodkin, living out her last days in her grandfather’s apartment in which she grew up, and sticking to her routines while the world steadily heats up around her, lies a resignation or acceptance of the state of things. As they slowly get sucked into deep-time, “back into the neuronc past” hidden within the central nervous system, they start to operate on a timescale beyond the immediate past and future. As Groes argues, Kerans refusal to return to the anthropocentric ideology and ideals of Camp Byrd is also an acknowledgement of human civilisation “as simply just another passing phase in the history of planet earth (Groes. *Against Nostalgia* 183): an anti-anthropocentric decentring of the human as the three choosing to stay in the lagoon seem to “accept and embrace the process” (182) of the ongoing apocalypse, and their impending End as both individuals and as a species. In a world where the End is fast approaching, both biologically, as the “birth of a child had become a comparative rarity, and only one marriage in ten yielded any offspring” (Ballard 23), blocking any chance of repopulating the planet, and the ever-increasing heat from the sun is steadily making it inhabitable, the choice of stoic acceptance may take the form of rational judgement, rather than self-destruction.

In contrast to the acceptance of deep-time developing within the three remaining occupants of the lagoon, the interests of colonel Riggs and the pirate Strangman lie within the immediate past. For both of them, restoration of old culture lies at the forefront of their purpose within the story world, as they both, for different reasons, work toward a re-separation of nature and culture within the European lagoons. For colonel Riggs, the recolonisation of old Europe is the final end goal of his purpose within what once was London, as the expedition’s current task of mapping and recording the area is a preliminary operation in the process towards an “attempt to reoccupy [the] cities” (17). This recolonisation of the European lagoons is a duty so important to colonel Riggs, and his superiors at Camp Byrd, that any threat towards this goal is met with

the promise of swift elimination. Despite having worked with Kerans for three years, he does not hesitate to threaten to “personally blow his head off” if he even entertains the thought of re-flooding London, as “[r]eclaiming land, particularly an urban area [...] in the centre of a former capital city, is a Class A1 priority” (158), a promise he later upholds, as he tries to kill Kerans after he successfully re-floods the lagoon (164-165). For Strangman, who is successful in killing Dr Bodkin when he attempts to re-flood the city (133), the urge to unearth old London is not so much a duty to a system and ideology of anthropocentrism aiming to restore old civilisation, as it is a more ambiguous hunger for collecting the treasures and artefacts of the recent past, as he raids the European lagoons in the hunt for the cultural riches of recorded history.

In their preoccupation with reviving old culture and finding and preserving cultural artefacts which once held immense value, but in the world of the European lagoons hold no more intrinsic value and purpose of use than “bones” (95), colonel Riggs and Strangman display a futile sense of hope and desire to return a former gilded age of humanity which stands in glaring contrast to the material world around them. Strangman’s behaviour becomes strange in the context of the reality of the world they occupy, as he dedicates his life to scouring the lost world for valueless cultural artefacts of a form of civilisation now drowned in the harsh and hot lagoons. These futile attempts to re-establish the old civilisation within the European lagoons, of which colonel Riggs is a part, seem almost blind to the reality of the story world. All signs point towards a fast-approaching End, not only of the now tropical Europe, but of the world as a whole, yet colonel Riggs and Strangman hold on to their conviction that the state of the world can be reversed, and that the golden trinkets of the old world somehow will regain their relevance and cultural importance.

In these completely different understandings and approaches to the world which they occupy, the remaining three expedition members find a sort of acceptance in the inevitable End of civilization and their own existence, and colonel Riggs and Strangman’s insistence on exhuming and re-establishing what is already lost to the current and increasing material conditions of the story world, lies two very different approaches and responses to the rapid change of the environment and the physical surroundings which the apocalyptic event has brought within *The Drowned World*. The state of the story world evokes two very different responses in the characters: a response of realisation and acceptance of the fast erosion of the barrier between nature and culture, and a silent acceptance of a world in which humanity does

not prosper, but rather fade out and disappears in the grand scheme of the geological epochs of deep-time, and a refusal to accept and acknowledge the deteriorating course of the world, while actively trying to re-establish the old borders between human culture and the rest of the world.

## 5.2. *The Road*

### 5.2.1. Literature review

Published in 2006, *The Road* has been described both as “the most important environmental book ever written” (Monbiot) by British environmentalist and writer George Monbiot, and “the first great masterpiece of the globally warmed generation” (O’Hagan) by the Scottish writer Andrew O’Hagan and has with its engagement with the notion of the ecological apocalypse, secured itself a firm place in the conversation around contemporary climate fiction. Playing with the idea of “what would happen if the world lost its biosphere, and the only living creatures were humans, hunting for food among the dead wood and soot” (Monbiot), the novel presents a story world ripe for ecocritical and environmental analysis.

Often falling under the category of post-apocalyptic fiction, in his chapter “Post-Apocalyptic Dystopia: Cormac McCarthy, *The Road* (2006)”, Jan Hollm argues for *The Road* as an example of post-apocalyptic dystopia, based on the quiet activism which can be read into the novel, with the sheer desolation of its story world standing as a possible eye-opener and deterrent in a contemporary Anthropocene reality in which the pressure which the local and global ecology and ecosystems are under. Where dystopian narratives work towards evoking an awareness in its reader towards contemporary topics and issues which might lead to some form of change, apocalyptic narratives do not so much focus on the issues and realities of a contemporary readership, but rather centre on the “depiction of total eschatological transformation” (Hollm 379) as the intention of the post-apocalyptic narrative. In this sense, *The Road* bears elements of both genres, as it is both apocalyptic, with the story world's steady descent towards the End, and dystopian in its pertinent depiction of a world where a vague something has gone horribly wrong, resulting in ecological mass extinction, a scenario which may appear somewhat too close to



comfort for the contemporary reader. Sebastian Groes also notes this didactic element within the desolate frame of McCarthy's apocalypse, which he refers to as a form of apocalyptic-stoic, were making the reader "imagine and feel the texture of a posthumous, ghostly and affectless world in which man is seemingly meaningless" (Groes. *Against Nostalgia* 177), the narrative activates a possible change in behaviour in order to avoid ending in a similar future as the once depicted. In this sense, the relentless and eventual collapse of everything within the novel can be read as an example of a cautionary tale, a bleak wake-up call for the generations of the contemporary Anthropocene moving forward.

The apocalypse in *The Road* does not offer any hope in its depiction of a fast-approaching end of the world in the typical form of religious revelation and renewal of the world after the End, but rather alludes to a near and eventual full stop, as "nature fails to equilibrate after humanity's end" (Giggs 202). This level of a definite End which the novel's version of apocalypse predicts, plays a central part in Rebecca Gibbs' reading of the novel, as the total collapse of the nature-culture binary, and the merging of nature and human culture within the novel "has caused the environment to *denature* in the biochemical sense" (207), leaving no possibility for anything to survive and re-establish itself. In her chapter "The Green Afterword: Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* and the Ecologically Uncanny", Gibbs engages with the novel from the perspective of the ecologically uncanny, analysing how the environment within the novel frames an anthropocentric, post-natural reality wherein "[n]ature's meaning can no longer be found in nature's otherness, its familiar independence from the non-natural" (205), and the effect which this total disintegration of ecology within *The Road* has on the man and the boy, as they move through a landscape wherein "[e]vidence of the human is everywhere, yet is nowhere recognisable" (206). With her analysis, Gibbs provides a reading of McCarthy's ecologically barren story world with special attention to the ecologically uncanny effect that this total erosion of any border between the natural and human culture has on the two lone protagonists moving through this landscape.

