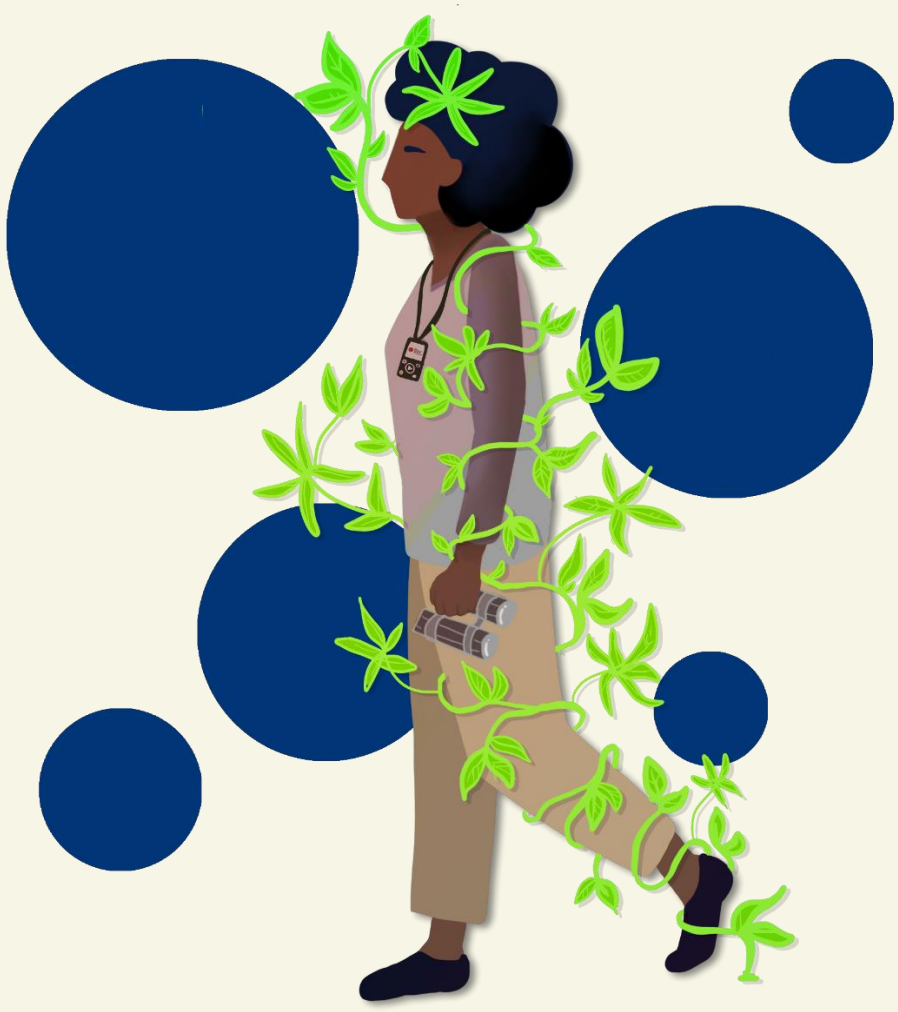
MASTER'S THESIS

THE WORLD MIGHT END, BUT LOVE DOES NOT:

AN ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF DESIRE WITHIN APOCALYPTICISM WITH SPECIFIC REFERENCE TO JEFF VANDERMEER'S *ANNIHILATION* (2014) AND PENG SHEPHERD'S *THE BOOK OF M* (2019).



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Abstract

In my master's thesis, I examine how apocalypticism and desire display love as a product of loss through a comparative analysis and discussion of desire within apocalyptic narratives exemplified through specific references to Jeff VanderMeer's *Annihilation* (2014) and Peng Shepherd's *The Book of M* (2019). This research question is the fundament for the thesis, as it explores the notion of desire within apocalypticism and how it depicts through the main characters of the two novels.

Love, loss, and apocalypticism combined is a notion that has little previous research, which amplified my aim to interpret the notions in this thesis. Thus, focusing on Shepherd's and VanderMeer's novels as examples of apocalyptic fiction with elements of desire entangled in the storyline, I analyze and discuss how Ory, Max, Naz, and the biologist display aspects of desire in narratives regarding the demise of Earth and humanity as readers know it. In my combined analysis and discussion, I scrutinize the notions of apocalypticism and desire in each of the two novels and eventually compare the differences and similarities between the apocalyptic events and the notions of desire portrayed within them.

Therefore, based on my analysis and discussion of the notion of love as enhanced by loss, my findings present that within these two novels, the notion of love and apocalypse are both driven by loss as the characters enter the estranged apocalyptic landscapes to search for their missing partners. In the end, however, a union between the subjects and the desired objects is withheld as neither of the characters reunites; thus, depicting how loss is the victorious notion of apocalyptic literature.

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1.0 Introduction

Over the last few decades, apocalyptic fiction's popularity has risen, and the genre still maintains its recognition (Booker and Thomas 53). The collapse – or near collapse – of civilization as humans know it has become a genre of fiction readers have come to cherish. Within the apocalyptic genre, there are endless "end of the world"-scenarios. The apocalyptic trope offers uncountably different possible endings of the world: from climate disasters to alien attacks to virus outbreaks. However, romance and desire are recurring topics within this genre, too. It is nearly impossible to read an apocalyptic or post-apocalyptic novel without stumbling into some representation of romance or desire portrayed by the main characters. Therefore, the depiction of desire is the common denominator between tales within this specific genre, although the stories of the multiple possible ends are worlds away from each other; whether that is Katniss' love triangle in the post-apocalyptic young adult novel *The Hunger Games* by Suzanne Collins (Collins np) or the man's memories and thoughts about his late wife in Cormac McCarthy's, *The Road* (McCarthy np). Thus, love and desire are almost always present in apocalyptic tales.

My intention with this thesis is to analyze and discuss *Annihilation* and *The Book of M* by first researching their apocalyptic storyworlds and, thereafter, the elements of desire depicted within the novels. Thus, the thesis will result in a comparative analysis of the two novels' differences and similarities in regard to the key concepts of apocalypticism and desire provided in the theory section. However, to analyze apocalypticism and the genre's tendencies, I draw up essential key points in Greg Garrard's chapter on apocalypse from *Ecocriticism* (2004). Herein, he describes the origin of the genre and how it represents in literature. Moreover, he provides an explanation of the tragic versus comic rhetoric within the apocalypticism, which is a notion I will be using to analyze *The Book of M* and *Annihilation*.

To explain the origin of apocalypticism, I am using Stephen D. O'Leary's *Arguing the Apocalypse: A Theory of Millennial Rhetoric* (1994) in order to provide an understanding of the genre and what it revolves around. Moreover, I provide O'Leary's concept of tragic and comic frames in addition to Garrard's, as O'Leary created the notion. To further explain the apocalyptic theory and how it portrays the end of the world, I present Brian Russell Graham's "Fictions of Apocalypse: Taxonomy and Meaning" (2013). His notions of the demise of the world as readers know it and how dystopian tales create new hierarchies will add to the analysis of the storyworlds of the two novels. Furthermore, I will use theories of apocalypse as well as dystopia from M. Keith

Booker and Anne-Marie Thomas' work, *The Science Fiction Handbook* (2009), to dive further into the apocalyptic genre in order to be able to analyze the two novels thoroughly. The combination of these apocalyptic and dystopian theories will aid in providing an understanding of the two novels' primary theme: the eradication of the world. Moreover, notions of apocalyptic theories from Damian Thompson, Frank Kermode, as well as Andrew Bennett and Nicholas Royle will additionally be provided in the theory section and thus used in the analysis to describe the apocalyptic events.

As stated earlier, desire is nearly always present within apocalyptic fiction; it is as though love stories are an essential part of the characters who are amidst tales of the earth's destruction. As a consequence thereof, I use desire as a term in the sense of loss, longing, and loving in regard to one's partner. To explain this term and concept, theories from Catherine Belsey's *Desire: Love Stories in Western Culture* (1994) will provide essential concepts to present an understanding of the notion of desire.

Additionally, Andrew Bennett and Nicholas Royle's chapter on desire from *An Introduction to Literature, Criticism, and Theory: Key Critical Concepts* (1995) will additionally elucidate an exploration of desire in literature further alongside Roland Barthes' *A Lover's Discourse: Fragments* (1990) and Joseph Allen Boone's *Tradition Counter Tradition: Love and the Form of Fiction* (1987). These theories elucidate desire and how it appears in literature, and therefore it will be used in my analysis to support the claims made therein.

Therefore, based on apocalyptic literature and the portrayal of love within apocalyptic fiction, the intention of this master's thesis is to scrutinize the need for desire within storylines regarding the end of the world. On the basis of this approach, Peng Shepherd's *The Book of M* (2019) and Jeff VanderMeer's *Annihilation* (2014) will be my primary literature used in order to illustrate and analyze the concept of desire and loss within apocalypticism. The reason I have chosen these two novels is because of how they both depict tales of love amidst an apocalyptic event, thus illustrating the element of love evoked by loss. The main character Ory from Shepherd's novel leaves his safe shelter behind in search of his wife, Max, after she disappears. He is willing to brave the post-apocalyptic landscape due to the sole goal of reuniting with Max. In VanderMeer's novel, the biologist is willing to enter a mythical reality within the world to understand the apocalypse at hand and figure out where her husband, who entered the same realm, disappeared to. Both of the main

characters of these two novels demonstrate a desire to find their partners to an extent where Ory and the biologist are willing to enter unknown and treacherous territories to reunite with their desired objects. It is apparent that the main characters of the two storyworlds love their partners to an extent where they are willing to risk everything for them, as they both brave apocalypses to reunite with their lovers. Ory from *The Book of M* defies the post-apocalyptic world to unite himself with his wife, Max, and the biologist from *Annihilation* volunteers to be a scientist in Area X in order to search for her husband, who disappeared there. The search for their partners is what forces the characters into estranged, apocalyptic landscapes.

Within this thesis, these novels will portray the treacherous events of love and apocalypse. As previously stated, I find the concept of love during the world's end intriguing; these two novels add to that interest as they depict an exploration of the concept of how love conquers loss. This notion is the two novels' common denominator and, therefore, what necessitates them as my primary literature in order to analyze and discuss why desire is prominent in apocalyptic fiction, enabling me to answer my research question.

Therefore, the ambition regarding this comparative analysis and discussion is to illustrate how desire appears within apocalyptic literature and is more or less a permanent topic within the apocalyptic genre, as it is a repetitive theme, despite the differences between the apocalyptic tales. As a result of the revelation that desire reoccurs in apocalyptic tales, the aim of this thesis is to elucidate the need for this specific notion in stories that depict the end of the world.

Lastly, a conclusion will sum up the entirety of my analysis and thereby explain the findings portrayed therein, depicting an answer to why loss is the common thread in apocalypticism and desire. Thus, all of these theories and concepts provided to analyze and discuss the novels will result in answering this thesis' research question:

How does apocalypticism and desire display love as a product of loss? A comparative analysis and discussion of desire within apocalyptic narratives exemplified with specific references to Jeff VanderMeer's *Annihilation* (2014) and Peng Shepherd's *The Book of M* (2019).

2.0 Literature review

As mentioned in the introduction, my aim is to analyze the reasons behind love stories within apocalyptic tales. I have been wondering about the need for this while reading apocalyptic fiction

myself throughout the years, as I have noticed that there is nearly always a tale of desire within apocalyptic fiction. But what is the point of inserting a love story when the plot focuses on a demolished earth? Desire and apocalypse have been connected before by others and in circumstances other than the one provided in this thesis. Examples of this are provided below in articles regarding *Annihilation* and *The Book of M*.

2.1 Scholarly Examinations of *Annihilation*

As pinpointed in the introduction, apocalyptic fiction has existed since the beginning of written literature, dating back to religious texts regarding the birth of a new world and reestablishments of new societies as a result of the annihilation of society as the reader knows it (Booker and Thomas 53). One of the most acclaimed apocalyptic novels is *Annihilation,* produced by Jeff VanderMeer in 2014. This notion is what makes it intriguing to analyze in the connection to desire as well.

In the article "Crossing the Boundaries of the Unknown with Jeff VanderMeer: The Monstrous Fantastic and 'abcanny' in *Annihilation*", Gözde Ersoy describes VanderMeer's novel as a prominent award-winning piece of New Weird fiction, expressing that the entirety of the *Southern Reach* trilogy has been published in more than 30 countries (Ersoy 252). Therefore, there is no doubt that VanderMeer's novel has been read and analyzed by many scholars before. However, it is often analyzed and discussed in regard to its relation to science fiction, the weird, or theories regarding the apocalypse rather than with a focus on desire. This notion is why this thesis aims to discover the traits of desire within the novel.

Ersoy argues that *Annihilation* is set in an apocalyptic future not too far from our own. He depicts that VanderMeer's novel is categorized under the fictional genre, New Weird. He turns to Sherryl Vint, who defines the new weird as a mixture of "science fiction, Surrealism, fantasy, magical realism, and Lovecraftian horror" (252). Seeing new weird as a blend of multiple genres that creates mesmerizingly peculiar tales, it is clear why Ersoy relates this genre to *Annihilation*, which revolves around an expanding transformation of the earth, wherein humans, nature, and nearly all else become altered. Moreover, by referring to China Miéville, he describes that fiction of the new weird often contains beastly creatures that aim to conjure revulsion within the reader. What Miéville explains as the notion of new weird in *Annihilation* is the fact that the main character begins to question what is real and what is not, although she has been and experiences the things she questions (252-253). What is more, Ersoy turns to VanderMeer's own explanation of his

fascination with the New Weird and why he creates tales within this particular genre, resulting in him describing how "New Weird fictions are acutely aware of the modern world, even if in disguise, but not always overtly political" (253). By these means, VanderMeer and Ersoy describe New Weird as a sabotaging approach to the romanticized idea of fantasy worlds, as Area X is mysteriously eerie rather than exhilarating to those who dare explore it.

Ersoy turns to the term uncanny to explain *Annihilation* and its connection to the genre, New Weird. The uncanny is a notion that Sigmund Freud describes as a feeling of something familiar being omitted. Hence, this is why the biologist and her expedition team experience feelings of uncanniness, as they have not been orientated about the entirety of Area X. Ersoy expresses that he analyzes *Annihilation* in order to depict the uncanny presented in the novel in order to portray it as a fiction of the New Weird (254-255). However, he quickly brushes over the return of the husband and how Area X has altered him, but Ersoy does so in relation to the uncanny rather than desire. Thus, he describes VanderMeer's novel as "an ecological thriller" (256) as it disturbs what the readers recognize as normalcy in regard to how nature should behave.

In Georgie Newson-Errey's article, "Weird Horizons and the Mysticism of the Unhuman in Jeff VanderMeer's *Southern Reach* Trilogy" (2021), she, additionally to Ersoy, depicts how *Annihilation* adapts to the New Weird, adding that the genre is a means for the reader to escape the familiar. She argues that the novel focuses on the uncanny and disturbances of known elements in nature, but equally on ecology and the Anthropocene (Newson-Errey 370-371).

In her article, Newson-Errey avails of the New Weird in the sense of the blurred lines between real and what is not, describing that: "One persistently recurring feature is a sense that the boundaries between self and other are dissolving, which in its most extreme form can manifest as an impression that the self has been effaced entirely" (372). Relating this to *Annihilation*, she argues that defacement has occurred to the biologist as she begins to question whether or not the choices, she makes are her own or merely due to the brightness she experiences within herself after being tainted by Area X's nature (372-373). Newson-Errey argues that the biologist craves the uncanniness she experiences in the pristine nature of Area X, and thus, the reader becomes consumed with her journey through the newfound landscape as they are drawn to the eerieness and horror it emits (373). Her focus throughout her article is mainly on the mystical essence of the novel and revulsion within the tale, but also the state of the ecological nature it depicts. Furthermore, the focal point in her article is additionally on the change of self, which the characters experience upon

entering Area X (374-377). Within the entirety of her article, there is no mention of the biologist's husband, making it clear that desire is not a point of focus in her examination of the novel.

Amongst the many who have commented on *Annihilation*, Miranda Jeanne Marie Issofidis and Lisa Garforth analyze the novel in regard to speculative fiction estimation of the climate crisis in their article "Reimagining climate futures: Reading *Annihilation*" (2022). However, they, too, categorize the novel as part of the New Weird as the two articles above. Moreover, they pinpoint that VanderMeer's novel is an example of literature that involves an imaginative climate crisis, which aids in focusing on actual, real-life crises (Issofidis and Garforth 248-249).

Their examination of the novel is essentially produced in the sense of climate crisis and the focus it provides on this notion. Nevertheless, they argue that speculative fiction is adjacent to climate fiction when aiming attention to the "Anthropocene dilemmas and climate futures. SF brings distinctive powers, pleasures and textual richness to the issues" (250). Furthermore, they bring this perception in relation to *Annihilation* when describing how quickly the main character switches from adoring the vast, pristine landscape to exploring an astonishing ecological disaster (250-251). Despite *Annihilation* not being a definitive warning of the future, as much as it is a module for comprehending the possibility of a cataclysmic climate future, Issofidis and Garforth argue that it focuses on preparing its readers for how climate change disasters can alter the earth's future. Thus, the bridging of *Annihilation* as a piece of speculative fiction focusing on the climate crisis is their main center of attention (250-255).

The prevalent discussion of *Annihilation* is in regard to the New Weird and the uncanniness that the novel depicts. This discussion is due to the novel's focus on the estrangement of nature and humans, which the abovementioned articles exclaim unsettles the reader. All in all, the focal points in these examinations and discussions of *Annihilation* are merely based on the ostracization of nature and eerie changes found in humans in Area X. Thus, the exclusion of a focus on desire is prominent, aiding in the reasoning behind my aim with this thesis.

2.2 Reviews of *The Book of M*

Compared to *Annihilation* and its academic status, Peng Shepherd's novel, *The Book of M* from 2018, has yet to come into the academic limelight. Thus, the literary review of this novel will be provided from a collection of shorter reviews of it in magazines. These consist of *Elle Magazine*,

The Guardian, TIME, as well as other magazines, where they all have given *The Book of M* a small quantity of credit for its mesmerizing tale of memory loss and for Shepherd's writing style. However, they have all read the novel as part of the science fiction genre, whereas I have read it as an apocalyptic tale. Henceforth, the novel will be analyzed within the apocalyptic genre.

The Book of M was marked as number two on Elle Magazine's list of "The 29 Best Books of 2018" (2018), recognizing it as "a good dystopian page-turner, and Peng Shepherd's debut novel is the real deal" (ELLE np). After a brief introduction of the novel's plot, they pinpoint that:

> The novel then follows both her and Ory's parallel storylines as they search for community, a rumored cure in New Orleans, and each other. Shepherd mixes in elements of multiple genres, like post-apocalyptic thriller and fantasy. But at its core, it's a meditation on memories and personhood, as Shepherd asks which one defines the other (ELLE np).

Elle Magazine's review of the novel is short but sweet, exclaiming that Shepherd's work encapsulates thrilling elements of the post-apocalyptic genre. They argue that the purpose of the tale is to make its readers consider the relationship between memories and personality and how - even if - it is possible to live without it (ELLE np). Shepherd argues with her novel that without one's memory-filled shadow, a person is only a deteriorating shell of themselves.