Loss is a central theme within the novel, as the total deterioration of both culture and nature has created a story world wherein nothing is left untouched and whole. In the article "Between Dystopia and Utopia: The Post-Apocalyptic Discourse of Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*" Inger-Anne Sjøfting discusses that, where images of failed civilisation could make way for the concept of a regenerating nature within an environmentally centred narrative, in *The Road* "it

is not nature but nothingness, represented by the omnipresent ashes, that encroaches on civilised society as well as on nature” (Søfting 707). And like the disruption of a circulating ecosystem, this intrusion of ash has set off a chain reaction within the story world, as Søfting articulates: “when nature dies, so do language, culture and ethics. Concepts that previously made sense are rendered absurd and dysfunctional” (708) within the world of the novel. Within this reality of the apocalyptic story world where everything is uncanny and strange, yet frighteningly recognisable, the novel opens up to the subject and interpretation of environmental anxiety. In her paper “‘All These Things He Saw and Did Not See’: Witnessing the End of the World in Cormac McCarthy’s *The Road*”, Hannah Stark looks at how contemporary anxiety around the environment can be read on a symbolic level in McCarthy’s use of sight and vision within *The Road*. She notes that “[t]he climate-change debate has hinged on our preparedness to see global warming as the inevitable outcome of current human action and inaction” (Stark 72), and that the idea of vision has a central place within the discourse of the climate change crisis. As the man and the boy travel the road, they are representatives of “the last witnesses to the end of the world” (72), the article looks at the vision of the apocalypse in *The Road* and the man and the boy’s position as witnesses to devastating climate change. Working from Stark’s perspective of loss of sight as an analogy of the loss of the world, sight will also be discussed in the following analysis of *The Road*, as the metaphor of developing blindness will be considered in the context of the fast-approaching End of the apocalypse, and the gradual erosion and loss of both the material world, and with it, language and memory.

### 5.2.2. Framing uncanny desolation at the End of the road

McCarthy’s ecologically bereft landscape is teeming with instance of the uncanny, yet it is not only within the story world that it manifest. Within the novel, the uncanny can also be found at the level of discourse, creating a strange and eerie structure and framework at the level of reading, on which the uncanny story can unfold.

In Cormac McCarthy’s *The Road*, the reader meets the two main characters, the man and the boy, for the first time in the darkness of a cold night in the woods. The man, having woken

from a disturbing dream, reaches his hand out, confirming that the boy is still there, alive, as his “hand rose and fell softly with each precious breath” (McCarthy 1). Faced with the reality that the region they have occupied has become too cold, too inhospitable, as winter approaches, the man and the boy decide to move south, towards the coast, in the hope of an undefinable something. The story depicts their journey through the post-apocalyptic landscape as they travel through the land along the road, and along the way, encounter the horrors within it. Precious resources have become a scarcity, and as the world gradually has become darker, considerations beyond sustenance and short-term survival have slowly dimmed with it, resulting in infanticide and cannibalism in the search for food. In the end, their arduous journey, and the dream of something better at the coast to the south, was nothing more than a dream, as they reach the shore, “Cold. Desolate. Birdless” (230), and the man ultimately must leave the boy to carry on in the end, as he dies days after having reached their destination.

Like it is the case with *The Drowned World*, *The Road* also opens in medias res, as the man wakes before dawn, and his first priority is to make sure that the boy is still with him. Already within the first five lines, a sense of uncanny wrongness about the state of the world is established, as the narrator notes that the nights are “dark beyond darkness and the days more gray each one than what had gone before. Like the onset of some cold glaucoma dimming away the world” (1). In this description of an increasingly dominant darkness, likened to an advancing blindness slowly taking away the image of the world, the sense of a fast approaching, eventual End is foreshadowed. This picture of the world slowly undergoing the process of a developing blindness is accentuated by the sparse language used throughout the novel: a level of description and word use which reflects the level of sensory stimulation, or lack thereof, within the story world itself. In the countryside, even in “the first gray light” of the day, everything is “paling away into the murk” (2) of the grey, ash-filled landscape. Unlike the vibrant and ecologically diverse lagoon of *The Drowned World*, where the setting almost demands detailed sensory description, the world in *The Road* is one of cold, grey darkness: a world slowly asphyxiating as the sun is unable to reach through the grey atmosphere, circling “the earth like a grieving mother with a lamp” (32), as apocalyptic change is unfolding throughout the story world. Where the sun is slowly cooking the European lagoons, mutating the flora and fauna into a new state of being, it is here the absence of its warm rays which sets off the beginning of the End.

The use of simile within the novel is used to provide texture and reference to the story world, as a whole city is likened to a sketched “charcoal drawing” (7). This comparison both highlights the burned down nature of the world, and the hazy, ghostly state of the elements littering the landscape, as the rough and textured lines of charcoal on paper, become a guiding representation of the grey word from the first page of the book. The rhetorical device is also used to further accentuate the extent of darkness and desolation present in the story world. As mentioned above, the darkness is not a finite entity, but rather both “beyond darkness” (1) and likened to the onset of blindness, implying a forward progression of increasing darkness which already has gone “beyond darkness” (1) itself. the world has moved beyond its own bounds and is now occupying a territory which exceeds definition and explanation. the description of the sun as “a grieving mother with a lamp” (32), during the daytime, only serves to strengthen this picture of a world drowned in darkness, as the planet’s lifegiving source of light barely is able to penetrate the dense darkness which has “banished” it (32). The progressing darkness of the world implies a movement towards an End which the image of the “grieving mother” only seems to support, as the sun, the one factor able to prevent total extinction, is left to mourn a foregone conclusion.

Both the protagonist and the third person heterodiegetic narrator, whose presences in the narration at times can be hard to tell apart, seem to hunger for opportunities to describe anything beyond cold, dead, grey, and darkness. There seems to be an urgency to word or voice anything beyond dull grey which is seen or discovered throughout the man and the boy’s journey towards the south, “Looking for anything of color” (3) in the road, be it fire, turning the “snow orange and quivering” (31), or in the figurative sense of finding opportunities to unfold a decaying vocabulary: “Crate upon crate of canned goods. Tomatoes, peaches, beans, apricots. Canned hams. Corned beef” (146). In this way, it is not only the natural world that is disappearing, but it is also language itself which is suffocating through the lack of stimulation within the story world. As the man and the boy come across an area of dead trees it seems important to the narrator to note that it had once been a “rich southern wood that once held mayapple and pipsissewa. Ginseng” and rhododendron (40). In the same instance, the man chooses to introduce a potential food source to the boy as “morels”, and then after the fact specifies it as a type of mushroom when asked for clarification. The reflex to resort to specifics rather than generic categories, when possible, speaks of a need to use and preserve a language of things in an attempt to prevent its

extinction. With the gradual loss of things within the monotone story world, specificity becomes important in the preservation of things in a “world shrinking down about a raw core of parsible entities” (93). It is something which the man himself contemplates, as he notes that, with the loss of entities within the world, the “names of things slowly follow those things into oblivion. Colors. The names of birds. Things to eat. Finally, the names of things one believed to be true” (93) are lost to time. Compared to the sensory language which paints the story world of *The Drowned World*, descriptions beyond destruction and dark, monotone grey within *The Road* almost present themselves as a threat, as they are the stuff of dangerous dreams and longing: dreams of “a flowering wood where birds flew” and “the uncanny taste of a peach from some phantom orchard” (17) ghosting across the tastebuds. The varied language and words which both the narrator and the man desperately tries to hold on to, come with the bitter aftertaste of loss, as things within this world steadily succumb and disappear as time goes on. The sparseness of language, then, becomes an indication of the sheer extent of the loss within *The Road*, a loss so extensive the world is reduced to charred trunks and “dead limbs” (266), where oak, beechwood, and pine are only kept alive through words and distant memories.

This sparseness of varied descriptions that occupy the pages between moments of colour and vibrance, is further supported by a minimalist use of punctuation, both in the case of an almost total lack of commas, unsignaled dialogue with no indication beyond line breaks, and the choice not to have any form of chapters, leaving the text as one long continuous block of small, contained paragraphs: everything is cut down to their core parts. While this sparseness of description and punctuation can leave the text seeming cold and flat, it also introduces an uncomfortable ambiguity: an uncanny sense of detachedness as words, sentences, and paragraphs seems to float on the page, untethered in the same way as the environment and the protagonists at times seem to be, creating a baseline of everything being “uncoupled from its shoring” (10). In this way, the uncanny is not only present in the story world but is also produced at the level of the reading, as conventions and waypoints are absent in the structure of the novel. There are no chapters to guide the reader through the book, to indicate or give breaks in the reading, something which is also the case on the level of the sentences, as the lack of commas leaves the reader with no indication of rhythm and tempo, a part of the structure of the novel which the reader is introduced to from the very first sentence: “When he woke in the woods in the dark and the cold of the night he’d reach out to touch the child sleeping beside him” (1). Another aspect

which makes the reading experience strange at times, is the sudden instances of analepsis throughout the text that appear unsignaled, wedged between paragraphs narrating the present time in the story world. These are flashbacks to the time when the boy's mother was still with them (54, 57-61), and long before the apocalyptic event, when the man himself was just a boy (11-12). Also small, sudden changes in the point of view scattered throughout the text, from a third-person perspective to a first-person perspective (10, 32, 79, 91, 209), make it difficult to interpret if it is the narrator or the man who is addressing the reader directly, or if they are instance of the man having internal monologues with himself. "Do you think that your fathers are watching? That they weigh you in their ledgerbook? Against what? There is no book and your fathers are dead in the ground" (209), it is asked between the sighting of a pregnant woman on the road, and the charred remains of a gutted infant on a roasting spit, an unsettling question with no clear sender or receiver, and left to float ominously on the page. All of these instances play a part in making the text itself appear strange and unpredictable: there is no conventional guidance on how to read the text, while the sudden changes in time, setting and perspective, make the reading unpredictable and fractured.

Within this uncanny framework, the story world itself is also imbued with uncanny triggers, as the road which the man and the boy travel, and the landscape surrounding it, contain recognisable elements, hidden underneath the ash and destruction. The setting itself is anonymous, but at the same time housing objects, elements, and places which point the story world towards something uncomfortably familiar to the reader. The reader's present reality is a ghost in the landscape of *The Road*, as the remnants of a world all too familiar lingers in the monotone grey silence, weathered, and scorched at the edges. A burned down city standing "in the grayness like a charcoal drawing sketched across the waste" (7), an advertisement to "See Rock City" (20) occupying the roof of a barn, a deserted supermarket (21) housing an abandoned can of Coca-Cola (22). This cognitive estrangement is used to produce a special kind of unease in the reader, as the fragments of the world before the apocalypse are eerily recognisable. Though barren, the landscape is home to familiar elements and signifiers which, like the drowned London in the European lagoons, points to a present moment in history, a contemporary moment that, within the story world of *The Road*, has become a moment in the past, while also being on the fast track to being forgotten. Sebastian Groes notes this uncanny duality within the novel and argues this as an example of how the novel works as a piece of proactive climate

fiction. By presenting the reader with a shadow of the world they know, making them “imagine and feel the texture of a posthumous, ghostly and affectless world” (Groes, *Against Nostalgia* 177), it may incite a desire for the present now and an urge to preserve and protect that world, as the novel becomes a reminder that this present moment may become “a future memory that will be lost” (177). All these well-known elements presented within an unfamiliar context make the world of *The Road* uncanny at its core, as the familiar becomes strange in this grey world, defamiliarizing and recontextualising the strangely familiar environment of the story.

To sum up, the world of *The Road* is one of monotone grey silence: a subdued sparseness which is also reflected in the framework holding the story in place. The state of the world, post apocalypse, is one of mass extinction of both flora and fauna, and with it, concepts and unremarkable impressions of the physical world, which before may have seemed invisible in their natural placement within the landscape, have been lost in the destruction. This drastic reduction in diverse sensory input which the grey atmosphere has created, has affected the novel not only on the level of the story but also at the core of the level of discourse and reading. The narrator, much like the protagonist, seems to grasp at the chance to describe anything beyond cold, grey darkness within the story world, as anything within the landscape which can be described beyond its general category is done so, lovingly, with great detail. Mushrooms become morels, trees are mayapples, and wildflowers are categorized as pipsissewa in a world where these species, and most likely all other species, are nothing more than ghosts in a scorched landscape. Language becomes the preserver of all that is lost in the apocalypse, but without an object to anchor these spectres of things that no longer exist in the physical world, they also slowly fall away into oblivion. In this sense, the monotone sparseness of the language and description of the story world is indicative of the sheer loss of things felt within that world, where only fragile words are left to remember that there once was something beyond burned down, generic descriptors. The world becomes strange and uncanny at its essence, as the man and the boy wander a world filled with ghosts of things which no longer exist beyond their rundown remains, yet still linger in the landscape. This sparseness which is seen in the description and language of the world also translates to the structure of sentences and paragraphs within the novel, as these are reduced to a level of basic form: the punctuation is minimized to its core and the paragraphs are small islands in a structure with no chapters to provide rest or waypoints for the reader. This provides a weird structure for the story to unfold within, where

everything becomes a little uncertain and unsteady, making the reading and grasping of the text itself become ambiguous and uncanny at times. Within this structure of uncanny ambiguity and loss, the effect of cognitive estrangement is also generated as this ghost of a former world, though reduced to a grey muddle of monotony, holds silhouettes of things frighteningly familiar. These remnants of a moment before the apocalypse mirror a contemporary moment in history which may seem eerily recognizable to the reader. A Coca-Cola can, an advertisement, the shadow of a former city: all well-known elements now presented in the context of destruction and desolation. Through this strange framing and structure of the novel, McCarthy weaves uncomfortable uncanny unease into the novel at the level of the reading, making the text as a reading experience uncanny in its own right.

### **5.2.3. A wasteland incinerated to the point of nothing**

Inside the dark and grey setting of *The Road*, the uncanny lies at the very centre of the story world, as the total non-existence of a culture-nature binary within the ecologically dead world, creates an environment and atmosphere in which nothing is beyond human culture, and no chance of biological reproduction and re-establishing is possible.

Within *The Road*, the distinct sense of passing permeates the setting, creating a continuous sense of things lost or missing, spectres of things once a natural part of the landscape, now still recognisable despite their death and deterioration. This loss does not extend only to some parts of the story world but is touching every part of the setting, creating a world hosting ghosts and ghosts only. In this totality of devastation, “a mounted deerhead” (McCarthy 229) or “illformed” (65) tattoos of birds become the only representative of the once sprawling animal kingdom, what was once a diverse plant life is reduced to “ashen effigies” (296) eventually taken by the wind, and the remaining members of humanity are fighting to live, day to day, on a finite amount of resource which also eventually will run out. What is left is a barren landscape where nothing is left untouched and nothing is as it once was, a post-natural state where any notion of a division between a concept of nature and culture is non-existent. Where the ecologically uncanny environment of *The Drowned World* presented a setting where nature and culture merged into an



intermixed state of something undividable, everything within the world of *The Road* has been burned to the ground, a wasteland incinerated to the point where any notion of a nature-culture binary is irrelevant. In a world where everything has been reduced to grey ash, “[n]ature’s meaning can no longer be found in nature’s otherness, its familiar independence from the non-natural” (Giggs 205), and the non-natural can no longer be distinguished by its dissociation from the natural. Cultured spaces, objects, and nature itself become ghosts in the landscape, standing as the uncanny remnants of a time when distinctions were possible, not only between nature and culture but also between a sense of life and death: a quiet reminder of all that has been lost and gone away. In this sense, every corner of *The Road* is uncanny, as everything is altered beyond repair and beyond its original meaning, making everything different yet unnervingly recognisable, and everything known appears strangely unfamiliar.