The Guardian, however, rated Shepherd's novel on their list of "The best recent science fiction - reviews roundup" (2018). In this review, they explain the twists of Shepherd's apocalyptic pandemic as a notion that "eschews a rational explanation for its central apocalyptic event" (Brown np). They argue this specific notion is due to how the citizens of the earth lose their shadows and, thus, their memories, as well as how the storyworld's society disintegrates as a result thereof. The Guardian expresses that the narrative of the novel essentially revolves around Max's disappearance and journey to find the alleged cure to the memory loss which seemingly inhabits New Orleans (Brown np). Moreover, The Guardian note that: "*The Book of M* is a moving treatise on love and loss, with the bonus of a stunning denouement" (Brown np). As a result of this, they signify their assessment of the novel and its neatly written conclusion, implying that Shepherd has written a thrilling apocalyptic love story.

TIME published an article where they are placing Shepherd's novel amongst apocalyptic classics, such as Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* and Emily St. John Mandel's *Station Eleven,* as a part of their article "30 Books and Series to Read While Soxial Distancing" (2020) amidst the coronavirus pandemic. In their review of *The Book of M*, they describe the novel as "eerily magical" (TIME np) and depict how it asks the readers a general "timeless question about the meaning of memory" (TIME np). Moreover, they acknowledge how love is a present theme in the novel, as they note that: "Max snuck away from their shared hideout after her shadow disappeared, and Ory would do anything to bring his wife home safe again" (TIME np). Thus, they pinpoint the apocalypse as well as the aspect of desire within the novel.

Henceforth, all reviews - however short they may be - all acknowledge the apocalyptic happening in the novel, but even more so the topic of love and desire, which exists therein. Thus, as there has been no coherent examination of this particular novel in the academic field, I find it interesting to analyze, especially alongside and in comparison to Jeff VanderMeer's *Annihilation,* which has received great academic appreciation. Therefore, I will read these novels as apocalyptic tales involving desire as one of their main themes, which correlates to my thesis statement.

The majority of the articles discuss the two novels in regard to science fiction. As a result thereof, this thesis aims to discuss them in the sense of apocalypticism and desire. Moreover, the following will open up a new analysis on this topic, as *The Book of M* has little to no scholarly works created about it. In contrast, *Annihilation* has been examined multiple times since it was published. The articles presented above offer insights into how other scholars have analyzed and categorized these two novels. However, these usual analyses of the novels offer an opportunity for me to examine a notion that has yet to be analyzed to a greater extent.

Additionally, my thesis will contain a combined analysis and discussion of the notion of desire and apocalyptic tendencies within each of the two novels, both individually and conjointly. With this in mind, I provide theories from scholars regarding apocalypse, dystopia, and desire. These theories will aid in analyzing what others have not yet rendered: the need for desire in apocalyptic fiction.

3.0 Approach

Going beyond what is presented above in the introduction of my master's thesis and the literature review, this roadmap will illustrate how my thought process and the theory I have chosen will answer the research question within the analysis. The following paragraph will explain my aims, methods, and intentions with this thesis, thereby depicting a roadmap for this study.

My approach for this thesis is to research and analyze the need to involve tales of love and desire within the apocalyptic trope; the analysis of this is provided by examining the two apocalyptic novels as they both have desire as one of their main themes. However, in order to explore the differences and similarities between the two tales in the sense of love present in a wrecked world, the theories mentioned in my introduction each pose essential points, which I will use throughout the analysis when diving into desire and apocalyptic tendencies in Shepherd and VanderMeer's novels.

Therefore, this roadmap consists of my thoughts and will be concerning the choices made throughout this paper. Furthermore, it will deal with the thought processes regarding the decision to analyze love and desire within the apocalyptic trope in the two novels *The Book of M* and *Annihilation*, as well as the theories that are chosen to support the analysis. The deliberations concerning the theories provide an explanation of how they fit into the study.

I chose these two novels on the basis of how they portray apocalyptic storyworlds while showcasing love and desire, as these are the elements I wish to examine within this thesis. I find the concept of tales of love within apocalyptic narratives intriguing as I ponder the need for them within this specific genre of literature. Thus, after deciding upon the main theories being apocalypse and desire, the next step was to dive deeper into these genres and retrieve similar theories, thereby being able to support and sustain the preeminent theoretical points made.

First and foremost, as described in the introduction, the following section will contain theories regarding the apocalypse genre. Thus, notions of apocalypticism will consist of points made by Garrard, O'Leary, Graham, Booker and Thomas, Thompson, Kermode, as well as Bennett and Royle. The theories these scholars provide are chosen in order to analyze the apocalyptic notions of *Annihilation* and *The Book of M*. Moreover, the theories regarding desire present how longing and loss are depicted in literature. Boone, Belsey, and Barthes each provide essential points of desire in literature, which enables me to explore desire as a literary theme in apocalyptic fiction.

According to Belsey, fictional writings are the primary provider of narratives regarding desire. She expresses that desire and love are prominent within stories: "To my mind, fiction remains the supreme location of writing about desire" (Belsey 11), which appeals to the purpose of my thesis' aim, which is to analyze desire within apocalyptic fiction.

Belsey pinpoints how desire is not necessarily written about but is kept between the lines and implied within the text: "Desire is thus understood by the reader, recognized as the meaning of a textual gesture which is almost emblematic" (ibid. 18). According to Belsey, desire is often disguised within the text as acts of love (ibid. 16-18). Herein lies my interest in analyzing the desire apocalyptic fiction portrays; when the tale is supposedly about the end of the world and humankind's survival, is desire then essential, as it is nearly always present? That is the concept I intend to examine, as loss is entangled in apocalypticism and desire. Therefore, my aims and methods regarding using these specific theories are to elucidate this very notion.

The theory I have chosen is provided to gain an overview of apocalypse and desire and how these theories appear in fictional literature. These theories will be the foundation of my analysis in order to analyze and discuss the two genres. Thus, the theory section will concern key elements regarding apocalypse and desire. Moreover, to implement the key points from the theories of apocalypticism and desire within the two novels, paragraphs and quotations from the tales are chosen and analyzed with the applied theories. The combination of these theories aids in providing a study of desire in apocalyptic fiction and, thereby, concludes an answer to the thesis statement as well. Moreover, the analysis section will be a combination of a comparative interpretation, analysis, and discussion of *Annihilation* and *The Book of M*, as this ensures a more effortless experience for the reader due to the points made in the analysis becoming interpreted and discussed straightaway.

As aforementioned, this dissertation will consist of an analysis as to why desire is a recurring theme in apocalyptic fiction; when the world obliterates, why do we focus on the character's desire for one another rather than the apocalyptic happening? As a result of this intent, I analyze the possible relationships between desire and apocalypse. Moreover, my analysis will provide an examination of the most essential points from the novels, highlighting points regarding the plot, the storyworld, the apocalyptic happenings, as well as the moments wherein desire depicts itself in the apocalyptic storyworlds. Lastly, a conclusion will finalize the thesis, connecting all the essential points made throughout the analysis section in order to answer my proposed research question.

4.0 Theoretical framework

This thesis aims to analyze longing and romance at the world's end. Therefore, theories regarding apocalypticism and desire will be presented and explained in the following paragraph in order to create the framework and base of the analysis and discussion.

4.1 Apocalypse

4.1.1 Apocalypticism and its narratives

In their work, *The Science Fiction Handbook* (2009), M. Keith Booker and Anne-Marie Thomas examine the apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic tendencies within fiction. They explain that apocalyptic literature evolves from a long line of produced texts, the first of them seen within religious scriptures. In contrast, post-apocalyptic fiction emerged closely following the aftermath of the wars in the late 1900s and the bombardment of Hiroshima, as the popularity of living in a post-apocalyptic environment became a reality (Booker and Thomas 53).

Booker and Thomas reference Susan Sontag and her statement about how literary and cinematic art regarding catastrophes rose in popularity due to catastrophes becoming significantly more relatable (53), resulting in the production of tales focused on the aftermath of calamity. In Sontag's article, "The Imagination of Disaster" (1965), which Booker and Thomas reference, she points out that the interest in apocalyptic tales is widespread due to their alluring stories of danger and cataclysms, which oftentimes end on a fortunate note, leaving the reader contented (Sontag 42).

Moreover, Booker and Thomas discuss how environmental disasters and the rise of global warming additionally conveyed the post-apocalyptic genre to be amongst the most popular in modern times. Although post-apocalyptic tales' primary focus is on the apocalypse at hand, it frequently has an adventure intertwined with the story of heroic status to enforce the reader's interest. According to Booker and Thomas, apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic tales have become an evergrowing subgenre of science fiction, and the interest in the earth's destruction is still increasing. Additionally, they argue that this might be due to the valiant characters and their escapades, which are portrayed in apocalyptic fiction (Booker and Thomas 53+61-62). Therefore, the claim is that due to experiencing apocalyptic events in real life, literature regarding the same has become popular.

4.1.2 The origin of apocalyptic tales

Booker and Thomas imply that the interest in the world's annihilation is thriving, whereas other arguments express that the interest in apocalypticism has always existed. However, in order to understand apocalypticism and the interest therein, it is essential to know its origin. Stephen D. O'Leary outlines his view on this in *Arguing the Apocalypse: A Theory of Millennial Rhetoric* from 1994. Herein he pinpoints how the interest in "biblical prophecies of Armageddon" (O'Leary 3) has risen in popularity within the last few decades. He argues that the interest in this specific genre might potentially be disputed as it relates to how readers envision both utopias and dystopias. Therefore, those narratives compete, as they are inspired by apocalypticism's philosophy (3-4).

O'Leary argues that many cultures worldwide have created a fable to tell the tale of the end of the world. He expresses: "From the beginning of time, humanity has attempted to imagine and predict the end of time" (4), hinting that the end of the world has existed alongside the beginning of it. Ultimately, O'Leary explains that when apocalypticism appears throughout history, it mainly focuses on the battle between good and evil. Furthermore, he expresses that it gives insight into humans' evil actions, as apocalypticism recognizes: "The unique feature of apocalyptic myth is that it offers a temporal or *teleological* framework for understanding evil by claiming that evil must grow in power until the appointed time of the (imminent) end" (6). As a result thereof, O'Leary depicts how apocalypse's discourse aims to enlighten humans about the notion that there are issues regarding sinfulness in society. Moreover, they offer the readers an insight into said problems and lay out a formula on how to act if this specific sin was to play out in reality (4-6).

In *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction with a New Epilogue* (2000), Frank Kermode depicts, in addition to O'Leary, that apocalyptic tales origin back into biblical texts of the end (Kermode 6-7). He describes that the interest lies within the imagination of overcoming an end, following with describing how: "Apocalypse depends on a concord of imaginatively recorded past and imaginatively predicted future, achieved on behalf of us, who remain 'in the middest.'" (8). Here, he illustrates that the belief of how the world's end being near is a narrative that persists, as humans have believed that apocalypses are a part of the natural order since early Christianity (8-9). As a result thereof, the eschatological viewpoint merged into literature and has stayed a favored genre ever since (14). Therefore, what we are to understand is the fact that apocalyptic tales have been desirable to humankind since the beginning of written texts. According to Kermode, O'Leary,

Booker, and Thomas, desiring to know how the world might end and what might happen to humanity is fascinating and what keeps readers returning to this genre.

4.1.3 The rhetoric of apocalypse

As stated above, the apocalyptic theme is a literary tradition that has existed since the beginning of written texts. Greg Garrard pinpoints in his chapter on "Apocalypse" in *Ecocriticism* (2004) that the inhabitants of the world have believed the world might come to a possible end for longer than three thousand years. He describes how multiple religions have written literature concerning the world's end and the birth of a new world, as they: "have adopted and adapted apocalyptic rhetoric, again with catastrophic results as prophecies of crisis and conflict inexorably fulfill themselves" (Garrard 85). Therefore, it is argued by Garrard that the apocalyptic trope has existed and been used for an abundance of literature (85-86).

Garrard turns to Damian Thompson, who, in his work, *The End of Time: Faith and Fear in the Shadow of the Millennium* from 1996, explains that the origin of the word apocalypse belongs to ancient Greece. It stems "from the Greek *Apo-calyptein*, meaning 'to un-veil'." (Thompson 13-14). O'Leary mentions that the Greek origin also means revelation, hinting that apocalypses are made into a discourse that aims to disclose the most preeminent end of the Earth (O'Leary 5). Hence, how apocalypses often showcase the shadow side of society and the downfall of the world as known to humankind, which is what literature within that genre mainly tries to portray (Garrard 86). What Thompson is illustrating is how devastation and tragedy create the baseline for the apocalyptic trope, as apocalypticism is produced on the basis of the unease there is around the world's potential end (Thompson 13-14). The how, why, and when regarding the apocalypse produces literature that explores the multitude of possible endings (Garrard 86). Nevertheless, Thompson pinpoints that as apocalypticism is rooted in anxiety, it is doomed to exist forevermore, especially as humans continue to "face the inevitability of their own personal apocalypse" (Thompson 333). By this, he expresses that the individual will experience apocalypses multiple times throughout their lives, promoting that an apocalypse is not merely reserved for the world's end but also for the end of who a person once was (332-333).

According to Garrard, apocalypses appeal to the reader's paranoia as well as the element of possibility, which the different imagined apocalypses depict. The genre's origin is based on the

concept of the fabricated apocalypses' actual possibilities of happening. Additionally, this concept is what captivates the readers about the tales from this genre (Garrard 86). Garrard explains that:

> apocalypticism is inevitably bound up with imagination, because it has yet to come into being. To use the narratological term, it is always 'proleptic'. And if, sociologically, it is 'a genre born out of crisis', it is also necessarily a rhetoric that must whip up such crises to proportions appropriate to the end of time (86).

As a result of this, fictional works of apocalypse are created on the basis of catastrophes possibly occurring. Due to this, Garrard pinpoints that the contention of how apocalypticism feeds into the readers' fear and curiosity about the world's end is what makes the eerie stories captivating (86). Additionally, fear and curiosity are topics within the theory of desire, too; therefore, I will explain these terms further in the section regarding that topic.

4.1.4 Inexplicable eeriness

Within the apocalyptic rhetoric, the term titled the uncanny is often present, as it is defined as something that cannot quite be defined (Bennett and Royle 33); however, it survives on fear and curiosity of the unknown. Thus, the uncanny is frequently the baseline of the apocalyptic events. Andrew Bennett and Nicholas Royle describe the uncanny as a notion that "has to do with a sense of strangeness, mystery or eeriness" (33). They explain the term as experiencing something unfamiliar in a familiar setting or the other way around too (Bennett and Royle 33). Thus, the uncanny is a sense of disrupting the familiar. Royle describes in his work *The Uncanny* that the notion of the uncanny is its confrontation against the ordinary nature: "one's own nature, human nature, the nature of reality and the world" (Royle 1). He depicts uncanniness as an estrangement of the known and the natural, as the uncanny manipulate reality (1-3).

Moreover, Bennett and Royle describe that the uncanny is relevant when analyzing literature, as the literary can sometimes consolidate with what is real (Bennett and Royle 33). Upon analyzing the uncanny, Royle describes that "its critical elaboration is necessarily bound up with analysing, questioning and even transforming what is called 'everyday life'" (Royle 23), thus making readers of fiction containing uncanny elements explore the uncomfortable about the familiar (23-24). As a result thereof, literature is involved in uncanny perceptions that become portrayed through storyworlds (Bennett and Royle 33-34). One of the portrayals of uncanniness in literature is repetition; Bennett and Royle express that the feeling the uncanny evokes is defamiliarization, which is portrayed in literature as our world transforms into an estranged familiar setting. This

unfamiliar yet recognizable event, person, or thing appears multiple times, as the uncanny favors repetition. Moreover, anthropomorphism is a recurring notion used in the uncanny. Bennett and Royle describe this as a: "rhetorical figure which refers to a situation in which what is not human is given attributes of human form or shape" (35). The eeriness the anthropomorphized item may provoke relates to uncanniness, as it is inexplicable (34-35).

The uncanny origins in the emotions which appear when what is known becomes defamiliarized, or the unknown becomes somewhat recognizable: "The uncanny, then, is an experience - even though this may have to do with the unthinkable or unimaginable" (39). Bennett and Royle describe the uncanny as an effect used in writing rather than a theme, as the uncanniness appears when it is interpreted by the reader. It is the experience the reader has upon reading the familiar or unfamiliar happenings; thus, it is the "effects of reading" (39) that creates the uncanny. It is not a product of the tale but more so a product of the reader's mind when reading (37-39).

4.1.5 To adapt or reject the newfangled world

In regard to how the readers form a perception of apocalypses, Garrard turns to O'Leary, who has created categories of the tales within apocalypse; his categorization is made on the basis of investigating the drama portrayed within apocalyptic tales, as O'Leary expresses how those tales are divided into either the comic or the tragic frame. This division is made on what he refers to as a "frame of acceptance" (87), where whichever frame - either the comic or the tragic - will become the dictator of how the chain of events of the storyline is produced (86-87). O'Leary expresses that reading apocalyptic tales as either a comedy or a tragedy is an essential and interpretive instrument when examining apocalypticism in literature (O'Leary 62). Reading the genre this way opens up a deeper understanding and analysis of the apocalyptic genre.

O'Leary depicts how the characters that fall under the comic frame perceive evil as a mistake and not as shameful, whereas the tragic frame perceives it with regard to the shame it produces; this is due to its agency focusing on the atonement of the character's victimage. The plot within the tragic frame hinge on the characters' ruthlessness and relentless behavior, as their acts revolve around offering and assassination. Alternately, the comic frame presents characters that try to acknowledge the new world, with a plot that moves towards showcasing the imperfections and frailty of society. In conclusion, the two frames of acceptance symbolize different deliverance methods for the

characters in the various apocalyptic tales (Garrard 87). Garrard explains the following regarding tragic and comic frames and how the characters perform therein:

> If time is framed by tragedy as predetermined and epochal, always careering towards some final, catastrophic conclusion, comic time is open-ended and episodic. Human agency is real but flawed within the comic frame, and individual actors are typically morally conflicted and ambiguous. The tragic actor, on the other hand, has little to do but choose a side in a schematically drawn conflict of good versus evil since the action is likely to seem merely gestural in the face of eschatological history (87).

Hereby, he expresses - through O'Leary's notion - how, within the comic frame, human's ability to structure their own life is present but somehow damaged due to the apocalyptic circumstances in which they find themselves. Those within the tragic frame become consumed with their victimage and let their guilt consume them, causing them to react outward and induce havoc. In apocalyptic literature, the comic narrative decides to search for the positives in their situations, whereas the tragic narrative resorts to calamity (87-88). What O'Leary suggests by the notion of analyzing apocalyptic fiction as either a tragedy or a comedy is by grasping how: "The drama of the Apocalypse provides a set of symbols that allows the interpreter and his or her audience to view historical events as part of a cosmic pattern" (O'Leary 63). O'Leary depicts that apocalypticism is deeply rooted in Christianity and compares the meaning of apocalypse to Revelation, wherein humans defeat evil powers. Moreover, the apocalyptic theme resembles the suffering which evil symbolizes in the biblical text, according to O'Leary (63-64). What O'Leary discusses is that apocalypticism was a dominant theme in biblical literature as Christians reimagined the earth after its end. But additionally, narratives of apocalyptic discourse were tools for them to understand evil and how to overcome it, as apocalypticism essentially roots in how the end is close (76-77).