This uncanny strangeness extends beyond the material state of the environment, as time also moves weirdly within the world. The state of the setting is a level of total destruction which suggests a long temporal journey has been underway to get to this stage of devastation, yet the beginning of the End of the world began no longer back in time than the birth of the boy. Though his age is never revealed, he comes across as a younger child in his early teens, old enough to keep pace with the man as they travel the road, yet small enough to be carried when needed (McCarthy 123). The change which has happened within his lifetime seems instantaneous. Much like in *The Drowned World*, the End of the world appears to have occurred almost in the blink of an eye, but where the change within the European lagoons occurred on the basis of too much sun, creating the perfect conditions for increased growth and mutation within the story worlds flora and fauna, the absence of the sun’s rays has managed to kill all photosynthesising life, and by extension all animal life, within the story world of *The Road*, all within the span of a decade. The speed at which the world died within *The Road*, speaks to a fear also existing within the Anthropocene present. When Icelandic volcanos erupt, disrupting the air traffic for weeks; when extensive forest fires and sandstorms force populations behind closed doors, as the concentration of smoke and dust in the air dims the rays of the sun; and when threats of nuclear aggression are voiced, humanity is reminded of the fragility of the earth and the local and global ecosystems, existing through stable cycles of adapted elements exactly because the whole is contingent on the well-being and existence of the individual parts. It is when one of the elements of the whole gets disrupted, that the intermingled co-dependence of the balanced ecosystems becomes visible and

apparent. The dimming of the sun's rays within the story world of *The Road* caused a chain reaction which, ten odd years later, saw the world reduced desolation beyond repair or rehabilitation.

Time seems to stand still within this new reality, where only the remains of consumer goods and cultural artefacts, such as the shopping cart, the advertisement, canned goods, and the private bunker, speak of the former world before the apocalyptic event being placed in recent history, all elements which help to create a sense of cognitive estrangement within the reader. Where days are only getting greyer, and nights are "dark beyond darkness" (1), "it could be November" (93) but the man is not sure. As man-made, chronological time is impossible to keep, and ecological time no longer is viable, the man and the boy end up travelling an uncanny time zone where nothing beyond shades of grey and black demarcates the passing of time, and day and night are the most discernible states in the world, yet only discernible by their level of darkness. There is no course forward, no organic material to grow and evolve, no ecology to sustain the survival of larger species, no guarantee and little chance for the survival of new generations in an environment in which "women, perhaps a dozen in number, some of them pregnant" (96) are marched behind wagons, and "a charred human infant headless and gutted and blackening on the spit" (212) is prepared as the meal of the night. Life in the broadest sense is no longer sustainable, and time seems to have stopped in anticipation of the end of the last stragglers inhabiting the world. While the "bleak and shrouded earth [goes] trundling past the sun" (193), continuing its constant orbit, life on the ground has come to a standstill, as the remaining habitants slowly disappear, either from natural causes or through the actions of others.

The environment stays much the same throughout most of the novel, with the exception of when the man and the boy finally reach the coast to the south. They have been going south, a saying with its own fitting connotations of moving towards a state of ruin, decline, or deterioration, in the hope of some reprieve from the increasing cold in the region where the reader first meets them. When they finally reach the ocean, it is as anticlimactic an experience as most of their journey has been. "Is it blue?" the boy had previously asked as they went over their map together, "I don't know. It used to be" the man answered (194), instilling his memory of the ocean in the boy's mind's eye. It is a narrative about the sea which the man later apologises for as they reach the ocean to the south: "vast and cold and shifting heavily like a slowly heaving vat of slag and then the gray squall line of ash. He looked at the boy. He could see the

disappointment in his face” (230). The hope of something beyond the reality they have lived for so long dies on that beach, as the realisation hits that the ocean is as dead as the landmass they had walked to get there.

From this disappointment, they quickly start to create a new narrative, some form of hope, as they sit on the shore debating whether there might be another “father and his little boy” sitting on the opposite shore, who “could be carrying the fire too”, and if they are “vigilant” they might find out (231). This is the narrative which the father creates together with his son, most likely to give the boy some form of hope after the disappointment of finding nothing, but in his own quiet moment, the man plays with a narrative of his own: an act of self-soothing after finding nothing but death and desolation at the end of their journey. “He thought there could be deathships out there yet, drifting with their lolling rags of sail. Or life in the deep. Great squid propelling themselves over the floor of the sea in the cold darkness. Shuttling past like trains, eyes the size of saucers” (234). This idea of the ocean being the last bastion of life, as it was the first, in the form of the primordial soup from which everything evolved, seems to have been a small hope for the man. The possibility that the ash and the cold could not touch the evolutionarily ancient invertebrates at the bottom of the cold dark sea, seemed to have been a small comfort for him. Yet, even the ocean, the one last place on earth where parts are still unknown to the people of the Anthropocene, seems to have succumbed to the apocalypse as the shore is littered with “[t]he bones of seabirds. At the tide line a woven mat of weeds and the ribs of fishes in their millions stretching along the shore as far as eye could see like an isocline of death. One vast salt sepulchre” (237). The state of the ocean and the mass grave of seabirds and marine life rolling up on the shore speaks of a dead, stagnant water only reanimated by the manipulation of the wind, and puts the last nail in the coffin for any redemption or re-establishing of life within the story world. There is no part of the world which has gone untouched, and there is no chance of reviving an ecology so thoroughly burned down and asphyxiated as the one occupying the setting of *The Road*.

#### 5.2.4. The man, the boy, and the spectral memory of her

The characters within *The Road* are deeply affected by the apocalyptic change which the total ecological collapse of nature has brought. The uncanniness within the environment is both felt and expressed by the characters as they try to navigate both the uncanny, desolate landscape within the story world, but also their relationship to each other.

Much like the story world in which they travel, the two main characters in *The Road*, the boy and the man are strangely untethered in their relative anonymity. Not much is revealed about the pair, from the first moment the man wakes up from his nightmare, to the point where the boy sits with his father's corpse for the last time, but their desperate need for each other's presence and wellbeing lies at the core of not only their mutual relationship, but also their individual characters. Through the experience of living within the harsh world of *The Road*, the man and the boy have become "each the other's world entire" (4), the only constant in a world of uncertainties. This strong co-dependency, a shared pact of survival and perseverance, not so much for their own sake, but for the continued survival of the other, is from the very first page the driving force of the novel, as the man's first waking thought is to make sure that the boy is still breathing, his chest rising and falling "softly with each precious breath" (1). This ingrained anxiety of losing the boy during the unconscious hours of sleep, the need to touch his son upon waking, making sure that his ribs are still moving and feeling for the presence of "warmth and movement. Heart-beat" (123), speaks of a character for whom loss has become a consistent companion rather than an unwelcome stranger, and of a world in which loss has become normalised to the point of routine. The story world itself is in a state of perpetual loss, as the rapid change that the world has undergone since the onset of the apocalyptic event, has altered, and reduced the environment to ash and remnants of what was once alive. All that is left are things which now only exist in their living state through memory, as their fragile, charred carcasses, like the "ferns and hydrangeas and wild orchids" remain littering the landscape as "ashen effigies" (295-296) of a former world. It is in this harsh environment, this total breakdown of the nature-culture divide, where the strong bond between the man and the boy has developed, as their surroundings have had an active role in shaping their desperate co-dependence. There is not much left in the landscape and the unstable world is only becoming smaller with time, shrinking further into oblivion, as things and their designation slowly

disappear. But one concrete certainty is that the man and the boy have, and can rely on, each other when everything else seems uncannily uncertain and untethered.

Within their close-knit relationship lies the woman as a spectre both between the man and the boy and in the man's memories and intrusive dreams, which resurface sporadically throughout the novel. Though little is known about her, the descriptions and memories of her scattered throughout the novel show a character dealing with the new complexity of the world which apocalyptic event the of *The Road* has brought. In a flashback it is revealed that the woman one night decides to take her own life, a possibility which the man and the woman had played with, in theory, during "the hundred nights they'd sat up and arguing the pros and cons of self destruction" (60) but which became all too real for the man when the woman made her decision. Despite her spiteful words before she left them, within her choice and instrument of passing can be seen a kind of mercy and care, as her "flake of obsidian" (60) left the two remaining "bullets in the gun" (57) for the man and the boy, leaving them with a quick way out, should they need it. This is a possible need which becomes all too real for the man, and the boy, as the man harshly reminds the boy how to use the gun, "you put it in your mouth and point it up" (119), when they come into close contact with raiders on their journey.

Much like Beatrice in *The Drowned World*, the woman seems to have resigned herself to the fact that her end is inevitable, but unlike Beatrice, she makes the active choice to decide for herself how that end will occur. She seems to realise the futility of continuing to go on in a world on the brink of total biological extinction and breaks from the bond of mutual co-dependency which the man and the boy still are bound by. "The one thing I can tell you is that you won't survive for yourself" (59) she notes in her last conversation with the man, an observation which highlights not only their co-dependence as a group but also the co-imprisonment that it forces upon each of them. In this sense, the birth of the boy was not a happy moment in her life, but rather another reason forcing her to endure the apocalypse, as she expresses that her "heart was ripped out of [her] the night he was born" (59). With the birth of the boy comes both the enormous responsibility of keeping him alive, together with the heartbreaking knowledge of having brought him into a world where his chances of making it are slim, and where life no longer entails much more than desperate survival. The world is actively dying, and life no longer holds any meaning outside the daily struggle of surviving for survival's sake, but while both the boy and the man express a wish for death and life to be over multiple times throughout the novel

(56, 157, 152), their mutual co-dependence forces them to live on, despite having no “long term goals” (170) for their existence. From this angle, the woman made the decision to break from this cycle of destructive co-existence and leave on her own terms. In a more regressive sense, the death of the mother can be read as a symbolic end of humanity in the biological sense. Where Beatrice’s reproductive role within *The Drowned World* was diminished due to the drastic reduction in the birth-rate within that story world, leaving her with no ‘reproductive purpose in life’, within the story world of *The Road*, the conception of children is still a possibility, but they do not necessarily get to live long in a reality where old-world morality is a scarcity, and the encounter with “a charred human infant headless and gutted and blackening on the spit” (212) lies within the space of possibility.

The man, as a character, is shaped by loss manifesting in different forms; the loss of his partner and the mother of his son, taken from them by a steadfast decision not to persevere any longer (57-60); the loss of a former life in a former world, where birch trees “stood bone pale against the dark of the evergreens of beyond”, as he walked the along the lake of his uncle’s farm (11); the loss of language, as his vocabulary slowly deteriorates in step with the disintegration of the world around him, as the world slowly shrinks down into “a raw core of parsible entities” (93); the gradual and unavoidable loss of memories attached to that language, as the memories of the world that was, slowly warp and fade, like “the dying world the newly blind inhabit, all of it slowly fading from memory” (17); and in the end, the loss of his life and from this his loss of the boy, as the man has to break his promise of never leaving him, and dies days after having reached the sea to the south (300). As a character, the man stands on a peculiar line between what was and what is. Unlike the boy, he lived the life of a contemporary, 20th-century man with a partner and a house from which they could watch “distant cities burn” by candlelight during the beginning stages of the apocalypse (61). He has witnessed and lived the massive change that the ashen and grey atmosphere has caused: a rapid change which has permanently altered the world in the short span of his child’s life. This experience of both living through the old world and the devastated present is one which the man shares with Dr Bodkin, who also is bound by a past reality which no longer exists while navigating the present, altered beyond recovery by the apocalyptic event within *The Drowned World*. Where these two differ in their relationship to the drastic material shifts within their lives, is in how they choose to relate to the old worlds which they distinctly remember but are no more. While Dr Bodkin’s connection to a past before

eminent disaster is something which he does not want to be bound by, the man's connection to the world before the apocalyptic event of *The Road* is one which he struggles to maintain, as it slowly slips from his mind in the slowly increasing absence of referents. In a tragic fashion, the man's urge to remember the past only seems to erode it faster, as "each memory recalled must do some violence to its origins" (139), leaving no means to mitigate the constant trickle of loss that the desolate story world brings upon him.

The world within *The Road* no longer has any intrinsic meaning, as it has been stripped bare to its most basic elements. To bring some form of meaning to a world wherein all meaning has been burned down and asphyxiated at the hands of the "indifferent sun" (234), the man creates the simple narrative of the good guys, bad guys, and carrying the fire, in order to give the boy something beyond survival to hang on to, to keep on going and surviving in the story world of *The Road* because that "is what the good guys do. They keep trying. They don't give up" (145). In this way, the boy is shaped by this narrative of being one of "the good guys" (81), a simple narrative of goodness and perseverance that the man has instilled within him, making him a character with high moral integrity in the face of desperate hardship. Where the man appears relatively anonymous to the reader, an unknown person whose life and memories the reader gets access to only through fragments, the boy is an even more unknown entity, making this unwavering moral compass which he has developed his most prominent characteristic. This is a set of values that, at the same time, does make the boy appear somewhat strange in the context of the world in which he has grown up, where even his father, the creator of the narrative which has shaped him, finds it hard to stay within the hard lines of good and bad in a reality so ambiguous as the one they find themselves in. Often having to question his father's actions and asking him to help the people they meet (173), the boy becomes their moral compass: an anomaly abiding by a ruleset that no longer is in effect.