Thus, Garrard and O'Leary depict the two versions of the end, where one is tragic and the other comic. These two varieties of endings encapsulate how the characters and the apocalyptic happening itself perform and behave.

4.1.6 The decreation of the world

Brian Russell Graham describes in his article "Fictions of Apocalypse: Taxonomy and Meaning" (2013) that fiction with apocalypticism as their main theme often embarks the readers on a journey of multiple storylines shaped by the varieties of apocalypse that exist within the apocalyptic genre.

Graham argues that the genre urges its readers to recognize the social goals that the tale aims to portray rather than the taxing demise of the world (Graham 21-22).

Graham explains that apocalyptic fiction is defined by the utter destruction of the world as the reader knows it; however, the variety of the desolation is depicted in diverse manners. Thus, he conducts different degrees of apocalyptic fiction, depicting that apocalyptic tales frequently begin with the obliteration of either the vegetable world, humans, or animals. He clarifies that "remnants of these worlds remain, especially of mankind, but what we see in these works of fiction is that levels of reality have been nearly destroyed, and the story takes place in the aftermath of the devastation" (22). Hereby, Graham explains that apocalyptic fiction depicts a world wherein survivors attempt to come to terms with surviving an apocalyptic event's occurrence (22).

Moreover, Graham discloses that some apocalyptic tales aim to depict tales of creation rather than destruction. Thus, they illustrate the possibility of new life amidst the havocked world by portraying new realms. Instead of total annihilation, Graham pinpoints that post-apocalyptic worlds are categorized by their "degrees of devastation" (23), which to him are the collapse of "mankind, the animal kingdom, vegetable life, the mineral world, and even the watery world" (24). The demise of humankind is frequently depicted by nature taking control and becoming idyllic and pristine, much as how Area X is depicted in *Annihilation*, where the alienated version of Earth assimilates humans and alters them. Graham describes these demises as "the Great Chain of Being" (25), categorizing them as different variations of alternative endings of the world. Furthermore, he adds the dissolution of God and fire to his list as well, completing the chain of different apocalyptic endings (22-26).

Graham's mission with his illustration of the various demises of the earth is to depict that apocalyptic fiction deserves to be read and analyzed with positive eyes (27). He notes that apocalyptic tales and their varieties of demises ables the readers to view the world without its hierarchies and, thus, hopefully, strive for a society free of hierarchies (29-32). The events portrayed in apocalyptic fiction more or less always have a hidden meaning, as the tales are trying to project an idea of salvation of a possible downfall. This notion will be discussed below through Booker and Thomas' description of dystopian fiction.

4.2 Dystopia

There are tales of utopia with societies that portray favorable societies that thrive and are harmonic; they showcase how ideal societies could appear. Then there are tales of the opposite: dystopias.

Dystopian fictive tales focus on conceptualizing a society where the world is unfavorable and abrogating. Booker and Thomas touch upon this in their work *The Science Fiction Handbook*. They express that works presented within the genre of dystopia have been made to serve as a warning as to what might happen if some habits remain unchanged. Suppose utopias are created to showcase how humankind can truly thrive. In that case, dystopias are made to alarm people about what might happen if society continues its oppression of people and disregard climate change, as well as other issues the world faces. Although the issues they present are described excessively as to how they appear in real life, this exaggeration is made to meticulously underline how genuinely devastating the result of it could become if the problems are not reversed (Booker and Thomas 65). This notion is the exact point that O'Leary expressed when noting that the apocalypse's discourse is created to showcase the sin of humankind and how to reverse or render it from happening (O'Leary 4-6).

According to Booker and Thomas, fiction within the dystopian genre address that social control frequently trumps the desire of the individual, which is generally portrayed through antagonisms (Booker and Thomas 65). Booker and Thomas pinpoint that:

> Modes of activity that Western societies have traditionally seen as crucial sites for the development of individual identity and fulfillment of individual desires (such as art and sexuality) tend to be monitored and controlled with a special intensity by dystopian regimes (65-66).

Within dystopian fiction, there is frequently some array of leaders who regulate the way the new society operates. Booker and Thomas express that dystopian tales take away the individual humans' will to live as they desire by opposing them to follow the structures of the newfound apocalyptic society (65-66). To summarize their points about dystopian fiction and its essence of warning, Booker and Thomas articulate how this is a crucial subgenre within the more modern understanding of the science fiction genre. As the majority of fictional works within dystopian literature symbolize possible endings of the world, these tales present their readers with possible modes of salvation; whereas they pinpoint that this is only if they are read as tales of warning and not imaginations of ominous character to keep their readers entertained (72). Henceforth, Booker and Thomas believe that dystopian literature appeals to a change in society's ways in order to evade possible cathartic ends of the world.

4.3 Desire

4.3.1 Desiring the desirable

In order to analyze the notion of desire within *Annihilation* and *The Book of M*, it is essential to gather an understanding of desire as a concept. In Andrew Bennett and Nicholas Royle's *An Introduction to Literature, Criticism, and Theory: Key Critical Concepts* (1995), they pinpoint that desire is a convoluted matter. They refer to the philosopher Sigmund Freud to explain that desire is deeply rooted in one's childhood and the desire for their mother (Bennett and Royle 138). Moreover, Bennett and Royle express that desire is in all literature:

> In the context of literature more generally, we can begin to think about the importance of desire in two fundamental ways. In the first place, we would suggest that every literary text is in some way *about* desire. To say this, however, is not to suggest that it is everywhere and always the same desire (139).

To them, desire and representations thereof are inevitable to stumble upon within literature, as it exists within both the characters in the literary work as well as within the reader thereof. They express this by turning to Sigmund Freud's and Jaques Lachan's ideas of desire. Freud depicts desire as unable to be compatible with satisfaction due to more always being wanted: when one believes that they have obtained what they want, a new longing appears for something else. According to Freud, desire is neverending and unfulfillable. Contrary to Freud, Lacan believes people are estranged due to their desires; they simply cannot help desiring. Freud believes that humans choose to desire, and Lacan believes that it is human nature and that people are unable to choose their desires (140-142).

Bennett and Royle pinpoint that desire in literary texts can never be satisfied, as the reader wants to know more. Moreover, they explain that: "If literature and theory alike demonstrate that desire is mobile, endlessly displaced, they also suggest that it is 'mediated', produced through imitation and simulation" (144). They use Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and René Girard's ideas of how desire is related to antagonisms, as desire is generated through both one's own desire but also what others desire - simply because they desire it. Humans are being taught how and what to desire when they begin to want what others desire, according to Girard and Sedgwick. Essentially, they explain that one's desire is based on the longing for others' desires as well as one's own desires for others (142-144).

4.3.2 Craving, longing, desiring

Diving deeper into the Western culture's view of desire from Bennett and Royle's explanations, Cathrine Belsey's work thereof will be elucidated. Her work *Desire: Love Stories in Western Culture* (1994) depicts an image of desire within stories as well as in writing and reading. With this subject matter, Belsey makes her readers question why we write and read tales about love.

Within the very beginning of her book, Belsey explains desire as: "a kind of madness, an enchantment, exaltation, anguish… perhaps the foundation of a lifetime of happiness" (Belsey 3). Hereby, she expresses that desire brings along a lust after more of what is desired by whoever has fallen under the spell of love. Furthermore, she depicts that one's vision is blurred by love, which creates a euphoric experience that may or may not end in heartache. Desire is the most personal, yet shared experience humans have (3).

Belsey argues that sex and sexuality are products of nature and culture. She claims this due to the fact that it is presented to us through culture, education, and relations, as well as our natural human instincts. Belsey expresses that desire is inherently problematic, as it is relentless to the person it encapsulates, and therefore, they always crave more. Thus, desire becomes universal, as it is a relatable state across historical and cultural borders (4-7).

When reading a love story, there is a specific formula as to how the heroine and hero of the romances - a specific genre - are portrayed within the fictive novels, according to Belsey. The female character is usually young, gorgeous, and lively with distinctive character traits, which are usually an uncommon eye color and dashing hair. Moreover, the heroine is usually a career-driven woman who knows what she wants (ibid. 21). Conversely, the hero is equally good looking, and often placed on the career ladder is higher than the heroine. The male character in a romance tale is oftentimes detached and apathetic, creating an interest, as he, at the same time, radiates devotion to what or whom he loves, whether he concedes it or not, creating the formula for the male interest (21).

Belsey expresses that this is the usual formula when creating romance fiction and that the first meeting between the two potential lovers is frictive and often ends in a rivalry between them (21). Thus resulting in the archetypal 'enemies to lovers'-trope that is present within the romance genre. Moreover, the reader detects the potential for desire in advance of the characters acknowledging it themselves; although they are on the verge of an epiphany: "as they begin to awaken in one another a new warmth, or maturity, or trust, which is identifiable as the transforming and revitalizing effect

of love" (21-22). Herein lies the realization of desire by the characters. Belsey adds that within this formula, interruptions occur, which causes the characters to drift apart. However, within the final few chapters, the heroine and hero understand that their connection is based upon true love. According to Belsey, these traits all form the basic romance story's tale, wherein the reader becomes relieved at the thought of how love conquers all. Belsey argues that romance plots are created to give readers the pleasure that accompanies a positive outcome, which is why this genre opts for a positive reconciling ending. Romance's interpretation of true love offers to heal, as Belsey points out that it reconciles mind and body within the individual as: "Physical sensation, the overwhelming intensity of erotic desire, is to be brought into harmony with rational and moral commitment, a shared life of sympathy and support, freely and confidently chosen" (23). Thus, romance literature unites the individuals' bodies and souls and unites two lovers as one, resulting in the individuals feeling complete (21-23).

4.3.2.1 Sensual and intimate desire

Belsey explains that beyond the desire for another person in terms of love and longing, there is a yearning for them physically. The sensual desire for another person can sometimes overpower love, as it is out of one's control: "True love is thought of as an essential part of the natural order. and yet, as the romances reveal, there is another nature, another equally fundamental category, and this is the arbitrary, irrational turbulence of sensuality. The body, we are to understand, has a life of its own" (24). Thus, Belsey explains how lust occasionally trumps love.

Consequently, the desire can become adjourned to eroticism. Moreover, Belsey expresses that the fulfillment one feels after a sexual encounter is equal to the fulfillment felt when experiencing true love. Belsey depicts the passion in romance tales as turbulent yet cathartic, indicating the strong urge to be with one another. Therefore, the feelings of sexual intimacy might appear in the subject to further connect with the object, as Belsey describes sex as an overwhelming sensation awoken not by rational consciousness but from an outside force. Thus, she explains that sexuality is natural, especially when felt towards an amorous object. However, the combination of sexual attraction and affection is not necessarily bound to love-filled relations. Yet, it does not diminish the desire within the interaction. Consequently, Belsey illustrates that sexual desire is inevitable when experiencing love; however, it is not exclusively diminished to love-filled relations and can therefore appear towards any object of desire to the subject (26-33).

4.3.2.2 The metamorphose of love

Love has a transforming effect on those who fall under its spell; both the subject and the object feel the metamorphosis of desire, promoting an illuminating sensation inside the amorous lovers (39). However, Belsey argues that if this experience is not with one's first love, the object of love will then forevermore be a surrogate to the first desired object of the subject. The loss of the first object of desire cannot ever be more than a replacement, despite the strong desire shown towards them (50-51). Belsey depicts that: "Desire is not the effect of the lost needs: loss returns and presents itself as desire. Desire is not *the same as* need" (57), expressing that desiring someone or something is not the same notion as needing it, nor it being a necessity. The emotions and reactions bound with desire differentiate from those that follow need; Belsey uses the example of sex, as reproduction is a need in terms of survival; however, whom we decide to reproduce with is desire's choice (57-58).

To describe postmodern love, Belsey depicts desire as a synonym for longing for a multitude of things: money, power, and sex. Due to this, she states that love has become a valuable sensation. Therefore, the focal point of romance fiction now lies in the desire for true love and the experience thereof. The desire to experience true love is undeniable; however, the experience might be far from how it is depicted in romance literature, as Belsey depicts that love is implied rather than spoken in real life (72-75). Therefore, the desire that is portrayed in romance novels is captivating to the reader, as it is spellbinding and enthralling. The portrayal of a true love story is riveting. Therefore, in addition to the desire found within characters, Belsey pinpoints how readers experience moments of desire too when reading romantic literature: "The reader is transported out of time and place, immersed in the fictional world, and involved with increasing intensity in feelings of increasing tensions" (35). This experience within the reader is solely present when the reader is accompanied by a great storyteller, as their depiction of the emotions the character experiences is pleasurable to the readers. Thus, desire is experienced by both the characters in the novel as well as by those who read it (35 + 74-75).

Belsey depicts that romance literature aims to evoke desire within its reader but then robs them of the closure, as the stories: "seek to elicit the desire of the reader, if only the desire for a closure that is finally withheld" (208). This notion keeps the desire alive, as the conclusion is never received. Desire is a chronicle of ambiguity; thus, tales regarding desire without the desired object being obtained by the subject enthrall its readers. Furthermore, Belsey illustrates how stories, no matter the final outcome of the tale, each and every one contains desire as: "We want what we don't have - and there is a good deal of that from any perspective" (209). Thus, according to Belsey,

desire is present in different forms in all written literature; even if written between the lines, desire enunciates itself (208-209).

4.3.2 Amorous objects and subjects

In his work, *A Lover's Discourse: Fragments* (1990), Roland Barthes discusses not only love's definition but conjointly how lovers behave. Barthes describes that the discourse surrounding desire is based on how "the lover, in fact, cannot keep his mind from racing, taking new measures and plotting against himself" (Barthes 3). When spellbound by love, the subject's feelings are arguably predetermined by the sensation of being in love. Barthes describes these feelings and behavior caused by love as fragments and figures. Furthermore, he describes the term figures as appreciable discourses; a figure can, for instance, be a declaration of desire in the shape of a love letter. Moreover, Barthes pinpoints that figures become concluded whenever they are performed and done by more than one individual. Therefore, they develop into a discourse, which people can relate to or have knowledge of in one way or another (3-5). For example, in *The Book of M*, what readers recognize as figures within desire's discourse, is Ory's portrayal of love for Max: how he cares for her, teases her, and the intimacy of their relationship (Shepherd 15 + 47). According to Barthes' theory, anyone who has been in love will recognize these fragments of the discourse and relate to it.

Furthermore, Barthes describes being in love as being encapsulated by another being. There is a sense of utter destruction when it comes to being in love: "we die together from loving each other: an open death, by dilution into the ether, a closed death of the shared grave" (Barthes 11). The sense of being consumed by another being is overwhelming, and if the love breaks or is lost, it is annihilating to the lover (10-11). Moreover, when a lover's beloved is absent, Barthes describes how this absence alters itself into the anguishing feeling of renunciation. Moreover, he depicts the function of absence as the inability to come together:

> "Amorous absence functions in a single direction, expressed by the one who stays, never by the one who leaves: an always present *I* is constituted only by confrontation with an always absent *you*. To speak this absence is from the start to propose that the subject's place and the other's place cannot permute" (13).

This notion applies to both of the novels I have chosen to analyze, as neither of the main characters are able to truly reunite with their partners by the novels' endings. This conception will be further

examined in the analysis, as their paths do not align at the end, which is what Barthes describes when he depicts how the subject and the other's paths do not cross.

Additionally, the "image of an embrace" (15) is the essence of longing for a partner in their absence. What Barthes depicts of absence is that desire is evoked whenever one is apart from their lover; this solitude becomes either a place where the subject's admiration for the object can grow or the pits in which love dies (13-17). However, beyond the absence is the reunion and the longing thereof, the essence of the subject awaiting its object; this figure is titled "Waiting" (37). Within this period, there is a sense of craving for the object. Thus, Barthes argues that there is a certain point to waiting, which drives the expectant subject mad. The anxiety of waiting and the anxious longing are tormenting to the lover (37-40).

Furthermore, Barthes describes what he calls "catastrophe" (48) as a state wherein the lover views their relationship as a path they cannot stray away from. It is the epiphany that love is inescapable due to two lovers' sensation of merging into one - leaving the abandoned part heartbroken until they reunite. Thus, catastrophe appears in the abyss of the waiting state (48-49). What is more, Bathers delivers a gesture that depicts a loving embrace and the effect it causes within the lovers; the "embrace seems to fulfill, for a time, the subject's dream of total union with the loved being" (104). This demeanor is referred to as "In the loving calm of your arms" (104) by Barthes. In this manner, the subject longs for the object's embrace, wherein they swaddle each other and receive affirmation (104-105).

Another figure concerning jealousy is one Barthes refers to as "The Orange" (110). The orange covers the envy and resentment that appears in the subject when their loved object's attention is focused elsewhere. Thus, those other beings, articles, or activities become rivals in the lover's eyes (110-111). Hereafter, the withdrawal appears. Thus, the figure entitled "Fade-out" (112) is presented. This figure concerns anguishing feelings that the subject experiences when their object begins to disengage themselves from their connection. Consequently, it wrecks the subject, as the object's detachment often is without closure: "Like a kind of melancholy mirage, the other withdraws into infinity and I wear myself out trying to get there" (112). Barthes claims that the feelings a fade-out evokes are much more havocing than feelings of jealousy, as the abandonment without reason by a loved one is heartwrenching to the lover (112-116). This particular notion is present in both novels within the husband of *Annihilation* and Max from *The Book of M*; therefore, it unfolds as a discussion in the analysis later in this thesis.

The figure named "The Love Letter" (157) is understood as the dialectic of the message, expressing longing for the desired person. Barthes depicts it as a notion wherein the lover letter's author expresses that the subject is thinking about the amorous object. To express this notion, he explains that the intention is not so much for the lover to read the context of the letter, but it is instead the notion that the lover will hold the note in their hands as the course of its creation. Additionally, the lingering thought that they might answer the note acts as an amorous interaction as well (157-159).

At last, the figure titled "Union" (226) represents the "Dream of total union with the loved being" (226). Barthes describes a reunion with one's lover as fulfilling, delightful, and filled with fruition. It is depicted as a reunion with one's other or missing half. Furthermore, he describes that "desire is to lack what one has - and to give what one does not have: a matter of supplements, not complements" (226). He hereby states that a union of two lovers is a completion of the self for each part of the relationship. When they are apart, feelings of not being fully oneself appear; thus, they merely return once they reunite (226-228).

Overall, Barthes delivers an astounding amount of the perpetual emotions that course through both the subject and object of desire. These figures, alongside the rest of Barthes' work, create, mold, and shape a lover when combined, according to Barthes, as they allow the readers to recognize the elements of desire within the characters. Therefore, these selected figures are chosen to analyze the discourse of the lovers in *Annihilation* and *The Book of M*.

4.3.3 The tradition of desire and its evolvement

Joseph Allen Boone depicts in *Tradition Counter Tradition: Love and the Form of Fiction* (1987) how desire often manifests in fiction as a romance leading to marriage. He states that the subject in fiction believes marriage in a romantic love-relation is thought to fulfill one's life with happiness (Boone 4-6). However, Boone describes that this has changed over time as the romance tale has grown with modern times. Thus, the flow of desire portrayed in novels is described as:

> each desiring subject is destined to meet one perfect love-object "made" for him or her; the perfect end of love is everlasting union with that individual; love will strike at first sight; sexual love transcends all material concerns; emotions are more valuable than reason in matters of the heart (6-7).

In the quote above, Boone describes the traditional flow of desiring one another, based on English and American culture, as a social ideology that then converts into literature. Moreover, within romantic literature, it is frequently the heterosexual romantic desire's archetypes of relationships that are displayed (7-11).

Boone depicts how the reader recognizes tradition as standard romantic patterns, whereas counter-tradition overthrows those (19). In his work, Boone depicts how the concept of wedlock has been deeply integrated into traditional romance literature and how it has changed over time. In addition, he describes how desire is a reoccurring theme due to "the logic of incremental repetition" (21), meaning that marriage and union are recurring topics in heterosexual culture and thus what he interprets as lived experiences for the heterosexual ideology (20-21).

Upon explaining the love tradition, Boone illustrates that in Western culture, romance fiction became popular due to its pursuit of passion, making desiring another person an exhilarating motive for narratives (34-35). However, as Barthes, Boone also depicts that desire can be all-consuming for the subject, driving them to act lunacy. The union with the object of desire is thus prolonged to contain the thrill of reuniting, enabling the euphoric feeling of the subject upon their reunion. All of this is promoted to keep the readers engaged in the story (38-40).

Boone describes that romantic literature first emerged in mid-eighteenth-century England. He then states that the romance tradition cannot be separated from the English-language novel's history due to its representation of romance literature (65). The narrative they used in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries shines a light upon "the way in which the marriage tradition successfully managed, for so many years, to circumscribe its thematized desires and curtail its narrative energies in the name, ironically, of readerly satisfaction" (71). Moreover, Boone explains that romance tales frequently end in a union in the form of marriage, as the love plot suggests a culmination (73). Barthes, too, describe union as the climax of the lover's journey, as they finally conform to one another (Barthes 226).

Furthermore, Boone describes as the thrill readers seek when reading a romance tale. They pursue the inevitable match of the two enamored characters; as a result thereof, the chase between the two characters and their relationship journey is what encapsulates the readers. However, Boone depicts this very notion as:

> The question of who truly desires whom (and for what reason), the degree to which lovers understand or miscomprehend each other's intentions, the knowledge available to the reader and the subordinate characters but unperceived by one or both romantic leads, the authorial insights imparted to or strategically withheld from the reader (Boone 73).

Herein, he describes the reader's desire as just as important as the desire portrayed by the characters within the romantic tale. It then becomes a play of fluctuations between the writer, the reader, and the characters within the course of the narrative, which then leads to either confining or consummating the love between the subject and the object (73-72). Belsey, too, describes the inability of the subject to obtain the object as the captivating element for the readers, which makes the tale captivating (Belsey 208-209). However, she argues the opposite of Boone, as he describes that with a novel ending with the characters marrying, the end evokes tranquility (Boone 79). Nevertheless, the element of closure is what Belsey describes that romance writes intent to withhold due to the prolonged effect of desire within the reader when they are robbed of closure between the characters (Belsey 208-209). The notion of fulfilling or failing at a union is the alluring end of a love story and is thus what keeps the readers entertained throughout the narration (Boone 79).

4.3.3.1 The development of romance fiction

Boone explains that fiction continues to inherit traits of the romance plot remains in modern writing: "Thus, although the context, the terms of bonding, in modern life may have changed, theidealized sexual affair of modern literature has remained a repository for many of the values and assumptions once associated with the romantic ideal of wedlock" (135). He hereby expresses that the romance plot lives on in modern love stories with twists that make it fit into modern societies (135-137). Moreover, Boone depicts that the change in marriage plots began to dissolve in the mid-nineteenth century, wherein the focus then became on how the male and female gender complement each other but are unequal in terms of power, thus changing the developing of desire's narrative further (142). According to Boone, novels gradually began challenging the ordinary perception of marriage, which was rooted in society at the time. He describes that the trend with romance fiction beginning to leave the novels with open-endings altered the reader's desire regarding the narrative structure as the end is withheld (214-215). As both Barthes and Belsey depict, the concealed closure of the novel only urges the desire to know more within the reader.

The romance tale has evolved over time, from men going on quests to either impress and obtain women or to merely abandon them in order to avoid societal necessities and to embrace their adolescence before conforming to their adult responsibilities and identities. Boone refers to this notion as "the male quest" (230). These fictional works aimed to exclude the marriage tradition in literature and thus created tales rooted in storyworlds rid of women. Furthermore, Boone describes that: "The quester's journey *into* the unknown simultaneously implies an escape *from* the known" (232). Therefore, these fictional works were created as escapism from the pressure of marriage in society at the time. The male quest was thus a retaliative response against the romance novels written by and to women. However, these fictional works aimed to portray adolescent males in their prime without the responsibilities that follow marriage, whereas romances are focused on the union of the amorous characters (228-235).

In addition to this, Boone depicts how in literature, men have been able to travel and explore, whereas women have been stagnant. This notion has promoted literature in which the characters explore life outside of the marriage: "the trajectory of experience for the protagonist of either sex who achieves self-definition outside of marital life and roles" (278). The counter-traditional sense that women are able to explore and evolve outside of their static positions, not limiting themselves to marriages and men, was scandalous at the time it first emerged but has become a standard narrative in modern times. However, Boone expresses that it became liberating to read such narratives for women. As a result thereof, this genre of romance reshaped the common fiction regarding love, marriage, and sex - and ultimately, desire (278-281).

Therefore, it becomes evident that fiction regarding desire has evolved to fit modernity and the liberation of the female gender. Boone describes, as stated above, that romance tales were focused on marriage at its origin but have since begun to separate themselves from the marital union and instead focus on other aspects of desire, such as love and sexual encounters (228 + 281).

Thus, to sum up, Belsey, Boone, and Barthes all depict desire as found within the characters of the novel, but additionally in the reader of the fictional work as well. Both Boone and Belsey base elements of their concepts on Barthes' figures and fragments, as his notions were published in their earliest versions in 1978. However, what they all agree upon is that the notion of love in the form of desire is present in nearly all fictional work; if not in the sense of lovers portrayed in the storyworld, then consequently in the readers, as they desire to emerge themselves within the tale and desire to know the outcome of the story. As a result thereof, the elements of theories presented

regarding desire and apocalypticism are provided in order to analyze *Annihilation* and *The Book of M* in relation to desire depicted in apocalyptic tales.

5.0 An analysis and discussion of desire within apocalyptic fiction with specific reference to *Annihilation* and *The Book of M*

Within the analysis, I aim to outline and discuss *The Book of M* and *Annihilation*'s apocalyptic storyworlds. Their magical twists and estrangements of the world, as readers know it, make these apocalyptic realms so intriguing. Both how they resemble each other, as well as how they differentiate. Furthermore, I look into the representation of desire and loss throughout the two novels by focusing on the main characters.

5.1 Magical Ailment and the End of the World

In order for me to explore the similarities between the apocalyptic events in either of the novels, it is essential to understand the case of apocalypticism in each of the novels. The following will therefore contain an analysis and explanation of the apocalyptic happenings within either of the two storyworlds. I begin by analyzing the storyworld by focusing on characters, places, and apocalyptic happening. After presenting this, I will analyze and discuss how the novels relate to the apocalyptic theory I presented earlier in my thesis.

5.1.1 The Allurement of the Unknown

The two apocalypse's magical scenes of pollution equally illustrate how alluring the unknown is when portrayed through a pristine perception. The two vastly different apocalypses have ravaged and altered the earth as the reader knows it; yet, the landscapes are portrayed as mesmerizing, especially by the biologist in *Annihilation*, who is greatly fond of the untouched landscape of Area X. She even describes how to her, it resembles a protected habitat for wildlife for hikers to explore (VanderMeer 12). Thus, the depiction of the apocalyptic landscapes are glorified and described as enchanting yet uncanny; these ethereal descriptions of the landscapes captivate the reader and draw them into the tale. This concept is supported by both Booker and Thomas, as well as O'Leary and Garrard; they all depict how the alteration of the earth is intriguing and is ultimately what draws the reader to apocalyptic fiction, as stated in the theory section. Apocalypticism allures the readers and

engages their paranoia, which is the primary reason for reading apocalyptic fiction, as it allows exploration of what cannot be understood, which is the end of the world (Garrard 86). Therefore, what Shepherd and VanderMeer are succeeding in portraying with their novels is precisely that; an impossible and unfathomable end, yet imaginable, in the sense of making the reader relate to parts of the tale (O'Leary 4-6).

5.1.2 Shadowless oblivion

Amid a bustling Indian spice market, a man named Hemu Joshi loses his shadow. *The Book of M* portrays this shadowless man as the beginning of the apocalyptic event, as Hemu becomes the center of interest and ambiguity surrounding the apocalyptic happening and sets off the post-apocalyptic events within the storyworld (Shepherd 35-41).

The tale of "the Forgetting" (5) is told by four characters, Orlando Zhang (referred to as Ory), Maxine Webber (referred to as Max), Mahnaz Ahmadi (referred to as Naz), and The One Who Gathers. However, despite having four characters, the main characters in *The Book of M* are arguably Max and Ory, although the novel switches between four different points of view, as their reunion is the primary focus of the novel's storyline. The story is achronological due to analepsis, as well as the different characters storylines happening in different years before all catching up near the end of the novel, ranging from the news of the outbreak to a few years after. Max and Ory's points of view are post-apocalyptic, whereas Naz's point of view is at the beginning of the apocalypse and then gradually moves to the post-apocalyptic timeline Ory is on. The One Who Gathers's storyline resembles Naz's, beginning at the very start of the apocalypse and catching up to the post-apocalyptic one when they all unite. The flashbacks appear multiple times throughout the plot, but an example is in the following quote: "It was afternoon in the courtyard that day, years ago" (56). Here, Ory reminisces about the day they heard about the apocalyptic happening first occurring in the U.S. The flashback is portrayed through the notion of it being years ago, pinpointing that this is an event happening before what he is currently experiencing.

The narration in *The Book of M* is seemingly heterodiegetic with zero focalization, as the narrator is placed outside of the story due to the character's stories being told in the third person point of view with access to their thoughts. However, there is a twist in the narration, as whenever the chapters are from Max's focal point, the narration becomes autodiegetic with internal focalization, which appears in this quote: "I didn't leave a note, because I thought that might be worse" (53). Here, it becomes clear that her narration is done with internal focalization by her

stating 'I'. This change in the narrative is arguably due to the fact that her name not appearing at the top of the chapter, like the others, but instead, a symbol symbolizing a tape recorder is portrayed. Thus, the reader is to understand that whenever the narration is done on behalf of Max, they are presented with the actual recording and not Max's innermost thoughts. Therefore, this is debatably the reasoning behind how desire is portrayed, as these recordings are targeted to Ory, and merely created for him to listen to, although he never gets a chance to. Arguably, Shepherd created Max's narrative in this way to allow the reader to get inside the person who is living through the Forgetting and the pull's mind, which enables them to access her innermost thoughts. This notion is done in order to create a sense of sorrow for Max, as the effects of this ailment suggest the loss of personality. Additionally, it applies to the uncanny, as her forgetting who she is evokes defamiliarization (Bennett and Royle 33-35). Max's personality and identity are depicted through flashbacks of her and Ory's relationship that are provided throughout the novel by both of the two characters (Shepherd 58-66). Thus, experiencing Max forgetting prejudicial feelings is distressing to the reader, thus promoting uncanniness.

Furthermore, this particular play of narration is referred to as multiple selective omnisciences, as the third-person point of view is narrated from multiple characters in succession due to the tale diverting between Ory, Naz, The One Who Gathers, and Max as the narrators. Splitting the narrative between four characters is arguably done to depict different versions of the apocalyptic happening, as each of the four characters tells their individual experiences of the apocalyptic happenings, which they explore throughout their journeys across the post-apocalyptic landscape. They each narrate how this apocalyptic happening has altered the world as well as their lives forevermore, which relates to the notion of apocalyptic fiction being desirable due to the interest in the earth's destruction (Booker and Thomas 53+61-62).

The Book of M begins in medias res where Ory, the first character whom the readers follow within the novel, braves the post-apocalyptic world to scavenge for food and other necessities. However, he and his partner Max stay confined within the territory they have lived in since the first few years of the apocalyptic happening (Shepherd 3-4). They reside in an abandoned hotel called Elk Cliffs Resort in Great Falls National Park in Arlington, where they have confined themselves since they attended their friends Paul and Imanuel's wedding at the apocalypse's beginning two years prior (12). It had been their shelter wherein they felt safe. That was until Max lost her shadow (12-13), forcing them to create rules for her to be safe should her memories disappear completely while he is

away. One of those rules is Ory asking "Blue" and Max replying "Fifty-two" (4), which lets him know she still remembers. Amidst his scavenging, he comes across another group of people led by a woman named Ursula; some of them have lost their shadows, and some have not. They are on a mission to travel to New Orleans. They explain that something is happening there, although they do not know exactly what, which Ory does not understand at all: ""You're leaving all this - you're going to go *out there* - for a rumor?" "We have to [...] Or there won't be anything left anyway."" (25). Them losing their shadows and memories urges them to see what the fuss is regarding The One Who Gathers (19-26). On his way back to their shelter, someone attacks him and steals his belongings. When he reaches his hideout, Max is gone (26-30). Thus, the tale of the shadowless world begins.

The novel's climate then gradually builds up as the narration switches between the four characters and their individual journeys. In order to understand their individual journeys better, and instead of depicting their journeys as a whole, I have decided to split the four characters' traverses through the U.S. individually to describe how the climate moves towards the denouement where they all meet.

Firstly, the reader encounters Ory's mission to find Max and bring her back: "There was no blood anywhere, nor signs of struggle, so he had to believe that she had left by herself and not as someone's hostage. All he had to do then was find her. Find her fast" (43). Ory questions the progression of Max's forgetting, as she has packed important belongings before searching for him, urging him to believe she has not fully forgotten anything yet. He notices that she has taken the tape recorder with her, which is an essential tool to remind her of how she is. Nevertheless, he wants to find her quickly before she loses her memories entirely (48). Ory does not believe that it is safe to travel through the apocalyptic landscape, and upon entering the post-apocalyptic world in search of Max, he realizes that the resort is the only safe space for them, despite Max expressing how much she wants to return to their home in D.C.: "She had wanted fiercely to go back, but it was too dangerous" (76). He thought that by staying couped up at the resort, they would be safe, and that is still his belief as he travels through the post-apocalyptic remains of the US (75-77).

On his journey, he explores much of how the apocalypse has altered the earth and describes himself as someone who feels as though they do not belong: "He was a tourist at the end of the world" (144). The uncanniness of the world's alteration is frightening to Ory, as it forces him to be confronted with the unfamiliar (Royle 1). As he reaches D.C., he realizes that Max would have wanted to explore more of the world before she lost her memories, thus forcing him to reroute.

However, he meets a group of soldiers, and within this group is the character Naz (Shepherd 199-200). Here, he reunites with Imanuel, whose wedding he attented when the Forgetting happened. The item his group is fighting for is his late husband Paul's book (203-209). Imanuel promises to give Ory two soldiers to help him search for Max once they find the book (231-232). Thus, after attaining it by fighting the shadowless and the red king, who turned out to be a mutated, shadowless Paul, they embark on their journey to New Orleans (287-295). On this journey, Imanuel dies, and Ory becomes the leader of their group (317-321). On their way, they pass a blue road sign on which Max has written fifty-two, but Ory does not notice it (355). He is slowly coming to terms with Max being gone for good and begins to develop feelings for Naz (372-373), as Max's absence allows him to obtain feelings for another person, because he believes their relationship to be over (Barthes 13).

When the reader encounters Max, she is represented as a tape recorder symbol rather than her name, whereas the other's chapters begin with the character's names as headings. The tape recorder symbol is arguably due to her narration being an account of her travels which she is dedicating to Ory, whilst knowing he will never hear them (Shepherd 53). The element of the tape recorder arguably fits into Barthes' notion of the love letter, as Max uses the tape recorder as a way of connecting with Ory and reminding him of her love. Thus, the recordings serve as declarations of her love towards Ory (Barthes 157-159).

Max explains that she is leaving to protect Ory from her forgetting getting worse. She breaks their rule of her not leaving their home in order to protect him. Hence, what Ory and Max try to do is protect each other. One believes it is done by leaving before the worst might happen, whereas the other decides to search for their lover because the worst might happen. What they want to do, is try to protect each other (Shepherd 48-55). Thus, the story of the potential union begins, which Boone argues engages the reader in the change of the desired object (Boone 73). However, upon leaving, Max realizes that she might never see Ory again and thus comes to terms with her decision:

> marched to the door, turned the lock, stepped out, and then shut it behind me. Click. That's when I paused. The finality of it really hit me then. That as soon as I walked away from that door, I'd never be able to find it again. I'd forget it, or the way back to it. This was really, really it (Shepherd 54-55).

This notion is Max's way of overcoming the imminent end due to her deciding to leave in order to protect herself and Ory from the apocalyptic happening, which relates to Kermode's idea of being

in the midst of the apocalypse. At that moment, Max is in the middle of the apocalypse, as the Forgetting is happening to her, but it has not yet taken over her mind completely. Thus, she decides that abandoning Ory is the solution for him to best survive her apocalyptic ending (Kermode 8).

Max explains losing her shadow as a feeling of absence and coldness and thus expresses losing it as: "It was looking back at me, in the same pose, waiting. Then I saw it tilt its head ever so slightly to the side, all by itself [...] Then it was gone" (Shepherd 65). Her shadow suddenly disappeared, leaving her in a state of shock until Ory came back from scavenging; only then did she mourn her loss (66). Furthermore, Max depicts how the Forgetting reached their hideout and how the wedding guests scrambled one by one, till it was only the two of them left at the resort (79-87 + 105-113). This notion relates to the comic frame of apocalyptic tales, as they try to adapt to the apocalyptic state of the world, due to Ory and Max reshaping their lives around protecting themselves from the apocalyptic happening and surviving it (Garrard 87). Max wanted to leave the resort, but Ory wanted to stay; however, now Max gets to explore the newfound world (Shepherd 126 + 133). This notion relates to Boone's comment that despite the gender roles being modernized, there are still unequal elements, such as the man having the last word, as depicted in the sense that they stay because Ory says so, despite what Max wants (Boone 142).

Throughout her journey, Max tries to convince Ory, and potentially herself too, that she had to leave him: "Do you know what means the most to me of all, Ory? Out of everything that's left in this world? Don't you see now why I had to leave you? That I had to do it? That I had no choice? Do you know what could happen when I forget *you*?" (160). She believes she has to abandon him to protect him, as she is afraid of how the Forgetting's pull might alter her.