Born in the early days of the apocalypse, while "distant cities" (61) burned in the landscape, the boy entered a world of destruction and desolation in progress, never getting a glimpse of what had once been. The man, on the other hand, remembers a time before their nomadic journey for survival: childhood memories of visiting his uncle's farm, walking the lush green land, and rowing across a clear, blue lake together (11-12). Where the man has lived experience of a reality which no longer exists in any form, the boy has never known anything other than the environmental disaster of the current story world. This generational difference

between the man and the boy brings into focus the effect that the deterioration of the world has had not only on the man, who, at every turn, is confronted with the totality of his loss, but also on the boy, who, at every turn, is confronted with the alien remnants of a world which he has never experienced, yet whose spectres plays an active role in his life and survival. In the boy's ecologically uncanny world, where "evidence of the human is everywhere, yet is nowhere recognisable" (Giggs 206), every instance of survival is conditioned on the access to resources and elements of the world before the apocalyptic event, as the post-apocalypse is unable to sustain itself. The world has shrunk down to so raw a "core of parsible entities" (McCarthy 93), that it no longer is able to support any form of organic life. The boy has only encountered living nature or growing organic entities to a limited degree in his lifetime. He manages to taste morels, apples, and dogmeat: the last of which was the result of a deep betrayal on the part of his father, who had promised the boy that "he would not hurt the dog" following the little family when the mother was still alive, but whose hide ended up stretched out on a trellis in the end (91). Instead, the boy is introduced to these organic entities through preservation. He gets a taste of nature and the world before the apocalypse through manufactured cans and homemade jars: cans filled with "Tomatoes, peaches, beans, apricots. Canned hams. Corned beef" (146), and jars of "green beans. Slices of red pepper [...] Tomatoes. Corn. Okra" (220). All small time-capsules of now-extinct species of flora and fauna that once had been available in mass-produced abundance, but now are a finite "richness of a vanished world" (147), and the biggest contributor to their continued survival.

It is not only through preserved food that the boy gets a glimpse of a natural world, but also through the "illformed" (65), second-hand rendition of a bird on the neck of a shrivelled corpse, and the taxidermized head of a deer found on the wall of an abandoned grocery store (229). In this sense, the boy's experience of the world before is mediated through the systems of value which were in place in the old world; resource extraction and mass-production for mass-market consumption; popular metaphors, motifs, and figures; and trophies, status symbols, and signifiers of affiliation. Even the "dead limbs" (221) which he gathers and burns, preserved through heat and drying, are the only representations of trees that he will ever know: scorched and charred trunks and branches standing like shadows in the landscape, as ghosts bound to the place of their physical destruction. The boy's world operates in a weird limbo between what is now and the foreign fragments of what once was. His world of grey scarceness is constantly



disturbed by alien entities from another time, an uncanny flickering in the back of the mind, as the ghost of an entirely different reality still lingers in the landscape.

Through the character of the boy, everything that may seem known and stabilising to the reader in the untethered and uncanny world of *The Road*, becomes estranged by innocent questions like, “What is it, papa?” (22) at the sight of a can of Coca-Cola, or a dam in the landscape (18-19). The boy's innocent questions put quotation marks around seemingly normal and obvious things littering the world, the elements which are known and grounding to the reader and the man, drawing attention to their misplacement within the boy's desolate grey reality: they are relics of an ancient civilisation for which the boy has no reference point other than what the man tells him. This generational difference is brought to the forefront early in the novel, when the pair comes across the man's childhood home. The building, that for the man embodies the essence of safety and home, is deeply scary to the boy, whose contextual understanding of buildings is one of entrapment, ambushes, and possible confrontations with other people. “There could be somebody here” (25), he rationalises, as the man seems eager to enter the building and relive his memories from before the disaster. To the boy, who had been trained “to lie in the woods like a fawn” (124) for protection, enclosed spaces do not equate safety in the same way as it does to the man and the reader, but rather appear like an avoidable risk, containing unforeseen consequences and dangers: be they basements leading to the food storage of cannibals (116), or dark windows shooting arrows (281).

For the man, the generational gap between him and the boy becomes eerily apparent as he lies in the bunker, a time capsule from before everything went wrong, and watches the boy sleep among the surplus of resources.

Maybe he understood for the first time that to the boy he was himself an alien. A being from a planet that no longer existed. [...] He could not construct for the child's pleasure the world he'd lost without constructing the loss as well and he thought perhaps the child had known this better than him (163).

The small reprieve from the real world that this hole in the ground had provided them with takes on the form of a cruel joke, as the man is reminded of a world which he will never get back, and by enthusiastically trying to teach his son about it, the boy takes on a loss for a world he has

never been a part of. What need does the boy have for knowing how to correctly put butter on a biscuit (154), when butter and biscuits soon will live on only as words and memories, destined to erode, as no physical object will be left to hold them in the world. Throughout the novel, the man has tried to introduce the boy to a former, better world through memories and stories in a need to share what he himself remembers as good and nice and safe. But at this moment, the man seems to understand that they have no common reference point to anything from before the apocalyptic event. He is talking to the boy in a language he does not understand, about a reality that the boy has never experienced, and by teaching the boy how to butter a biscuit, the taste of a Coca-Cola, the specific name of a mushroom, or how he used to live as a child, he is also settling him with the loss connected to those things. Like Kerans in *The Drowned World*, the boy has no reference to the world that was before the apocalyptic event beyond what he has been taught through second-hand knowledge, leaving him untethered to the reality which the man tries to make him a part of. The boy's reality is not morels, blue water, or green forests, it is scorched tree trunks and "dead limbs" (221), grey skies and ash. It is petrified corpses and burned bodies, sights that the man desperately tries to shield him from, but the boy already is used to. "What you put in your mind is there forever?" the boy iterates the man's concern for his mental well-being, before reminding him that the horrors of the post-apocalyptic world "are already there" (203), firmly imprinted in the boy's memories.

## 6. Uncanny pictures of Anthropocene anxieties

The activation of the uncanny is a waypoint that something irregular is afoot, a shift in the known and familiar, and what has been understood as natural. It is a "crisis of the proper" (Royle 1), a change in the known and established, and "a crisis of the natural, touching upon everything that one might have thought was 'part of nature': one's own nature, human nature, the nature of reality and the world" (1). In this way, strange uncanniness is an indication that things are not as they should be, producing a sense of anxiety around the notion that there has been a breakdown of the natural order of things. In the following chapter, there will be a discussion of this sense of anxiety: how *The Drowned World* and *The Road* speak to anxieties of the modern Anthropocene

in regard to the state of ecology and the environment in the contemporary reader's reality of global warming and climate change.

Where Ballard's *The Drowned World* may have been an interesting thought experiment to its implied reader, an engaging story within a fantastical story world of unimaginable ecological change, to the contemporary audience it paints a picture which may hit a bit too close to home. To the modern audience, the almost clinical assessment that "soon it would be too hot" (Ballard 1), comes across as an uncannily early warning of a global ecological trajectory which, gradually since the early notions of global warming, has been repeated to the point of desensitisation. As Marco Lambertini, the Director-General of WWF International, warns in the *Living Planet Report 2020*, "this years Living Planet Report provides unequivocal and alarming evidence that nature is unravelling and that our planet is flashing red warning signs of vital natural systems failure" (WWF 4), a description which also sounds eerily close to the possible prelude to the state of the story world within Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*, where the disappearance of one element within the global ecosystem seems to have brought the global ecology as a whole to come crashing down.

This long occurring hyperobject of the wayward sun within *The Drowned Word*, speaks to a lack of urgency which seems as much as a blind spot today as it was in Ballard's novel in 1962. As the world is changing uncannily around them, Camp Byrd, colonel Riggs, and Strangman still hang on to the notion that the world can be reclaimed and rebuilt, that cultured spaces already list to climate change somehow can be raised from the water and re-established into their former state before the beginning of the End within *The Drowned World*. Here Ballard has seemed to hit something core to the human experience, a difficulty seeing prolonged change in the making while simultaneously being in the thick of it. This is a notion that, to some extent, seems to mirror the contemporary state of the climate, where scientists and organisations, such as the UN and the WWF, for years have warned of an eventual point of no return. "UN climate report urges world to adapt now, or suffer later" (Spring) Jake Spring writes for Reuters as recently as February 28, 2022, yet another pleading warning that "soon it would be too hot" (Ballard 1), too late, aimed at conscious minds for which the sheer temporal scale of the ongoing ecological disaster is almost entirely too complex and too intangible to fully comprehend and react upon. For characters within *The Drowned World*, this eerie sentence takes the form of an observation rather than a warning, as it, unfortunately, appears to be too late for the European

lagoons and the rest of the planet, as the point of no return seems to have been reached and passed long ago, and the world steadily moves towards the End. This uncanny imagined future that Ballard has created, activates a deep sense of cognitive estrangement within the contemporary reader not only due to the deeply recognisable world within the novel, where the Hotel Ritz, the planetarium, “Leicester Square” (122), all are physical places in modern London, but also because of unsettlingly recognisable way which this world is meeting its End, the picture of and anxiety of the modern Anthropocene’s climate fears around the climate crisis. In this sense, the contemporary reader is ‘looking’ at the End of their own reality, or an imagined future of modern climate change anxiety.