Whilst on her journey, Max admits to craving the sense of being shadowless when the Forgetting began, expressing that she had wanted to feel the magical essence of apocalypse too. She then fears that the Forgetting heard her wish and granted it to her (179-180). Here, it is evident that Max is attracted to the uncanny and strange feeling of the unfamiliar due to her wishing for an apocalyptic event (Bennett and Royle 39). Thus, it is arguable that the apocalyptic happening is then an action, as she is begging for it to encapsulate her: "maybe it happened to me because at one time, for one brief moment, I had *wanted* it to happen… And my shadow knew it, too" (Shepherd 180). She longed for the uncanny and imagined the apocalypse happening to her, thus forcing the imagined notion to become a reality. This relates to Garrard's idea of imagining apocalypses, as Max's paranoia forced the imagined scenario to become a real apocalyptic event to her (Garrard 86).

Later on, Max joins a group, which is led by Ursula, the same woman Ory met earlier in the novel. She then joins her group of shadowless travelers and their mission to get to New Orleans to meet The One Who Gathers and find a cure for their loss of shadows (Shepherd 185-197). It is during her time with them that her memory starts to truly deteriorate, despite having survived nearly three weeks still remembering. As a last resort to try and keep remembering Ory, she makes them stop at a blue sign to write fifty-two on it; however, shortly after, she forgets how to read (213-221). After this, she realizes that whenever she feels like her mind is slipping further away, she thinks of Ory. Thus, he becomes her anchor to who she is (259).

While taking a break on the road, the shadowless group is captured by an association named Transcendence (269-270). Their captors want to become shadowless, just as Max once wished. While they are urging them to explain how to do that, Ursula forges an escape plan; they have to omit some of their memories in order to escape (279-285). Ursula then alters the cage, which the Transcendence has put them in into the RV they drove before through her forgetting. She lets go of some of her memories to imagine the RV and then alters reality till the imagination is real (312-313). Here, the reader is presented with the uncanniness of the apocalyptic event, as the estrangement, alteration, and overall manipulation of the natural and known is a trait within the uncanny (Royle 1-3). The shadowless group now feels the effects of this manipulation of reality as their memories fade even quicker than before (330). Max's memories are deteriorating, and she forgets what the tape recorder is for, she forgets to eat, and she basically forgets everyone but Ory (359-361); till suddenly, she only remembers Ory: "Where did you go, Ory? Why aren't we together? Was it may fault, or yours? What reason could I have to ever leave you?" (379). The group has given up everything to get to New Orleans, and now there are barely any of them left but Ursula and Max. The two continue their journey to the end goal, despite not remembering anything anymore (378-379).

Additionally to Max and Ory, we are presented with the character Naz, an Iranian archer who had to leave her family to train for the Olympics in the U.S. (Shepherd 35). She is obsessed with Hemu and the phenomenon of the shadowless. After the introduction of Naz, the plot switches back and forth between her, Ory, Max, and The One Who Gathers.

When the Forgetting happens in Boston, Naz is in constant contact with her mother and sister over the phone, but as the power dies, she is left alone (67-74). However, her sister, Rojan, gives up everything by traveling to the U.S. to be with her, and they embark on a journey to New York

together (88-91). On their journey, they befriend a man named Wright, however, he ends up attacking Rojan, leaving her with a deadly wound to the leg (143-143). Nevertheless, they make it to Washington D.C. (136-143), and upon their arrival, they meet a group of soldiers, which they decide to join (164-169). Rojan, unfortunately passes away from the infectious wound in her leg (249). Shortly thereafter, Ory becomes a part of their group, and Naz feels an instant connection towards him, as Paul has told tales about Ory to Naz (249-253). She then prepares to travel to New Orleans alongside the rest of the group, too, as they have become her new family (273-278). On their way there, she experiences how much the apocalypse has changed the world due to the shadowless' alterations (365). This appeals to the reader's paranoia, too, as the manipulation of the world creates the eeriness that sets the tone for the post-apocalyptic landscape (Garrard 86).

The last of the four characters the reader is introduced to is The One Who Gathers. He is a man who, before the forgetting happened, lost his memories in an accident. His amnesia is the reason for him still having his shadow, as the Forgetting cannot gain anything form taking his memories, as he has none. His memory loss is stated as total retrograde amnesia; thus, he describes himself as being reborn: "He was born at forty-two years old. A man with middle, but no beginning" (Shepherd 97). The amnesia has made him immune to the Forgetting, giving him the ability to gain new memories (95-102).

The One Who Gathers is flown to India to visit Hemu to talk about their memory loss in order for doctors to potentially understand Hemu's situation (114-120). The One Who Gaters realizes how severe Hemu's Forgetting is and believes himself lucky that: "He had to deal only with having forgotten - he never had to live the actual forgetting" (155), stating that he did not wish to live through the process of slowly losing your memories (149-156). As The One Who Gathers tries to help Hemu remember the Mandai spice market, it suddenly vanishes into thin air, as Hemu cannot recollect what it is (171-174). Alas, Hemu's forgetting manipulates reality, which relates to the uncanny's ability to alter the world (Royle 1-3). As a result thereof, his forgetting about the spice market made it disappear. Shortly thereafter, Hemu dies from an allergic reaction to the peanut butter and jelly sandwich he asked The One Who Gathers to get him (Shepherd 178). This notion is a way of expressing that although his memories were disappearing, he still remembered some bits and that the forgetting was too much for him to live through. Thus, it is arguable that Hemu's ending in the novel is tragic, as his tale comes to a calamitous end, according to O'Leary's apocalyptic framing (Garrard 87). The One Who Gathers then makes it his mission, alongside his

doctor and nurse, to find shadowless people that are willing to undergo research in the search for a cure (Shepherd 233-236). Suddenly, a storm hits the hospital in which The One Who Gathers houses the shadowless he is helping alongside Hemu's doctor, who has traveled to find The One Who Gathers and his previous doctor (303-305). During the storm, The One Who Gathers is hit directly in the face when trying to retrieve the patients' files and Hemu's notes, which causes him to lose his eyesight completely, thus forcing Hemu's doctor to become his eyes (326-329 + 350).

Before Ory and his group even reach the border of New Orleans, The One Who Gathers knows of their arrival (401) due to him turning into another being, where his shadow is now shaped as an elephant that is able to see for him, as his eyes and Hemu's doctor are gone (402-404). He is now able to grab shadows from other elements and shape them into people, which makes them regain memories (406-410). Thus, he is the key to the cure.

Picking up from where I left off, all of the characters' journeyes, the four different storylines culminate in the tale's denouement as Naz and Ory's team reach New Orleans and meet The One Who Gathers. Here, Naz and Ory begin to build a relationship with each other, sleeping together, and living together (417-423). Ory admits that he: "didn't want Max to forget him, but she had anyway. Now he wanted to forget *her*, and couldn't" (423). He believes he is developing feelings for Naz due to Max having forgotten him.

The One Who Gathers reveals that he has cured his first shadowless patient with the personal belonging they arrived in New Orleans with, which is a tape recorder: "The thing from which he'd taken the cured patient's shadow. A tape recorder [...] a woman who had arrived on foot, alone, who remembered nothing, and a tape recorder with fragmented thoughts locked inside" (450). At this moment, it becomes clear to the reader who the first cured person may be, and as the desire to know more reaches its all-time high, the reader arrives at the novel's climax. The One Who Gathers then admits to Ory that he found and cured his wife (451). The desire to know if Ory and Max will reunite is enthralling to the reader, according to Belsey's notion of closure in romance literature. Although it is not a romance tale, the element of their romantic reunion is cathartic to the readers (Belsey 208).

A few days after Ory's team arrives in New Orleans, The One Who Gathers realizes that Ory, who is called Zhang by his team, is Max's husband; thus, he reveals that she is alive and in New Orleans too. He then sets up a meeting between the two (Shepherd 451 + 461). Naz expresses feelings of distress regarding the love triangle she finds herself in, and she leaves Ory despite him

wanting them to stay together (459). Max is anxious to meet Ory and tries to reminisce about their time together. When she does this, she can picture him, but never herself in the moments she pictures. As they reunite, she is thrilled to see him, but he then blurts out the name Ursula, stating that she is not Max (466-471).

The novel concludes with the person who has Max's memories identifying herself as M. She only then realizes that her shadow is not shaped like herself but as Max: "Mine doesn't look like me because it looks like Max. Because it's made of her memories" (475). It is then M realises that she has to change her identity because she is not who she believes she is. She finds herself in the love triangle, too, without being an actual component in it; as to Ory, she is an imposter, and it revolves around him, Naz, and Max (480). Therefore, she decides giving up her identity is the solution to their problem: "*Oh, Ory*, I sighed. *I wish you'd never given me the recorder*. I knew only what I couldn't do: have you again, be Max, or forget. But I didn't know what I *could* do" (482). The novel ends as M decides to tell Ory all of Max's escapades on her journey, as this helps him deal with the fact that she is gone, but it additionally helps M regain life; a life that is her own, despite having all of Max's memories (482-485). This ending relates to O'Leary's notion of a comic-framed apocalypse, as M found a positive solution to the post-apocalyptic alteration of the life she now has to live (Garrard 87-88). Interpreting *The Book of M* as a novel with a comic ending will be discussed later in the analysis upon comparing it to *Annihilation*'s ending.

Overall, *The Book of M* describes an apocalyptic happening, as an unknown ailment similar to a pandemic draws its shawl over the world (61-62). However, when Max reveals that they give up some part of themselves and their memories to alter reality, the apocalyptic event then becomes an apocalyptic action (312-313). This is due to the fact that an action is premeditated and thus requires somebody's intention of doing something, such as forgetting on purpose to alter objects or reality. Therefore, when the shadowless characters let go of their memories in order to do certain things, it is arguable that the event evolves from a happening to an action. Therefore, the apocalyptic event is changeable when switching between the character's points of view; as for the other three, the event remains a happening, but for Max, it becomes an action as she participates in the event.

5.1.2.1 The beginning of the end in The Book of M

The apocalyptic happening of Hemu's missing shadow quickly becomes a worldwide phenomenon as humankind ponders what happened to him to make his shadow vanish. No one understands what

this loss signifies, and the indication that he can survive without it interests the entire world. This notion relates to Kermode's suggestion apocalyptic fiction is interesting due to the concept of how to survive apocalypses is presented (Kermode 8-9). Suddenly, the disappearance of people's shadows begins spreading to other countries, resembling a pandemic (Shepherd 40-44). Naz describes the obsession with understanding the virus: "Scientists from every country took over the television channels, armed with hypotheses and ideas for experiments to explain why the shadows never came back, or why without one, a mind starts to flake away like ash on a cindered log" (50). The public and the healthcare system rely on figuring out what is happening to understand the disease and find a cure. Although quickly, the mysterious ailment encapsulates the entire earth.

Within this apocalyptic world, one's shadow is connected with one's mind. It stores memories; without it, you forget who you are. A shadow is the bane of one's existence. The apocalyptic happening forces people into a state of amnesia. Little by little, without a shadow, they lose who they are as a person and begin to move aimlessly around. Those who still have their shadows either feel sorry for those who have lost them or are slightly afraid of them, as the shadowless become mentally deranged over a short period of time (5 + 7-9). Ory describes those affected by the Forgetting as:

> The ones left all started forgetting too, and disappeared. Wandered right out of their houses and couldn't remember how to get back, or died of starvation in one room, unable to figure out how to unlock a door or that there was an upstairs, until the doors themselves vanished from the walls and the stairs flattened to hallways, trapping them forever. How to get back to a shelter, how to use a can opener, that rain existed. Who would have thought that you'd need a shadow to work a key or recall your mother's name? (7).

Simply, what this ailment does, is take away every single thing that makes a human, human. This is due to the fact that memories are a core value of human beings, and without it, we become helpless. Without the memories of how to do simple things, such as remembering to eat, we wither away. This notion is what the apocalyptic happening does in this particular storyworld; the Forgetting rids humans of their ability to be human, as it changes them by removing their memories and offering them magical abilities in the form of alterations in exchange for their identities (330). Thompson's description of personal apocalypses fits this notion, as losing one's memories is an annihilation of who they once were (Thompson 333). What the shadowless relinquish to the pull of the Forgetting is expressed in the abovementioned quote where Ory explains that "the doors themselves vanished

from the walls and the stairs flattened to hallways" (Shepherd 7). Herein, it is indicated that the shadowless who feel trapped actually become trapped because, as they believe they are, they alter items until their changes become a reality. Thus, Graham's notion of the demise of the human species, the animal kingdom, and the natural world becomes a reality in Shepherd's novel because the shadowless are able to alter these degrees of devastation. However, this showcases that the post-apocalyptic world is still functional, despite the major changes that are done by the shadowless (Graham 22-26).

5.1.2.2 The endowment of human existence

As mentioned above, the shadowless have the ability to alter reality to make it fit theirs. This becomes apparent when Naz is fleeing from Boston to New York City, and the Statue of Liberty plays havoc with the city, destroying everything in her path. It is implied that it is the Statue of Liberty in between the lines, but knowing of American culture and its landmarks, it is understood that the one who wreaks the city is the statue, which has awoken:

> They stared. New York was being destroyed by its own monster. At least three times her original size, the emerald woman rose up between two skyscrapers, the huge torch in her hand blazing with real fire. With a deafening roar, she lifted the tablet in her other arm and brought it down on top of a building, flattening it to the ground. Shock waves skipped across the water as the green hands tore into the wreckage (Shepherd 139).

They stare at it in awe and confusion, pondering how this before them is real. Naz exclaims that what she is staring at is impossible yet quite mesmerizing (139). Nonetheless, this is simply one of the cases wherein anthropomorphization has occurred to nonhuman objects in *The Book of M*. Herein, the allurement of cataclysms and ambiguity in apocalyptic literature, as Sontag, Booker, and Thomas describe it, becomes apparent as what captures the characters, and the readers is how the world has become entirely something else (Sontag 42; Booker and Thomas 53). The alteration of what the readers know is alluring and intriguing to explore. Hereby, Shepherd has created a storyworld wherein the differentiation of what statues, hallways, and any other inanimate object are usually able to do has become something else entirely. Royle describes the inexplicable eeriness that follows the uncanny experience as the disruption of the familiar, which arguably is what Shepherd has done in her novel (Royle 1-3). The alterations that the shadowless are able to conform to in Shepherd's storyworld are frightening and mysterious, such as the revitalization of the Statue of Liberty.

Moreover, a point Bennett and Royle make of the rhetorical figures used in the uncanny is the anthropomorphization of the nonhuman (Bennett and Royle 34-35). Different examples of anthropomorphism within Shepherd's storyworld are when Max encounters a wolf and Ory a tree. Ory encounters a man hovering around a tree not shortly after he has left the shelter at the resort. He is stopped by the man, who talks of trees, and then in one of the trees behind the man, Ory makes out a face in the bark of a willow (Shepherd 129-132). This appalling tree shifts unnervingly in the nonexistent wind; Ory believes it is laughing. While arguing back and forth with the man, who begs Ory to ask his shadow where the man's shadow went, the tree follows the conversation as if it is listening. He expresses that: "The trees hissed excitedly. There was a face again, for a moment, like a woman carved into wood, with leaves for hair" (131). Thus, the anthropomorphization of the tree occurs as Ory becomes certain that there is a woman in the tree trunk. The anthropomorphization of this tree is arguably used in order to portray the downfall of humankind and the rise of nature, which refers to Graham's points regarding the decreation of society. As Shepherd gives life to inanimate objects such as trees, she allows for the rise of nature to take place, which potentially could result in the demise of humankind, according to Graham (Graham 22-26). Moreover, what Thompson pinpoints is that the use of unnerving elements is essentially the baseline for an apocalyptic storyline, which is what Shepherd does when giving life to the nonhuman (Thompson 13-14). Henceforth, the uneasiness Ory feels during this encounter is used to portray the harrowing fear that fills him during their interaction (Shepherd 131-132).

Furthermore, Ory becomes certain that the tree is connected to the man somehow, as when he is forced to deprive the man of his existence in order to pass him, the tree falls silent: "Around them, the trees hushed, as if alive, as if afraid. Or perhaps in mourning. If the fragment of the woman who had once been the shadowless's wife still remembered anything at all" (132). Here, he expresses and acknowledges that the tree has feelings, and thereby the anthropomorphization of the tree is completed, as he refers to it being the man's altered wife. The terrifying element of a tree with human traits and emotions adds to Shepherd's imagined apocalypse (129-132), which relates to how Garrard depicts that imagination and apocalypticism are closely tied in order for fear and interest to fall into play. Hereby, Shepherd's anthropomorphization of the inanimate adds to the reader's paranoia while experiencing the apocalyptic events (Garrard 86).

The abovementioned regarding Garrard applies to all of the anthropomorphization of nonhuman elements the characters come across throughout the novel. However, when Max encounters a wolf,

the situation is different. Here, her mind has begun to deteriorate as her memories are slipping through her fingers due to the loss of her shadow. There is no way of genuinely confirming that this interaction is, in fact, real or simply a product of her forgetting's alteration. Nevertheless, if it is to be considered a legitimate conversation between Max and the animal, it then becomes a case of anthropomorphism due to the wolf and her carrying out a conversation together as it speaks (Shepherd 257-259). Still, this interaction is an interesting part of the apocalyptic tale, as Max initiates the conversation by telling it not to attack her but is then not fazed by it actually answering her request:

> I heard the scrape of something soft squeezing through leaves and leaned around the trunk of my tree to look. A small, skinny wolf cocked its head and peered at me. Its yellow eyes glinted, almost glowing. We stared each other down for several seconds, perfectly still. "There are too many of us to attack me," I finally warned. "I know," it said simply. All right then (257).

The last line confirms her nonchalant approach to the entire situation. Therefore, the demise of mankind is prominent through the portrayal of anthropomorphism. The eeriness of the animal and plant kingdom potentially overruling humans is unfathomable yet somehow comprehensible due to the apocalyptic event's behavior. The excessiveness of how humans deteriorate when losing their memories and morph into other beings or inanimate objects might appear exaggerated, but as Booker and Thomas describe, the exaggeration is done to prove a point (Booker and Thomas 65). Thus, the point that Shepherd is portraying is that when one person's memories are gone, they become someone or something else entirely. They rely on their memories to remind them of who they are. Without them, they could be anything. Even a willow tree that is swaying in the nonexistent wind (Shepherd 131). Thus, the apocalyptic happening in *The Book of M* is uncanny, yet it brings some sense of familiarity through experiences of memory loss, despite the inexplicable events it portrays.

5.1.3 A gleaming and glistening haze

In *Annihilation*, the estranged world also brings anthropomorphization into play; however, it differs in the sense that the main character actively chooses to enter the apocalypse, whereas the apocalypse happened unwillingly to the characters in *The Book of M*. In this section, I will also describe the sequence of events before analyzing. Thus, in VanderMeer's novel, one expedition

team, out of several more who had done the same years before them, enters a divergent, magical part of the Earth that is merging into the real world, which they name Area X. They enter it in order to explore the mysterious, apocalyptic happening on behalf of the government: "Our mission was simple: to continue the government's investigation into the mysteries of Area X, slowly working our way out from base camp" (VanderMeer 4). Thus, the motion of actions in *Annihilation* begins (3-4).

Annihilation is narrated in first person, and the homodiegetic narrator is also the main protagonist of the novel; therefore, the narrator narrates from inside the story. The biologist is an autodiegetic narrator with internal focalization (3); she is a personal narrator, letting the readers know her innermost thoughts from her point of entry into Area X to the moment in which she finishes writing the journal the reader is reading. Thus, her intimate narration revolves around an event that happened in the past. An example of this conception is presented in the following quote: "It was expected simply that we would keep a record, like this one, in a journal, like this one: lightweight but nearly indestructible [...] These journals would either return with us or be recovered by the next expedition" (8). Herein, it becomes evident to the reader that we are presented with a homodiegetic narrator who narrates in the past tense. Thus, the storyline of the biologist is achronological, as the plot begins in the present, then moves back into the past, and in the end, finishes in the present tense. Thus, it weaves its way through the present and the past (193). The biologist demonstrates the events of *Annihilation*'s story within the order they occur, thus chronologically; however, there are few disturbances of achronological analepsis concerning her memories of her childhood, adult life, and marriage.

Annihilation sets off in medias res with the biologist recapping how Area X appears and that the team had no idea the way in which their lives were about to change: "Looking out over that untroubled landscape, I do not believe any of us could yet see the threat" (3), which is narrated in the present tense. After the first paragraph of the novel, it switches to past tense for the remainder of it (3), except for the last three pages (193-195).

The counterfeiting sphere the team enters into is seemingly harmless until they immerse themselves in it. Furthermore, the biologist introduces their exclusively women-based team consisting of herself, a surveyor, an anthropologist, and a psychologist; the latter is the leader of the expedition. They are all chosen on the basis of them being scientists, leading a project-orientated adventure through Area X. Their expedition team will be the twelfth to enter and explore Area X on

behalf of the government, researching how to cease its spreading. They have been given supplies to last them two years in the estranged land, which is crucial given that no team has ever truly made it back alive or as themselves (3-5). Thus, the apocalyptic adventure begins (Booker and Thomas 53) as the journey is laid out before the team. Their mission: explore Area X, survive the apocalypse, and return.

The climate gradually progresses as the expedition members begin to discuss and question each other's motives. Upon their first exploration of the vast landscape, the team encounters a building plummeting into the ground, which they were unaware of. This captures their attention, and they decide to explore the Tower, as the biologist labels it (VanderMeer 18-22). Inside the Tower, they discover writings on the wall made out of living organisms. Upon examining them, the biologist becomes exposed to contaminating spores (23-26). As they ascend the Tower to the ground's surface, the biologist notices an estrangement of the walls and depicts: "But as we climbed back up, I had a moment of vertigo despite being in such an enclosed space, a kind of panic for a moment, in which the walls suddenly had a fleshy aspect to them, as if we traveled inside the gullet of a beast" (27). Thus, the first consequence of her contamination materializes, as she realizes that the Tower might be the heart of Area X. This relates to how Garrard depicts that apocalypticism is correlated with one's imagination, as it is created first by the author, then reshared to the reader through the narrator. Hence, the biologist allows the reader to imagine the Tower as a living organism, alongside other observations she makes or alterations that might happen to her due to this contamination (Garrard 86).

The expedition members consecutively die; firstly, the psychologist forces the anthropologist on a lethal mission to collect samples of the Crawler, a beast that inhabits the Tower (VanderMeer 37 + 60-65). Secondly, the psychologist attempts suicide by jumping from the lighthouse, as she too had been contaminated in the Tower by a wound inflicted by the Crawler. She had seen no other conclusion than to off herself (119-132). Consequently, to her return to the base camp, after finding the psychologist, the surveyor attacks the biologist in the marsh outside their camp by shooting her. She tries to ward her off and coax her into leaving Area X, but the surveyor refuses to leave, as she does not believe the biologist is human any longer and needs to be put down (144-148). Their actions relate to Royle's idea of the uncanny confronting human nature as their behaviors change in Area X (Royle 1). These happenings, alongside the biologist's exploration of the landscape, the Tower, and the lighthouse, all contribute to creating the novel's climax. Ultimately, their fight ends with the biologist shooting the surveyor in the head, exclaiming that: "Now it was just me"

(VanderMeer 147). At this moment, the novel's climax is reached, as she now lives in solitude in the apocalypse.

Moving toward the novel's denouement, the biologist explores the Tower and the area surrounding the lighthouse. She describes an alluring feeling toward the lighthouse, defining it as her object of desire (157). As she journeys to it, she feels a compulsion to explore the Tower, where the light within her illuminates the darkness she descends into (169-172). Here, she has an altercation with the Crawler, where her brightness inside protects her from its harm as she escapes it (180-186). Thereafter, she makes it to the lighthouse, and on her way there, she accepts her adornment of Area X: "The terrible thing, the thought I cannot dislodge after all I have seen, is that I can no longer say with conviction that this is a bad thing. Not when looking at the pristine nature of Area X and then the world beyond, which we have altered so much" (192). Herein, she admits to not being able to leave the apocalyptic wilderness and accepts that her fate is to stay.

Thus, the novel concludes without closure, as the denouement of it depicts how the biologist's adventures culminate with her abandoning the reader. She writes an account containing her experiences and afterward sets off deeper into Area X to find her husband rather than relinquishing her expedition's mission and retreat across the border (VanderMeer 193-195). The biologist and her teammates' escapades in the apocalyptic happening are what intrigue the readers, as it depicts a potential and unstoppable threat to Earth. The urge to know more about their findings in the apocalyptic area as well as what is going to happen to them, creates an alluring effect, which is common in apocalypticism. Hence, the apocalyptic interest in *Annihilation*'s storyworld is awoken amidst the world's presumed end (Booker and Thomas 61-62). Moreover, the element of defamiliarization is at play, as a part of the world has suddenly become alienated, thus stimulating the uncanniness of Area X. The uncanniness of the pristine yet transformed nature captives the reader, provoking interest in the unfamiliar aspect of the storyworld's place (Royle 23-24).

5.1.3.1 The structure of *Annihilation*'s plot

The biologist tells the story of her time in Area X, from beginning to middle to end. However, there are flashbacks of events from her childhood; one example is when she recalls herself exploring an ecosystem in an overgrown pool (VanderMeer 43-46), as well as memories of her husband, which the reader is presented with multiple times. She presents her discoveries about and detections of Area X and her curiosity about the mesmerizing landscape. Additionally, she unveils her secrets to

the reader, such as her contamination from the spores in the Tower (25-26). The way in which VanderMeer has created the narrator of the plot evokes the readers' epistemophilia, as the biologist's storytelling feeds into the readers' desire to know. This notion is equally what Ersoy depicted in his analysis of the novel, as he exclaims that Area X is not so different from our world (Ersoy 252).

In addition to the desire to know, some details are always excluded. The notion of ellipsis is prominent in *Annihilation*, as some details are often left out. The biologist even admits to omitting some parts and pieces of the story near the end of the novel, as she fears the entirety of some of the events might shape the reader's assumptions of her or the situation she is describing. Thus, she exclaims: "in this account thus far I have neglected to mention some details about the brightness. My reason for this is, again, the hope that any reader's initial opinion in judging my objectivity might not be influenced by these details" (VanderMeer 150). In this quotation, the ellipsis becomes a tool she uses to omit information she finds less important while still portraying what happened in those moments. Hereby, the biologist omits points wherein the brightness is controlling her behavior, making her an unreliable narrator, as she excludes parts of the apocalyptic happening. These happenings might even be apocalyptic actions, as her unreliability confuses the reader as to what was unintentional and what was premeditated.

Moreover, an ellipsis appears at the novel's end, as *Annihilation* has an open ending. The open ending symbolizes her acceptance of her adaptation to the changes Area X has developed within her. These changes steady her choice to stay embedded in the unknown. Arguably, there are two reasons for staying, which the biologist admits to the reader; one is that she decides to stay and search Area X for her missing husband. I will unfold and discuss this argument later in the analysis in regard to desire. The other reason the biologist presents is due to Area X's infiltration of her; she has become merely another organism in its world. A simple vessel for the mystical elements of Area X to evolve within:

> The brightness, which had already infiltrated my limbs, now seemed in one final surge to have been fought to a draw by my body, its progress stunted by the need to tend to my injuries. The cold symptoms had receded and the lightness, the heaviness, had been replaced by a constant sustaining hum within me and for a time an unsettling sensation, as of something creeping under my skin, forming a layer that perfectly mimicked the one that could be seen (151).

In this quote, it becomes apparent that the biologist is undergoing a change enforced by the spores she inhaled upon their first examination of the Tower (25). *Annihilation* then fits into O'Leary's interpretation of the apocalypse as an inevitable event, as the world's end has been inescapable since its beginning (O'Leary 6). The growing border of Area X appears to be the alpha and omega of the Earth, and the brightness is merely the beginning of the unavoidable end, as it effortlessly inhabits organisms and alters them. The biologist describes those alterations as unstoppable and as moving towards the eventual annihilation of the self (VanderMeer 151). The biologist depicts how the incandescent radiance alters her to such an extent that she feels as though the brightness is creating a replica of herself. Thus, she experiences Area X's transformations not only of the landscape but of herself too. The apocalyptic happening is an inconspicuous occurrence with an ability to manipulate the world as the readers know it (Bennett and Royle 34-35). Hence, the apocalypticism in *Annihilation* conforms to the general idea that apocalyptic tales satisfy its readers' curiosity and awe (Garrard 86); therefore, the horror which the biologist explores is captivating, and the eerie experiences produce an enthralling apocalyptic piece of fiction.

The biologist admits to feeling sensations of changes within her, which she excludes the other teammates' knowledge about (VanderMeer 34). She is obsessed with the changes she experiences after being exposed to Area X; therefore, she marks her thought as irrational when she believes the Tower to be a tower rather than a bunker or an underground tunnel (7). This statement marks the first unnatural event in the apocalyptic tale, expressing notions of uncanniness (Bennett and Royle 33). Moreover, the biologist states that she has a strong desire to submerge herself into Area X, as the engrossing place captivates her, and she has nothing to lose: "my existence back in the world had become at least as empty as Area X. With nothing left to anchor me, I *needed* to be here" (VanderMeer 12). However, the biologist cannot help but feel an attraction towards the hypnotic memorization of Area X, as expressed in the quote. Her urgency to connect with the troubled landscape is marked within the citation in italics; the word needed illustrates her stark desire to immerse herself in anything and everything the apocalyptic place has to offer. This evokes the reader's interest regarding what Booker and Thomas depict as the apocalyptic tale's fundamental element: exploring the apocalyptic event. Essentially, they perceive an apocalyptic tale to have an adventure woven into it, thus exhilarating the reader's interest in the journey through the apocalyptic event (Booker and Thomas 53). The biologist coming into Area X is where the apocalyptic adventure in *Annihilation* begins, as she immerses herself in the apocalyptic happening.

The biologist's call to adventure emerges upon her husband's return from the eleventh expedition. From the first moment of his arrival, she senses something off about him and questions whether or not this person is truly him (VanderMeer 55-58). She expresses that he acts more as an old friend rather than a lover and that she could never truly find the man whom he once had been (57). Arguably, this notion relates to her developing feelings of renunciation towards him for abandoning her (Barthes 13). At first, she is not supportive of his mission and entry into Area X, which could be seen as her refusal of the call, as the biologist tries to persuade him not to leave (VanderMeer 55). Alas, he is gone, and she decides to emerge herself into Area X as well, which induces the biologist's adventure, as she feels a deep need to be there (12).

However, in this case, the hero's journey of *Annihilation* does not follow its original structure, as the biologist disrupts the usual ending by refusing to follow the home-away-home structure. Instead of returning home, she decides to immerse herself even further into the apocalyptic place, abandoning her prior life and journey to explore a new landscape (195). Nevertheless, this aids in sparking interest within the reader, as the open ending proposes a new interest as to what happens afterward; thus, enforcing what Booker and Thomas pinpoint the apocalyptic hero's adventure is meant to do (Booker and Thomas 53). The biologist refusing to return to the other side of the border again adds to the reader's epistemophilia.

Therefore, the experiences the biologist depicts throughout her written account are intriguing to the reader. The uncanniness of Area X is fascinating, and the effects of reading the biologist's experiences with the uncanny capture the reader's lust to know more (Bennett and Royle 39). Furthermore, the alteration of the human mind and body upon arrival in Area X is part of the tale's apocalyptic events, such as when the biologist's senses become heightened to the extent of her being able to see individual raindrops pouring down (VanderMeer 74-75).

Area X's particular apocalyptic happening is seemingly due to a mutation of a part of the world, transforming the landscape and the living organisms that inhabit or enter it. Henceforth, it is arguable that the novel is written as a warning from a dystopian viewpoint. However, this novel is not nearly as much a warning as it is a plea for people to understand that we are amidst the apocalypse and that alterations to the climate are irreversible. Alas, the idea of an Area X, with a climate that is escapable, is a soothing thought compared to our world. We, as readers, are already in Area X; thus, there is no chance of escaping the changes of the environment. The changes in the

nature resemble uncanniness, as the nature in Area X is familiar yet estranged (VanderMeer 12-15; Bennett and Royle 37-39).

5.1.3.2 Climate crisis critique

One argument that is recurring in the discussion of *Annihilation* is the topic of climate fiction due to its context, as it depicts a part of the world wherein nature has been altered, not entirely, but enough to notice the changes. Moreover, the biologist believes she has been lied to regarding what truly is happening in Area X, expressing that: "I felt, in so many ways, that I was being lied to" (93). The changes that Area X is making to the landscape could debatably be due to VanderMeer depicting the effects that climate change has on the planet. This argument was also made by Issofidis and Garforth, which is presented in my literature review; they pinpoint that the radical changes in Area X's nature arguably are portrayed as a warning of potential future climate crises (Issofidis and Garforth 248-249). Therefore, the novel could debatably be analyzed as a dystopian tale, as they often are written as warnings regarding potential apocalyptic futures. However, it might not be as much a warning as it is a notion of letting the reader know that we are currently in Area X, as the alterations to the climate are happening in our entire world, and not in an excluded part of it. Booker and Thomas pinpoint dystopias as fictional works that portray issues in society, which could potentially result in the devastation of the world (Booker and Thomas 65). This notion relates to the entire atmosphere regarding Area X, as it is altering the biosphere of the landscape it consumes; Area X's antagonistic behavior is altering every living organism inside of its borders.

The first few encounters with the altered ecosystem do not bother the expedition team all that much, other than the eeriness of deteriorating villages and other signs of long-lost human inhabitance. They do not mind the alterations of nature all too much, not even the biologist, whom the reader would assume is interested in all biological organisms and the changes they have been exposed to (VanderMeer 5 + 12). However, she merely finds them desirable, as they relate to her epistemophilia in regard to gaining knowledge of Area X.

The team's first direct encounter with an alteration of an animal is a wild boar, which yearns in loud moans throughout the night. At their initial confrontation with the creature, the biologist describes the animal as orderly but with a sense of an unspecified, unnerving commodity:

> Nothing about its muzzle or broad, long face looked at all extraordinary, and yet I had the startling impression of some *presence* in the way its gaze seemed turned inward, and

> its head willfully pulled to the left as if there were an invisible bridle. A kind of electricity sparked in its eyes that I could not credit as real. I thought instead it must be a by-product of my now slightly shaky hand on the binoculars [...] I was searching for entirely rational biological theories (VanderMeer 16-17).

This encounter is startling to her, but in a way she cannot fully describe other than appalling, as there is something human about its presence, causing anthropomorphism (Bennett and Royle 34-35). The notion regarding elements anthropomorphism will be discussed later in the analysis concerning the examination of anthropomorphic elements in both *Annihilation* and *The Book of M*. Nonetheless, the unsettling transformation of animals is part of the apocalyptic happenings of Area X. Its alterations of what readers know as real becomes blurred with the brightness' influence, and thus depicts the apocalypse at hand: nature's modification, which is what Garrard refers to as an apocalyptic portrayal of a shadow-side within society (Garrard 86). In this case, it is the climate crisis and how it transforms and reshapes the premises of the ecosystem. The notion of warning is a recurring theme of apocalyptic and dystopian fiction, as they depict worlds wherein the alterations and transformations of Earth have appeared but could somehow have been avoided (Booker and Thomas 53 + 65). However, there is no notion in *Annihilation* as to how Area X came to be, nor any information as to how to halt the impending doom of the brightness. Yet, the inevitable cataclysm of Area X consuming the entirety of the Earth is not merely unimaginable, as nature recuperating the Earth is favorable for its recovery after humans have ruined pastoral landscapes by ruining pristine scenery to reside there. Withal, the way in which Area X transforms those who enter it is what presents the unnerving eeriness of place and its existence in the apocalyptic storyworld (Royle 1-3).

5.1.4 The affinity between the brightness and the shadowless

Both of these apocalyptic happenings in the two novels are unexplainable. They have equally magical elements encapsulating their stories, as they present actions that are impossible and inexplicable. Although, despite their different scenarios, similarities are present such as anthropomorphization, as the main characters in both novels experience natural elements and inanimate objects having human traits, which is portrayed throughout the novels multiple times as the characters move through the apocalyptic landscapes.

As mentioned in *The Book of M*, the main characters experience multiple anthropomorphisms of non-human and natural elements (Shepherd 131-132 + 139 + 257-259). Similarly, anthropomorphizations are showcased within *Annihilation* on multiple occasions but are especially hinted at when the biologist encounters a dolphin with eyes resembling those of her husband. Upon first encountering the dolphins, the biologist is shocked and taken aback by what she discovers:

> As they slid by, the nearest one rolled slightly to the side, and it stared at me with an eye that did not, in that brief flash, resemble a dolphin eye to me. It was painfully human, almost familiar. In an instant that glimpse was gone and they had submerged again, and I had no way to verify what I had seen [...] I had an unsettling thought that the natural world around me had become a kind of camouflage (VanderMeer 97-98).

The last sentence in this quote depicts how the biologist believes that Area X is changing and merging itself with the humans who enter it; within the natural, the unnatural is present. The entire quote resembles the uncanny, as Royle describes how it represents the manipulation of reality (Royle 1-3). Moreover, the biologist and the readers experience the uncomfortable truth that Area X conceivably consumes humans and alters them to fit into its vegetable world, which is seen with how the dolphin's eye has human resemblance (23-24). Her comment about the eye being almost familiar is thus the argument that the eye might belong to her husband, which makes this notion fit into the uncanny experience. Additionally, the biologist exclaims that what she is witnessing cannot be accurate, but she still ponders about the dolphin and its mesmerizingly eerie eye a few times throughout the rest of the novel, which is depicted on page 168 in *Annihilation*:

> In glimmers, in sheds of thought, in the aftermath of my reading, I wondered if he kept a journal still, or if the dolphin's eye had been familiar for a reason other than it was so human. But soon enough I banished this nonsense; some questions will ruin you if you are denied the answer long enough (VanderMeer 168).