With the total loss, not only of the nature-culture binary within *The Road*, but with it the natural world as a whole, McCarthy works with loss as a central subject, and with it, reminds the reader of the impact which the loss of the natural world may have, not only on the collective, but also on the individual. The loss of species is not a new concept, as the world has seen “an average 68% decrease in population size of mammals, birds, amphibians, reptiles, and fish between 1970 and 2016” (WWF 6), but by forcing this trajectory to its extreme conclusion, McCarthy manages to highlight exactly how important the presence of the non-human, natural world is for human existence. The narrator and the man hunger for stimulation, for something outside of culture in a world where nothing and no one beyond the last few stragglers have survived. The death of ecology, it turns out, is not only equivalent to the loss of the means for sustaining further life, but it also has a deteriorating effect on memory and even language itself: the ultimate manifestation of the human. It may come across as trivial to say that nature and life are fragile, yet the story world within *The Road* and the characters moving within it make a poignant re-examination of this claim, as McCarthy tests the limits of humanity’s independence from nature and comes to the grim conclusion that there is not much hope or chance for a thriving humanity, either biologically or existentially, within a world totally bereft of nature. With *The Road*, McCarthy asks the question of how one lives and survives within a world of nothing beyond the human, what constitutes life, or a life, worth living, and how you relate to not only yourself but those around you in a world where gradual but consistent loss of life, referents, and memories has become a central part of life.

Humanity’s ambivalent relationship to nature manifests through the uncanny, both in the case of too little nature and too much nature, too much sun and too little sun, uncontrollable

nature, and the total absence of nature. The uncanny elements within the two novels show the ecological anxiety inherent in the erosion of the binarism of nature and culture characteristic of the Anthropocene age, and the apocalyptic narration of ecological collapse serves the purpose of providing a safe space wherein these anxieties and imagined outcomes can be acknowledged and explored. Within the two novels, Ballard's European lagoons seem to be the only place wherein hope, to some extent can manifest. While to the contemporary reader, living under the shadow of climate change, there seems to be little hope to be had for the occupants of the old capital city, or the rest of the world for that matter, but for the implied reader there may have been a promise of something more. The fatalistic attitudes of Kerans, Dr Bodkin, and Beatrice, and their accepting attitudes towards their "neurotic odyssey" (Ballard 174) into the ecological world of deep-time as a psycho-biological memory within all of neurological existence, may bear with it a hint of an anti-anthropocentric hope that some form of life will continue on, and humanity itself will become part of this new future as a biological memory of a bygone epoch. This hope for a revelation or some sense of a new beginning is one which Ballard himself hints at, by referring to Kerans as "a second Adam" (175) before he gets lost in the nature of the lagoon. In the case of *The Road*, there is little room for a hopeful ending as the total lack of organic life left makes any sense of a regenerating future impossible, McCarthy chooses to hammer this point home by destroying the last hope that the man and the boy, and the reader, may have had of something beyond desolation, as they make the evolutionary cradle of the deep sea just as ecologically dead and gone as the rest of the world. And while the boy's meeting with a group of supposed 'good guys' at the end of the novel may come across as a flicker of hope, it is most likely only a momentary reprieve in a world on its deathbed.

In the two novels uncanny depictions of the environment, ecology and the End of the world lies uncomfortable contemporary anxieties about the natural world and humanity's relationship to it in the modern Anthropocene age of climate change and global warming concerns. This comes across both in *The Drowned world's* depiction of a world slowly heating up to the point of inhabitation, a global hyperobject which is mirrored in *The Road's* destructive lack of sun, which leads to the same end result through opposite means. Also, the totality of loss that climate collapse may bring is examined, as McCarthy's characters are forced to navigate a dead world with no future, a reality which brings to the forefront nature and the natural world's effect on the human, both as a collective and as individuals.

## 7. The uncanny at the end of the world

While the worlds within J. G. Ballard's *The Drowned World* and Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* each lie on their polar opposite side of the spectrum of ecological apocalypse, they meet in their mutual progression toward the End of their respective worlds. These advancements towards the End result from ecological disasters initiated and sustained by an increase and lack of the sun, wherein one is suffering under too much of the sun's rays, and the other is not being exposed to enough of it. With this rapid change comes a strong sense of uncanny in both of the story worlds, as what once was recognisable appears strange and foreign, and that which once may have come across as unrecognisable now bears elements of something known.

This uncanny presence within the novels does not only come across within the level of the story, but it also permeates the level of the discourse, creating strange and unnerving structures framing the story, triggering a sense of the uncanny at the level of the reading experience. This manifests in the novels' use of *in medias res*, to disorient the reader as they are thrust into strange and eerie worlds which both are marked by the consequences of their individual climate catastrophes. Also, the authors' use of familiar cultural objects and landmarks to incite a sense of cognitive estrangement and defamiliarization within the reader only enhances the uncanny within the novels. Where one novel almost has too much to describe, painting the environment with vivid sensory descriptions of a lively green lagoon, the other seems to hunger for a chance to describe something beyond the nothingness of cold, grey darkness which permeates every corner of the burned down landscape, destroyed beyond repair by the lack of growth and warmth which the sun previously provided.

Within the setting, the uncanny infiltrates every part of the two story worlds. This expresses itself in the erosion of the nature-culture binary within the merging of nature and old culture within *The Drowned World*, and the total non-existence of a binary within the desolate landscape of *The Road*, as nature no longer exists within this reality, only leaving behind humanity and its culture. Within these environments, time seems to operate within strange zones, as man-made chronological time seems inadequate or useless, while ecological time also moves strangely, as in one instance time seems to go backwards while in the other, it seems to have stopped entirely, only discernible by the level of darkness determining whether it is night or day.

Lastly, the uncanny within the novels are expressed through the characters and their relation to the uncanny environment and the people around them. Both worlds have turned their inhabitants into climate migrants, forcing them to relocate to more hospitable areas. This has created generational gaps between the protagonists, both in *The Drowned World* and within *The Road*, where some have lived within the lost cultured spaces which they now wander, and others have little attachment to areas which they only know about by the second-hand knowledge they learn along the way. Especially within *The Road*, the drastic change to the environment is deeply felt by its characters, as they are forced into a somewhat unhealthy co-dependence in order to survive, while the massive generational gap and difference in lived experience between the man and the boy, together with the constant state of gradual loss, leave the two appearing uncannily alien to each other.

Within these uncanny stories of ecological apocalypse lies uncomfortably recognisable narratives about global ecological collapse, which appear uncannily familiar to the contemporary readers within the modern Anthropocene age of global warming and climate change. The stories appear uneasily uncanny to the modern audience exactly because they speak to the anxieties about the ecology and environment as they depict scenarios which hits a bit too close to home within the current reality and state of the material world.