This eeriness surrounding the eye and the possibility of it being something as impossible as a human eye is what makes the biologist recall and reconsider the encounter several times throughout her traverses in Area X. Moreover, repetitions within the plot are part of the uncanny, as it favors encountering the estranged notions multiple times (Bennett and Royle 34-35). Therefore, making the biologist return to these thoughts on multiple occasions is a way for VanderMeer to enhance the estrangement of the unfamiliar and truly represent the uncanniness of Area X. Additionally, in relation to the notion of her commenting about the eye potentially being familiar for other reasons than it looking human, is why I argue that she believes it symbolizes her husband. The reason for

this is due to her pondering about their resemblance immediately after reading her husband's journal (VanderMeer 167-168). Therefore, with this argument, the uncanny resemblance of the dolphin's eye to her husband's is a case of anthropomorphism, as it then could be argued that the dolphin actually is the husband, which Area X has turned into an animal.

However, a peculiar notion within the novel is when the biologist mentions that she dislikes the notion of antopromophization: "I despised anthropomorphizing animals" (78). Her ambiguity regarding this notion is bizarre as she antopromophizes both the boar and the dolphin herself. Thus, her anthropomorphzing animals could be an effect of the brightness within her, which now allows her to see animals as more than merely an object for her to study and observe, as she previously did, due to her profession.

Just as the magical elements and personifications alter reality in *The Book of M*, Area X presents an altered version of the Earth in *Annihilation*. Within VanderMeer's newfound world, humans are able to merge with natural elements or inanimate substances. This phenomenon in apocalyptic fiction applies to Garrard's notion of how apocalypticism interests the reader, as it evokes a sense of curiosity as to how and why the world has been transformed in this particular way. The modified version of our world is compelling, especially when presented in an ominously altered universe (Garrard 86). Moreover, the uncanny also favors altering inanimate objects to resemble humans, evoking eeriness within the characters of the story but also in the readers (Bennett and Royle 34-35). Thus, how VanderMeer and Shepherd alter and shape their apocalyptic storyworlds is what makes them remarkable examples of apocalyptic fiction, as they carry elements of magic alongside their eerie apocalypticism.

5.1.4.1 Inanimate embodiment

As mentioned above, nature and natural beings are anthropomorphized in *Annihilation*. Although, in VanderMeer's novel, the human resemblance is not only embedded in animals; it also sprouts directly from the Earth itself:

> Then, abruptly, something nudged against my boot, flopped over. I aimed my flashlight at the ground—and leapt back, gasping. Incredibly, a human face seemed to be rising out of the earth [...] A wide face, with a hint of pockmarks across the left cheek. The eyes were blank, sightless, staring. I felt as if I should recognize these features—that it

> was very important—but with them disembodied in this way, I could not (VanderMeer 140).

In this quote, the biologist is experiencing a face sprouting directly up through the ground. She wonders if she should know this face but cannot quite picture from where (140). Thus, the anthropomorphization of nature is used to showcase the biologist's confusion about how Area X operates and how the brightness encapsulates those who brave it. Yet, she somehow finds comfort in the unnerving encounter, as it embodies the disturbingness of the strange place she has willingly entered (140). Here, she is experiencing something that is seemingly familiar in an unfamiliar setting, which is the essence of the uncanny (Bennett and Royle 33). The allurement of this strange alteration is what draws the biologist to go further into Area X. Moreover, the estranged nature is ultimately what eventually keeps her there, alongside the potential of finding her husband, which she later admits to believing was the face rising out of the earth (VanderMeer 194). The eerieness of the brightness within her and its transformations of Earth persuades her into staying and examining the altered realm in addition to her mission of finding her husband (194-195).

One difference between the two novels is how the anthropomorphization of nature and other objects distorts *Annihilation*'s main character's mind, estranging her perception of the nature around her. The modification of natural elements are unfathomable to the biologist, especially the alterations that are happening which seem human, such as the dolphin's eye, as referred to earlier in the analysis (VanderMeer 97). She ponders about them and how they came to be, whereas in *The Book of M*, the characters accept that they cannot understand why or how these changes have come to be, but they deal with them and acknowledge the alterations of the cosmos as part of their new world. Although Ory describes his confusion about the state of the world and how it has been made anew within the post-apocalyptic cataclysm (Shepherd 17), he adapts to the newfound state of the world and acclimates himself into society as it is now (417-418). In *The Book of M*, there is no major discussion of the alterations of the Earth, no matter how many they come across; however, in *Annihilation*, the biologist examines and contemplates each unnatural occurrence. This might arguably be due to her profession, and her argument that she is consumed by her work and has been it ever since she was a child when she was fascinated with an overgrown pool and its ecosystem in her childhood home's backyard (43-46). Nevertheless, the obsession could additionally be due to her experiencing the drawing effects of the apocalypse's uncanniness, which relates to Royle's

notion of wanting to explore the uncomfortableness in the familiar (Royle 23-24). As a consequence thereof, the biologist allows her passion and inquisitiveness to take the lead (VanderMeer 195).

Thus, the difference between the two novels is arguably that in one of them, the characters let the apocalyptic event consume them, whereas in the other novel, they adapt to changes in the apocalyptic happening. This relates to O'Leary's description of a tragic or a comic apocalyptic story (Garrard 87-88). *Annihilation* is seemingly tragic when analyzing it through O'Leary's description, as it portrays the biologist letting the apocalyptic event consume her, whereas the majority of *The Book of M* is comically framed due to the characters adapting and shaping their lives according to the post-apocalyptic normalcy while trying to find a cure to fight the evil of the apocalyptic happening (O'Leary 63). The biologist, however, becomes part of the apocalyptic event, causing it to become an apocalyptic action, as she, at the novel's end, chooses to let the brightness consume her (VanderMeer 191-192). Thus, the two novels battle the question of preventing the apocalypse; the biologist in *Annihilation* decides to let Area X asorbs her, whereas the main characters in *The Book of M* travel across the country in search of a cure, consequently making them examples of the two different variations of O'Leary's apocalyptic framing.

5.1.4.2 Adapting to or being consumed by the apocalypse

The abovementioned statement of *The Book of M* being under the comic frame of O'Leary apocalypse for the most part is due to Max, as the other three characters are what makes the story a comic apocalypse. However, Max is consumed by the apocalypse as the essence of the apocalyptic happening entangles itself in her and rids her of her shadow and memories. If the novel was merely from her point of view, I argue that the story would then be under O'Leary's tragic frame of apocalypse, as she does not overcome the inevitable doom (Garrard 87-88). The singular reason for her existence at the end of the novel is due to a member of her group, Ursula, surviving and bringing Max's tape with her to New Orleans, where The One Who Gaters merges her memories and thus shadow, with Ursula's body, and therefore her memories awoke again (Shepherd 450). This is why I made the argument earlier about how the apocalyptic event in *The Book of M* is an action later on in the novel, when the readers follow Max's tape recordings, as she admits to giving up parts of herself to the apocalypse in order to get to New Orleans (330). This notion, unfortunately, becomes the end for her bodily self, as she lets the pull take all of her to reach their end goal (378-379). In the end, she exclusively reenters the tale due to Ursula reincarnating Max's memories. It even states that the tape recorder's shadow fights The One Who Gathers as he tries to

connect it to Ursula's body, as it arguably knows it is not its true possessor (469). Therefore, when split into two different tales, the novel could potentially be tragic when relating it to Max's apocalyptic journey, even despite M accepting her fate and continuing on with her newfound chance at life. This is due to Max arguably dying as she does not reach New Orleans with Ursula too, and alas, cannot be reconnected with her memories. Arguably, this is the tragic conclusion to the apocalyptic tale (Garrard 87). However, when depicting the story through the other three characters, the tale is a comic apocalyptic frame, as they all find a way to survive the apocalyptic happening and thus build a new life; Naz and Ory as lovers (Shepherd 480), and The One Who Gathers as a shadow-giver (481-482). In the end, however, all four characters receive a somewhat comic ending, as M decides she cannot be Max, despite having her memories, and decides to try to become a new person for herself and for Max, too (485). Here, she searches for the positives in her situation instead of resorting to creating havoc as a tragic frame would have done (Garrard 87-88), accepting that Max's memories of love for Ory must be put aside for them both to live comfortably ignoring her feelings, which Belsey depicts can be a relentless experience (Belsey 3-7).

Compared to *The Book of M*, the biologist of *Annihilation* finds herself amused by the strange and everchanging landscape of Area X. The reshaped biological elements excite her, and she is ignited by the estranged alteration of the world to practice her research of the landscape. As a cause of this, she decides to let the brightness consume her and stay in the mesmerizing haze in search of her missing husband (VanderMeer 192-195). Thus, VanderMeer's novel applies to what O'Leary explains is a tragic apocalypse (Garrard 87), as the ending presents a character who has chosen to let the post-apocalypse absorb her, as she acknowledges her attraction to the apocalyptic landscape and her eagerness to explore it and to let it consume her wholly (VanderMeer 192). Therefore, the notion of the novel's essence is that it essentially falls under the tragic category due to her calamitous conclusion of deciding to become a part of the apocalyptic happening (O'Leary 63). Nevertheless, there is a notion of desire, as, despite the desire of epistemophelia, the desire to find her lover is apparent, thus relating to the quest to find one's romantic object (Boone 73). Additionally, this evokes the desire for closure within the reader, which they unfortunately are robbed of experiencing, as *Annihilation* uses traits of romance literature wherein they omit the union between the subject and the object, according to Belsey (Belsey 208-209).

However, despite these notions, what is interesting about *Annihilation* is my argument that VanderMeer experiments with creating a novel wherein the ending has elements of both the tragic

and the comic apocalypse (Garrard 87), as neither of the two truly fit the novel's ending. She surrenders herself to the apocalypse, yet she does so in order to reconnect with her husband in whatever sense that might be (VanderMeer 195).

In the novel, there are little to no joyful moments throughout the thrilling plot. Moreover, at the novel's end, the biologist journeys off into the uncharted parts of the apocalyptic landscape, as she has no intention of leaving Area X or the possibility of recovering her lost husband (194-195). This notion leaves the ending open, as the reader does not know what will happen to the biologist from this point onward. Henceforth, this relates to O'Leary's notion of comic-framed apocalypses being open-ended (Garrard 87). Assuming that the novel is under the tragic category, the biologist would become absorbed by the apocalypse entirely, as we experience with Max from *The Book of M*, when she is giving up her memories to the Forgetting's pull (Shepherd 378-379). However, being absorbed by the apocalypse leaves the situation regarding Area X unresolved once more, as it was with all of the previous expeditions (VanderMeer 4). An ending wherein the biologist would essentially have become part of Area X's landscape, as either a part of the vegetation or the animal life, would have left the readers unsettled, as there is no notion of what happens to someone being anthropomorphized; however, it would have been concluded, as the ending would be her becoming a part of the apocalypse entirely. Still, it would have fallen under O'Leary's tragic ending, as the biologist would give in to the cataclysmic final of Area X's intentions: making her wholly a part of its world (Garrard 87). Nevertheless, this element is only partially present, as *Annihilation*'s ending is open; thusly, it is not completely a tragic apocalypse, as there is still potential for adaptation of the apocalypse rather than consumption thereof.

Withal, the novel does not fall under the comic category either, as the readers are short of a reunion between the biologist and her husband (Belsey 208-209), as well as her adaptation and ability to live alongside the apocalyptic happening rather than inside of it (Garrard 87). Her exiting Area X with him, alongside a solution to cure the apocalyptic place's expansion, would have completed a comic ending to the apocalyptic tale. Nonetheless, her acceptance of the state of Area X and her husband potentially being out there is arguably a notion that fits into the comic frame, as she finds the positive in her situation: she cannot go back, as she is too consumed with the brightness, so instead she decides to find her husband (VanderMeer 194), thus, going on a journey to find her lover (Boone 73). Therefore, the ending could be debated as comic as well as tragic. However, these notions are arguably the reasoning behind why *Annihilation* can and cannot be put under either the comic or tragic category, as the reader is left both with and without answers to

questions such as: Do the fascinating alterations consume her? What more can she explore in the alienated area? Is her husband still alive? And lastly, why will she not exit the apocalyptic place without her husband? Thus, loss becomes her motivator to find him; she has nothing more to lose, but the potential of gaining him keeps her going. Their potential reunion overthrows her feelings of renunciation (Barthes 11-13).

Moreover, the aspect of an open ending is what allows me to argue that *Annihilation* falls within neither of the two, as O'Leary describes that a tragic main character engulfs themself in the calamity, whereas, in contrast, the comic character aims to overcome it (O'Leary 63). Withal, the biologist does neither of the two, as the novel concludes with her deciding to submerge herself into the apocalyptic landscape with no intentions to either overcome it or fight against it; she simply wants to live in it (VanderMeer 192). Moreover, she urges the reader of her journal not to search for her if they were to find her belongings, portraying that there is no element of sorrow or sympathy within the readers upon the biologist confining her secrets in the journal, as she is confident in her choices and does not reveal any anguishing feelings in regards to staying in Area X and potentially being consumed by the brightness (VanderMeer 192-195). On the contrary, *The Book of M* finalizes with the characters finding a potential cure and thus fighting against the apocalyptic happening (Shepherd 484-485).

5.1.4.3 The end of the self

Other resemblances between the two novels are their notions of extremely few chapters and the omission of names. At the birth of a new world, the omission of the old one is necessary to move on to adapt to it (Garrard 85). Thus, the expedition team of *Annihilation* is forced to omit their names upon signing up for the mission, as the Southern Reach wanted them to focus entirely on the mission and not each other: "We were meant to be focused on our purpose, and "anything personal should be left behind." Names belonged to where we had come from, not to who we were while embedded in Area X" (VanderMeer 9). Furthermore, the biologist states that names were a luxurious essential that belonged to the outside world:

> I had not seen a name or heard a name spoken aloud for months, and seeing one now bothered me deeply. It seemed wrong, as if it did not belong in Area X. A name was a dangerous luxury here. Sacrifices didn't need names. People who served a function didn't need to be named. In all ways, the name was a further and unwanted confusion to me, a dark space that kept growing and growing in my mind (134-135).

Here, the biologist makes it clear that names became an estranged concept while being embedded in Area X, and thus, names are considered unnecessary elements in apocalypses.

Additionally, in Shepherd's novel, Ursula gives up her name, and essentially her identity, to break them free of their prison at the Transcendence's camp by giving some part of herself to the Forgetting (Shepherd 310-313). Not only does she forget her own name, the entire group of shadowless she travels with do so, too, including Max:

> I waited for her to tell me what she'd just given up. Then I realized what it was. "I don't remember it either," I said. Somehow she had forgotten it, and then forgotten it for all of us as well. "I'm sorry." She shook her head. "It's all right." [...] "It was just a name. There was hardly anything left to it anyway." (347).

She gives up her name and, ultimately, who she is to save the rest of the group. Her willingness to forget herself is a sacrifice she makes in order for them to survive the apocalypse; however, this tragic effect portrays the essence of the reader's paranoia, as this novel depicts the fear of losing who you are as a person when you forget your memories, which could essentially be a very real apocalyptic happening to a person with amnesia (Garrard 86). Thus, the novel essentially uses the loss of names and identity as portrayals of living with amnesia or alzheimers and the fear bound with that occurrence. However, it might not be an apocalyptic end of the world entirely, but it might just be the end of the world for one individual, which is why I argue that this notion fits under Garrard's idea of apocalyptic fiction being created on the basis of the readers' fear and curiosities (86).

Therefore, the loss or abandonment of names is essentially a choice made by the characters in order to depict the end of their former selves. The disregard for identity is ultimately why the names become abandoned in the two novels, as in *Annihilation,* the biologist ends her former pre-brightness self and decides she favors who she has become in Area X (VanderMeer 192). Whereas, within *The Book of M,* the novel depicts the end of Max, as it ultimately describes how M came to be by being forced to obliterate all remainders of Max; she must do so in order to move on and live her life after being shut down by the one she loves unconditionally. Alas, she is forced to put her name and identity behind her and become M (Shepherd 482-483). Thus, the two novels assign themselves part of Thompson's notion of the anxiety rooted in apocalypse, as he depicts that humans are condemned to experience their own personal apocalypse (Thompson 332-333), which is

what M and the biologist experience by letting go of their identities. The abandonment of their names is the apocalypse of who they once were.

Therefore, the aspect of loss is present within both apocalypticism and desire, which leads me to analyze elements of desire further in the following segment. Herein, I scrutinize moments of desire within the two novels and how it relates to the theories regarding romance literature despite the fictional works being apocalyptic novels rather than romance fiction.

5.2 Love, loss, and desire

An ominous event of a world different than what one is used to is equally as rigorous as loving and being abandoned by someone. Barthes describes abandonment by one's lover as calamitous to the one who is deserted (Barthes 10-11 + 13). This abandonment is what both Ory of *The Book of M* and the biologist of *Annihilation* experience when realizing their lovers are gone. Their lover's presence haunts their memories upon the realization of them aiding in getting them through the apocalyptic happenings.

Within these storyworlds, it is apparent that the main characters desire their partners in one way or another. Ory braves the newfound world to reunite with his partner, Max, and the biologist enters Area X in search of her vanished husband. What draws each of the characters into their equally eerie and unknown apocalyptic landscapes is the search for their partners.

5.2.1 Desire depicted in incandescent radiance

Upon reading *Annihilation*, one's first thought might not be of desire, which is the reasoning behind the examination of the biologist and her husband's desire in this thesis. Mainly, the biologist does not often speak fondly of her late husband, and, what is more, most of her memories of him and their relationship are antagonistic (VanderMeer 76-78). Yet still, there are points where desire shines through her forlorn perspective of him; here, their love becomes clear, and her longing is reflected. One of these longing and loving moments is when she braves an attack by the moaning creature of the night; she hides out in a tree and clutches her husband's account as a protective shield: "I held my husband's journal to my chest like a talisman to ward off the night" (VanderMeer 143). In this quotation, the biologist arguably feels protected by her husband's essence, as his journal is what gives her the ability to ascend the Tower and face the Crawler once more. However, shortly after this thought, as she is contemplating the brightness within her and how it feels, she

expresses that her husband would have tried to diminish it and cure her from the illuminating change, which she does not want. Thus, there is an existential conflict within her upon letting her husband love her completely. Reluctantly, she admits to this towards the novel's end, wherein she confesses that she was not a good lover to him, although she did indeed love him (188). She even declares to the reader that she wishes she had entered Area X equally as much for him as she did for herself when reminiscing a conversation between them from before he left for his mission:

> "Ghost bird, I'm afraid now," he said. "I'm afraid and I have a selfish thing to ask. A thing I have no right to ask." "Ask it anyway." I was still angry, but in those last days I had become reconciled to my loss, had compartmentalized it so I would not withhold my affection from him [...] "Will you come after me if I don't come back? If you can?" "You're coming back," I told him [...] How I wish, beyond reason, that I had answered him, even to tell him no. And how I wish now—even though it was always impossible—that, in the end, I *had* gone to Area X for him (189).

Herein, she blatantly expresses that she truly wishes that she had gone to Area X for him, but her self-centeredness controls her. In her own way, she does love him, but in the end, she loves herself more. Referring to Barthes' fragment of absence, the biologist has been dismantling herself from her husband throughout their entire relationship but admits to doing it by accepting her loss before he even departed to Area X (189). Thus, in this case, the lover's absence is not a vessel for the subject's growing affection but rather a berth where the remainder of her love finally succumbs (Barthes 13-17). However, the result of the loss is additionally what then dries her to stay: "I will follow my husband up the cost, up past the island, even. I don't believe I'll find him—I don't need to find him—but I want to see what he saw. I want to feel him close, as if he is in the room. And, if I'm honest, I can't shake the sense that he is *still here*, somewhere, even if utterly transformed—in the eye of a dolphin, in the touch of an uprising of moss, anywhere and everywhere" (VanderMeer 194). She is content with even finding more anthropomorphized remnants of her husband in the nature if she cannot have him. Nonetheless, despite her declaration to stay in Area X to search for her lover, the desire is arguably not merely to scrutinize the lands for him but is potentially used as an excuse to stay and explore as much as possible of the apocalyptic wilderness and the brightness that inhabits her (195). Essentially, these two could be related if she is right in her perception of him potentially being consumed by Area X's apocalypse and thus transformed into the dolphin and the moss (194). Furthermore, this ending differs from what Belsey argues is the romance tale's plot's bane of existence, which is the satisfaction of reconciliation between the lovers (Belsey 23). In

VanderMeer's novel, he bereaves the readers of this satisfaction as he lets the reunion between the two linger as a possibility and not as a requirement. Thus, the healing of their love lies in her promise to search Area X of her husband, as depicted above (23).

The husband is experiencing Barthes' notion of "Fade-out" (Barthes 112), wherein Barthes depicts the anguishing feelings of the object withdrawing themselves from the relationship, evoking feelings of unreasoned abandonment. This is clearly depicted when the husband tries his best to converse with the biologist, but she disregards his attempts and thus his feelings as he begs for her love (VanderMeer 189). He has clearly, which she acknowledges, begun to feel her drifting away due to her job and her slowly losing feelings; she depicts her feeling that they have been fading out for quite a while, too (55). However, upon his clone's return, she has intercourse with him in order to relate to his physical existence at that very moment, as she, during the act, looks for any signs that he still is who he had been before he left: "I was trying to reclaim remnants of the man I remembered [...] I could never get beyond the mask, could never find the man I had known inside of him" (57). This is the biologist's attempt to create intimacy between the subject and the object through intercourse (Belsey 26-33). Unfortunately, she finds no traits of her husband and thus believes this person to be a replica of him (VanderMeer 56-57).

However, despite their skulking fallout, the sense that he might still be in Area X makes the biologist turn to her husband to overcome certain situations multiple times through the plot. One of these instances is when she and the surveyor are exploring the Tower, and she expresses that: "Instead, I "got my shit together," as my husband used to say" (VanderMeer 42). In this sense, the husband is present, as she uses him to force herself through tough situations with him as her encouragement.

As previously stated, the biologist did apply to go to Area X to find him equally as much as to explore the eerie part of the world. This notion applies to Boone's depiction of romance tale's quests of escapism; however, in this case, it is a woman liberated from the marriage only to find that she does indeed want to be with her husband after all (Boone 278-281). At the novel's end, she admits to wanting to reunite, depicting her longing for her husband after reading his journal (VanderMeer 160-168). Additionally, it relates to Barthes' concept of absence and embrace (Barthes 15), as in their absence, they have only grown fonder of each other, which is especially seen in the husband's journal entries, wherein he describes how much he believes the biologist would have loved Area X and exclaims that he would have understood her better if they had

explored the landscape together. Thus, the following quote is a declaration of love and his longing for her:

> Seeing all of this, experiencing all of it, even when it's bad, I wish you were here. I wish we had volunteered together. I would have understood you better here, on the trek north. We wouldn't have needed to say anything if you didn't want to. It wouldn't have bothered me. Not at all. And we wouldn't have turned back. We would have kept going until we couldn't go farther (VanderMeer 167).

This causes her to feel proud of him for exploring the unknown, and she believes it to be their most intimate moment. Arguably, this is due to her experiencing him doing something she loves and longs to do: exploring the wilderness and telling her how much he enjoyed exploring it too, but how he would have loved it more with her by his side (162-168). Thus, their absence makes their admiration for each other grow, as in both perspectives, the subject's love for the object is roused upon losing one another. Their love has evolved by them losing each other. Furthermore, Barthes' notion of waiting appeals to, as the biologist is not in a state where she craves her object of desire; the husband (Barthes 37-40). Therefore, the culmination of *Annihilation*'s love plot is the quest the biologist embarks on; when she decides to search for her husband in Area X. She embarks the quest of desire (Boone 72-73) upon reading his last pages in the journal, where he tells her: "If you ever read this, that is where I am going. That is where I will be" (VanderMeer 168) regarding him traveling up the coastline and exploring the island closeby. As a result thereof, robbing them of a union is VanderMeer's way of prolonging the effect of desire, according to Belsey's notion of withholding closure from the reader (Belsey 208-209).

5.2.2 To spend the end of the world alone or with your lover?

Arguably, Ory and the biologist both enter unknown territory to look for their partners. They abandon their versions of safety and decide to explore the newfound world to brave the apocalypse in search of their loved ones, who have vanished from the face of the earth. Although dystopian tales' primary focus is on the apocalypse at hand, it oftentimes has an adventure intertwined with the story of heroic status, according to Booker and Thomas (Booker and Thomas 61). Within these two novels, the adventure at hand is the journey to find and reunite with their lost objects of love. This scenario fits the two novels, yet, as they fall under apocalyptic fiction, the apocalypticism at hand confiscates their happy, romantic endings, withholding their lovers reconciling at the end (Belsey 21-23). In *The Book of M*, Naz, who becomes Ory's new lover, as he believes Max is gone

forever, expresses this notion in the following quote when she finds out that Max is alive and Ory's inevitable reunion with her:

> It should have been the most romantic story in the world: wife loses her memory and disappears, husband traverses the country, braving wilderness and war to find her, against million-to-one odds (Shepherd 460).

For Naz, luck is that Max's shadow has been wrongly reattached to a different subject. Thus, Ory cannot picture his wife in this other body and can, therefore, not connect with her, although the new body now contains remnants of Max: her memories. The way he discards her, because she no longer is within her own body, is hurtful to M, as she feels as though she truly is Max (470-471). Moreover, M believes that Naz cannot truly replace her, as she feels they are caught in a love triangle (479-480). This notion is confirmed by Ory, as he describes that he blames his adornment of Naz on the fact that Max must have forgotten him, otherwise he would not be able to love somebody else, expressing that he has to move on as he: "didn't want Max to forget him, but she had anyway. Now he wanted to forget *her*, and couldn't" (423). His love for Max is undying, but he feels that his love for Naz is a result of him moving on (422-423). Thus, both Ory and M make the distinction that the new object of desire, Naz, can never truly replace his first desire, Max, which relates to Belsey's notion of the first love being irreplaceable. Therefore, Naz cannot ever be Max, but neither can M; thus, Naz will act as a surrogate for Ory's original desired object (Belsey 50-51). Furthermore, what M feels upon seeing the two together is what Barthes depicts as the orange (Barthes 110-111) due to feelings of resentment and envy appearing in Max as she witnesses Naz and Ory together (Shepherd 479).

Naz, however, feels remorse for herself and what she and Ory could have become if they had gotten the chance: "To find anyone again after what had happened was nothing short of a miracle. [...] But this was different. Zhang had added to Naz's life, but she had taken Max's place in his" (459). The last line is especially heartwrenching as Naz realizes she can never truly fill Ory's heart, as Max is the entirety of it (459-460), stating that she too realizes she is Max's replacement (Belsey 50-51). This exact feeling Naz portrays makes Ory and Max's reunion feel excruciating, as they are finally reunited, but nothing is the same, nor will it ever be. Desire is rooted in memory, and to Ory, the memories in Ursula's body will never be Max, as she cannot ever truly be her (Shepherd 484). To M, Ory is still her entire world, although she realizes that they can never be what they once were or even be together. She regains her memories only to be discarded for them, as the memories do not fit the body they are in. She then, to put herself in Ory's place, tries to imagine if his memories

were entangled in someone else's body and then asks herself: "Would I still love you like I love you now? Or would I fail to see you just as you'd failed to see me?" (485). What this quote portrays is the concept of being able to love your partner, despite their appearance. To Ory, Max does not exist anymore, although the entirety of her memories are now encapsulated in another body. Despite this, M makes it a point to indicate that although her appearance may halter, she is still partly Max by expressing their saying in which he asks her blue, and she answers fifty-two: "I will remember it. For myself, for you, and for Max. Fifty-two" (485). Max will be a part of her forevermore, although she has to let her go because Ory has done so. In his mind, Max has died, and therefore M must annihilate Max to some extent as well.

Between Ory and Max, love and desire is portrayed plenty of times throughout the novel, despite the ominous theme of the story. Max, whose memories are fleeing, clings to the one thing she loves the most: Ory. Even in her darkest of times, with the tiniest amount of memories left within her, she still thinks of Ory: "I refuse to forget. It took all of me, but I refuse to let it have the last thing, which is you. Ory. I remember you. I remember your name. I remember your face" (379). When the Forgetting has gotten its strongest hold of her, Ory is her anchor to who she is; he is her anchor. When the memories seem to be lost, the thoughts that remain are dedicated to him. Barthes' idea of "the image of an embrace" (Barthes 15) is what keeps her going. Although, when she left, it was because Max views herself as a liability due to her memory loss and acts out of love when she decides to leave him to avoid potentially ruining him by watching her existence deteriorate (Shepherd 53-55).

Max tries to protect Ory by abandoning him, leaving him to follow after her because, to him, the sole purpose as lovers is to be together. Barthes describes this concept through his fragment called "catastrophe" (Barthes 48). Herein, the path Barthes describes that the lover believes they cannot stray away from is portrayed by how Ory emerges into the post-apocalyptic wilderness to reunite (Shepherd 48-49). Ory's heart is broken by her abandonment, and his purpose then becomes to reunite with her once again. What Barthes describes as "the image of an embrace" (Barthes 15) is what keeps both Max and Ory going as they believe they will, someway and somehow, reunite.

But braving the post-apocalyptic wilderness, war, and shadowless people does not end in the exhilaration of a reunion, as, despite their efforts and everything they have been through to achieve the moment of reunion, Ory fails to love Max for who she is now that her appearance does not

match how she used to look. Therefore, as aforementioned earlier in the analysis, to soothe the part of Max that is lost, M tells Ory about the adventures and encounters Max made after she abandoned him. This eases his relation to Max and M, as he can now mourn his loss, and M can regain a new life; although this new life will be without him: "For you, it was death. For me, it was life" (Shepherd 484). Thus, this becomes their way of abandoning the relationship completely. What should have been the reunion worthy of the most incredible love became a heartwrenching tale of desire that could conquer calamity but not an alteration of a face. Hence, Shepherd delivers an ill-fated love story that fits apocalypticism's havoc and misfortune.

Therefore, their love story falls under O'Leary's notion of a tragic apocalypse, as Ory becomes engrossed in his victimage of Max's abandonment, and when he finally reunites with her, he fails to love her as the new exterior cannot match the old, despite the interior being Max entirely. Thus, an epiphany does not occur between the two because the relationship between them becomes estranged. By means of this, the interruption of their usual pattern has been disturbed, and it causes them to drift apart. This result is the opposite of what Belsey underlines about the development of desire in love stories, as she states the lovers usually realize their connection is based upon faithful love, and they embrace their relationship (Belsey 21-23). In this instance, as Ory and Max do not reconcile, the readers are left without the relief of a positive reunion; thus, giving the love the readers root for the same apocalyptic fate as the state of the world. In this novel, love is determined by loss, as he sets after her because of his love for her; however, he believes her to be gone, as she does not resemble herself anymore. Thereby, their love suffers an apocalyptic event in the same sense that the world has suffered one; the apocalyptic happening has altered them, too.

However, Shepherd's post-apocalyptic story still has elements of romance, love, and desire sprawled throughout its apocalypticism. The readers experience little glimpses of desire throughout the story; thus, desire is arguably prominent within apocalyptic tales. In the instance of *The Book of M*, desire is an element of hope to the characters therein; and without the hope, there would have been no traverses of the post-apocalyptic landscape, as Max would have had no reason to leave, and Ory would have had no reason to chase after her. Thus, therein lies the desire.

Within this thesis, the argument is to discover how, through *The Book of M* and *Annihilation*, the main characters are made prone to heteronormative tendencies, such as desire and fear. These tendencies encapsulate their resemblances to the readers; by portraying desire in the midst of danger and uncertainty makes the tale far more captivating and enables the reader to mirror themselves to

the character's situation in some aspects, such as chasing a long lost lover. The basis for writing elements from the romance trope in an apocalyptic novel are made on the notion that the characters must be relatable to the reader to evoke their epistemophilia (Boone 214-215). According to Belsey, Barthes, and Boone, desire is a relatable phenomenon, which is the reason for the genre's popularity, and the reason for it merging into other genres, such as apocalypticism. Therefore, by adding elements of desire and love into apocalyptic tales, authors reach an even greater sense of epistemophilia, as suddenly, it is not only the potential of the imagined disaster that is desirable to the readers, but also conjointly the element of love within the tale, too.

What these two apocalyptic novels have in common with romantic tales is the element of a character braving the world to be with their lover. In *The Book of M*, the heroic adventure, which Booker and Thomas reference (Booker and Thomas 53 + 61-62), is Ory's search for Max, whereas, within *Annihilation*, it is when the biologist decides to stay in Area X to hopefully reunite with her husband (VanderMeer 194-195). This notion is arguably the common denominator between apocalypses and desire; the ambition to confront the conflict at hand, whether that is the loss of your desired object or the loss of one's reality.

6.0 Conclusion

Taking all the abovementioned statements into consideration, I conclude that desire and apocalypse are closely linked due to the sense of loss depicted within the two novels. Apocalypticism and desire are two notions that both thrive whenever a loss is at play, which is prominent in my comparative analysis and discussion of *Annihilation* and *The Book of M*. The loss depicted is either of one's love or the state of the world as the characters once knew it. Thus, this notion encapsulates the essence of this thesis as my argument is that apocalyptic novels with elements of desire portray apocalypticism as desirable reads due to their notion of surviving the end and losing everything yet being able to endure the worst. This concept is what O'Leary, Booker, Thomas, Garrard, and Graham all depict as well; apocalyptic fiction thrives on depicting endurance and the desire to live, even through the worst of times. Thus, both VanderMeer's and Shepherd's novels applies to the apocalyptic genre by depicting storyworlds that have altered and manipulated the world. Moreover, they additionally relate to Boone, Belsey, and Barthes' notions of desire, as they depict lovers who long for each other but are withheld of their ultimate reunion, thus enforcing how love is measured

by loss, as the characters of the two novels endure the imminent end of the world to try to be with their partners.

In conclusion, the main characters within these eerie storyworlds depict elements of desire aimed towards their respective partners throughout the entirety of the plots, despite experiencing the havoc of the apocalypses they explore. Ory braves the world of the shadowless in order to reunite with his run-away wife, Max, and the biologist entering the potentially deadly Area X to find the unaltered version of her husband. Hereby, the notion of reunion and the potential of embrace draws the characters into the estranged and treacherous worlds. Ultimately, the biologist's inquisitiveness gets the better of her, and thus she finds herself immersed in the apocalyptic happening. The same notion happens to Max as she lets the Forgetting take her memories entirely. However, the positive aspects of the apocalyptic events is the experience of going against defeat and, thus, the notion that one can keep going beyond the end, which is portrayed by both Max, Ory, and the biologist, as they survive the apocalyptic happenings, despite having been cocooned in their shelters. An end usually signifies a new beginning; therefore, I argue that the demise of the world offers an opportunity for the birth of a new one, and thereby, there is potential for continuing on after the worst possible events. I state that the biologist continues on in the hopes of finding her husband, and Ory conquers by helping The One Who Gathers cure the shadowless. Thus, they find new aspects of desire, as their previous ones were the nature for the biologist and finding Max for Ory. Their losses are depicted multiple times throughout the two novels as loss of the self and identity, loss of partners, loss of life as it once was, and the world as it used to be. All of these losses are presented in both novels; yet, despite the loss, the biologist uses hers to decide upon staying in Area X, and Ory losing Max, and eventually, Max losing Ory becomes their reasons to move on.

Within the novels, their storyworld's encapsulate elements of the uncanniness of apocalyptic events that are enthralled with magical elements depicted in both the characters and the nature of their worlds. This notion is especially experienced by the readers as a rhetorical figure of anthropomorphization is frequently used throughout both of the novels. Here, I argue that the novels portray loss in the sense of the demise of humankind and nature, as they are altered completely by the two novel's respective apocalyptic happenings through Bennett, Royle, and Graham's key points.

However, I also discuss that what is lost is given back in the sense of nature adapting and altering itself to consume humans and make them part of the earth. This is portrayed through Ory witnessing the human-shaped trees and the biologist experiencing a human face emerging from the earth. In these notions, the apocalyptic storyworlds and the characters therein have adapted to the apocalyptic happenings. Arguably, it is proven that apocalypses are adaptable to those who find themselves therein and that desire is a driving force to survive it.

Therefore, in conclusion, my analysis answers how the characters of *Annihilation* and *The Book of M* depict and experience loss as a magnifier of love. The main characters would have never set out to explore the apocalyptic landscapes if it were not for their separations from their partners and the anguishing feelings of abandonment this left them with. I argue that Ory and the biologist are both driven by the beliefs of a potential union as their reasoning for braving the apocalyptic happenings, as the thought of reuniting with their desired objects keeps them alive. However, as discussed, each of the novel's withholds the union of the lovers as neither the biologist nor her husband, as well as Ory and the true Max, does not reunite by the two novels' endings. This, I argue, is Shepherd and VanderMeer's ways of following the structural ending of a romance tale, yet giving the story the cataclysmic end of the apocalyptic genre rather than the cathartic reunion of the lovers.

Thus, the answer to my research question is that desire is closely tied in all fictional work, but especially in apocalyptic literature, as apocalypticism portrays the epistemophilia of the world's end. Hence, desire is already present in the reader before the tale even begins, as the reason for choosing to engulf oneself in apocalyptic literature is due to the desire to know how to survive the end of the world.

Moreover, love is displayed as a product of loss in the two novels, as in VanderMeer's *Annihilation*, the biologist enters Area X with the potential occurrence of finding the unaltered version of her husband, who she presumes dead. In Shepherd's *The Book of M*, Max leaves Ory to protect him from the Forgetting, thus deciding that losing him is the best way to guard him from harm. Ory, on the other hand, braves the post-apocalyptic landscape, which he has sheltered himself from, in order to find Max. Thus, it is concluded that what drives the main characters is the love they experience as a result of the abandonment and loss of their desired objects.

Consequently, these two novels are portrayals of how the romance genre and apocalypticsm merge together in enthralling tales of love, loss, desire, and survival. Therefore, the conclusion to

my research question is that loss is the powerhouse of apocalypticism and desire, as it is the source of the character’s survival and overcoming the circumstances, they find themselves in. Thus, apocalyptic fiction and romance elements relate in the sense of evoking desire - both within the characters and in the readers of the fictional works as well. Thereby, to conclude, Shepherd’s and VanderMeer’s apocalyptic novels depict stories that portray how desire thrives on loss, especially in apocalyptic events.

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