## 8. Works Cited

### 8.1. Primary sources

Ballard, J.G. *The Drowned World*. London: Fourth Estate, 2014.

McCarthy, Cormac. *The Road*. London: Picador, 2010.

### 8.2. Secondary sources

Barry, Peter. *Beginning Theory: An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002.

Bennett, Andrew, and Nicholas Royle. *An Introduction to Literature, Criticism and Theory*. New York: Routledge, 2016.

Bubandt, Niels. "Anthropocene Uncanny: Nonsecular Approaches to Environmental Change." In: *A Non-secular Anthropocene: Spirits, Specters and Other Nonhumans in a Time of Environmental Change*. Edited by Niels Bubandt. More Than Human. AURA Working Papers, vol. 3, 2018, pp. 2-18.

Carroll, Siobhan. "The Terror and the Terroir: The Ecological Uncanny in New Weird Exploration Narratives." *Para-doxa*, vol. 28, 2016, pp. 67-89.

Clarke, Jim. "Reading Climate Change in J.G. Ballard." *Critical Survey*, vol. 25, no. 2, 2013, pp. 7-21.

Clement, Tracey. "'Soon It Would Be Too Hot': Revisiting *The Drowned World*." *Journal of Asia-Pacific Pop Culture*, vol. 3. No. 1, 2018, pp. 26-54.

Crutzen, Paul Jozef. "Geology of Mankind". *Nature*, Vol. 415, p. 23, 2002.



Curtis, Claire P. *Postapocalyptic Fiction and the Social Contract*. Lexington Books, 2010.

Davis, Thomas S. "Fossils of Tomorrow: Len Lye, J. G. Ballard, and Planetary Futures." *Modern Fiction Studies*, Johns Hopkins University Press, vol. 64, no. 4, 2018, pp. 659-679.

Dini, Rachele. "Resurrected from its Own Sewers": Waste, Landscape, and the Environment in J. G. Ballard's 1960s Climate Fiction." *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment*, vol. 28, no. 1, 2021, pp. 207-229.

Freud, Sigmund. "The 'Uncanny'." In: *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XVII (1917-1919): An Infantile Neurosis and Other Works*. Translated by James Strachey, London: The Hogarth Press and the institute of Psychoanalysis, 1955.

Garrard, Greg. *Ecocriticism*. London: Routledge, 2012.

Giggs, Rebecca. "The Green Afterword: Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* and the Ecological Uncanny." In: *Criticism, Crisis, and Contemporary Narrative: Textual Horizons in an Age of Global Risk*. Edited by Paul Crosthwaite, New York: Routledge, 2011, pp. 201-217.

Groes, Sebastian. "Against Nostalgia: Climate Change Art and Memory." In: *Memory in the Twenty-First Century: New Critical Perspectives from the Arts, Humanities, and Sciences*. Edited by Sebastian Groes, Palgrave Macmillan, 2016, pp. 175-187.

Groes, Sebastian. "From Shanghai to Shepperton: Crises of Representation in J. G. Ballard's Londons." In: *J. G. Ballard: Contemporary Critical Perspectives*. Edited by Jeannette Baxter, London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2008, pp. 78-93.

- Heise, Ursula. "Martian Ecologies and the Future of Nature." *Twentieth Century Literature*, vol. 57, no. 3/4, 2011, pp. 447-471.
- Hollm, Jan. "Post-Apocalyptic Dystopia: Cormac McCarthy, *The Road* (2006)." In: *Dystopia, Science Fiction, Post-Apocalypse: Classics – New Tendencies – Model Interpretations*. Edited by Eckart Voigts and Alessandra Boller, Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier, 2015, pp. 379-393.
- Kermode, Frank. *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1967.
- Lisboa, Maria Manuel. *The End of the World: Apocalypse and its Aftermath in Western Culture*. Cambridge: Open Book Publishers, 2011.
- Macfarlane, Robert. "Generation Anthropocene: How Humans have Altered the Planet Forever." *The Guardian*, 1 Apr. 2016, [theguardian.com/books/2016/apr/01/generationanthropocene-altered-planet-for-ever](https://www.theguardian.com/books/2016/apr/01/generationanthropocene-altered-planet-for-ever). Accessed 27 May, 2022.
- Matthews, John A. "ANTHROPOCENE." *Encyclopedia of Environmental Change*. Ed. John A. Matthews. Thousand Oaks,: SAGE Publications, Ltd., 2014.
- Monbiot, George. "Civilisation ends with a shutdown of human concern. Are we there already?," *The Guardian*, 30 Oct. 2007, [theguardian.com/commentisfree/2007/oct/30/comment.books](https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2007/oct/30/comment.books). Accessed 27 May, 2022.
- Morton, Timothy. *Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology After the End of the World*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013.
- Morton, Timothy. *The Ecological Thought*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010.

- Subramanian, Meera. "Anthropocene Now: Influential Panel Votes to Recognize Earth's New Epoch" *Nature*, 21 May 2019, [nature.com/articles/d41586-019-01641-5](https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-019-01641-5). Accessed 27 May, 2022.
- Suvin, Darko. *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction: On the Poetics and History of a Literary Genre*. London: Yale University Press, 1979.
- O'Hagan, Andrew. Cover endorsement. *The Road*, by Cormac McCarthy, London: Picador, 2010.
- Rossi, Umberto. "Images from the Disaster Area: An Apocalyptic Reading of Urban Landscapes in Ballard's *The Drowned World* and *Hello America*." *Science Fiction Studies*, vol. 21, no. 1, 1994, pp. 81-97.
- Royle, Nicholas. *The Uncanny*. New York: Routledge, 2003.
- Stark, Hannah. "'All These Things He Saw and Did Not See'" Witnessing the End of the World in Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*." *Critical Survey*, vol. 25, no. 2, 2013, pp. 71-84.
- Scott Sørensen, Anne. "Kulturbegreber - i et længde- og tværsnit." in: *Nye kulturstudier: teorier og temaer*. Tiderne Skifter, 2010.
- Spring, Jake, Gloria Dickie and Andrea Januta. "Un climate report urges world to adapt now, or suffer later." *Reuters*, 28 Feb. 2022, [reuters.com/business/cop/un-climate-report-urges-world-adapt-now-or-suffer-later-2022-02-28/](https://www.reuters.com/business/cop/un-climate-report-urges-world-adapt-now-or-suffer-later-2022-02-28/). Accessed 27 May, 2022.
- Søfting, Inger-Anne. "Between Dystopia and Utopia: The Post-Apocalyptic Discourse of Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*." *English Studies*, vol. 94, no. 6, 2013, pp. 704-713.
- Taffel, Sy. "Mapping the Anthropocene" in: *Ecological Entanglements in the Anthropocene*. Edited by Nicholas Holm and Sy Taffel, London: Lexington Books, 2017, pp. 219-240.
- Tait, Adrian. "Nature Reclaims Her Own: J. G. Ballard's *The Drowned World*." *Australian Humanities Review*, vol. 57, 2014.

Tate, Andrew. *Apocalyptic Fiction*. London: Bloomsbury, 2017.

Teeuwen, Rudolphus. "Ecocriticism, Humanism, Eschatological Jouissance: J. G. Ballard and the Ends of the World." *Tamkang Review*, 39.2, 2009, pp. 39-57.

Trexler, Adam. *Anthropocene Fictions: The Novel in a Time of Climate Change*. University of Virginia Press, 2015.

WWF. "Living Planet Report 2020: Bending the curve of biodiversity loss." Almond, R.E.A., Grooten M. and Petersen, T. (Eds). *WWF*, Gland, Switzerland, 2020.