UNIVERZITA KARLOVA V PRAZE – FILOZOFICKÁ FAKULTA

ÚSTAV ANGLOFONNÍCH LITERATUR A KULTUR

McCarthy's apocalyptical *The Road*: a minimalist and allegorical reading

BAKALÁŘSKÁ PRÁCE

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Praha, srpen 2013

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Studijní obor:

Anglistika a amerikanistika

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V Praze dne 21. 8. 2013

To my father, Jaroslav Kuna († 21. 8. 2012): "The good guys will win."

Acknowledgement**:** My thanks belong to Hana Ulmanová for her scholarly advice, Maciej Ruczaj, Václav Voslař, Jan Černíček and Klára Vozábová for their inputs, and foremost to my mother, Marcela Kunová, for her immense patience and love.

Thesis abstract in English

This paper analyzes Cormac McCarthy's novel *The Road* with the aim to find elements of fiction it shares with selected major novels of the American literature as representatives of literary traditions defined by Steven Frye. These elements are considered the basic "building stones" for the minimalist style of the novel. The first chapter introduces McCarthy as a traditional author in the sense given to this term by T. S. Eliot. It briefly describes McCarthy's personal life and the literary and artistic influences that form his work. The second chapter presents juxtapositions of *The Road* with James F. Cooper's *The Last of the Mohicans,* Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick*, William Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying* and Walter J. Miller's *A Canticle for Leibowitz*. By comparing *The Road* with these representatives of the American frontier romance, the philosophical novel, the Southern literature, and the so called post-apocalyptic subgenre, this thesis finds some elements of fictions that turn out to be universal enough for a minimalist piece of art, for example symbols and archetypes. The third chapter deals with allegorical elements, particularly those found by juxtaposing the novel with the Passion story of Jesus Christ and the Revelation of St. John. The fourth chapter introduces the contemporary style of minimalism and describes its origins and basic characteristics. It also tries to approach the novel not only from the viewpoints of literary criticism, but basic musical theory as well, relying on the similarities in writing/composition. As a result, the novel is presented as a postmodern minimalist allegory of the process of revelation.

Abstrakt práce v češtině

Tato práce analyzuje román amerického spisovatele Cormaca McCarthyho *Cesta*, a to za účelem nalezení základních prvků fikce, které tento román sdílí s vybranými romány americké literatury dle jejich příslušnosti k literárním tradicím definovaným kritikem Stevenem Fryem. Tyto základní prvky jsou zde považovány za jakési základní stavební kameny pro minimalistický styl románu. První kapitola představuje McCarthyho jako tradičního spisovatele ve smyslu, jaký tomuto termínu udělil T. S. Eliot. Kapitola krátce popisuje McCarthyho život osobní i literární a shrnuje umělecké vlivy na jeho dílo. Druhá kapitola se zabývá srovnáváním románu *Cesta* s následujícími díly: *Poslední mohykán* od J. F. Coopera, *Bílá velryba* od Hermana Melvilla, *Když jsem umírala* od Williama Faulknera a *Chvalozpěv na Leibowitze* od Waltera Millera. Porovnáním *Cesty* s těmito zástupci amerického historického (hraničního) románu, filosofického románu, Jižanského románu a tzv. post-apokalyptického žánru se tato práce snaží nalézt takové prvky, které jsou dostatečně univerzální pro použití v minimalistické tvorbě, např. symboly a archetypy. Třetí kapitola se zabývá alegorickými prvky, zejména těmi, které lze identifikovat jako navázané na biblický příběh Pašijí a Zjevení sv. Jana. Čtvrtá kapitola představuje minimalismus jako současný umělecký směr a popisuje jeho vývoj a základní charakteristiky. Snaží se McCarthyho román nahlížet nejen z pohledu literární kritiky, ale také hudební teorie, přičemž spoléhá na podobnosti ve způsobů psaní a kompozice. Výsledkem je to, že tato práce představuje román *Cesta* jako postmoderní alegorii samotného procesu zjevení.

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1. Introduction

1.1 The aims and methods of the thesis

Many long-time readers of Cormac McCarthy were quite astonished with the release of his latest novel *The Road*. The turn from a Faulknerian, modernist approach and almost Baroque language found in his previous work towards more Hemingwayesque minimalist style was chiefly unexpected. The aim of this thesis is to present *The Road* as a continuation, rather than abandonment, of literary tradition and thus argue that McCarthy is still the traditional author[1] who works in his motto *"Books beget books"*[2]. The style of minimalism will be presented and showed as particularly appropriate to the so called post-apocalyptic genre and its choice to convey a contemporary form of an allegory.

The methods used in this thesis will mostly include juxtapositions of the novel *The Road* with McCarthy's other novels and some major works of predominantly American literature that have been mentioned in critical essays as having influenced his writing and originating from three main literary traditions; the other method being literary analysis by which examples of elements of fictions that have their origins in certain literary traditions will be found and identified as the "building stones" of the new McCarthy's novel. These basic literary elements will then be identified as *potential* material vehicles of the minimalist style and symbols creating an allegorical reading of the novel.

[1] "This historical sense, which is a sense of the timeless as well as of the temporal and of the timeless and of the temporal together, is what makes a writer traditional." Eliot, T. S., "Tradition and the Individual Talent." *Norton Anthology of American Literature*, 1874.
[2] Greenwood, Williard P., *Reading Cormac McCarthy,* 14.

The framework of this thesis will include selected major authors and works of American literature cited as influential to McCarthy by Steven Frye, literary critic and Professor of English, President of Cormac McCarthy Society and the editor of *The Cambridge Companion to Cormac McCarthy*, as well as three literary traditions Frye mentions in his *Understanding Cormac McCarthy*. Apart from those, literary works and other media that helped to form the modern genre called "post-apocalyptic" will be explored as representatives of the subgenre and considered as another potential literary tradition.

The first chapter will present Cormac McCarthy as a traditional writer in Eliot's terms. This will include short mentioning of his life, since the regions he lived and lives in have significant influence on his writing (a regionalist writer[3]) and understanding this enigmatic author is necessary for an informed reading and proper analysis of his novels.

The second chapter will analyze elements of fiction in the above mentioned literary traditions with regards to *The Road*. The elements are defined in Willard P. Greenwood's *Reading Cormac McCarthy*[4]. It will present the elements found by comparison with several major American writers and their famous works. This chapter will also introduce the post-apocalyptic (or *eschatological*) subgenre, including some major works both from literature and cinematography. This subgenre will be broadly defined and the works analyzed with the aim to explore another tradition, one that Frye excludes from the major influences and scarcely mentions. The resulting findings will serve as the basis for the chapters dealing with allegory and minimalism.

[3] Hart, *The Oxford Companion to American Literature - Sixth Edition*, 556.
[4] Greenwood, Williard P., *Reading Cormac McCarthy,* 13.

The third chapter will focus on *The Road*'s reading as a postmodern Christian allegory. By comparison of the novel with passages from the Bible and other Christian texts, patterns of the previously identified traditional symbols will be searched for.

The fourth chapter will deal with minimalism as a stylistic approach, from its origins in arts to literary minimalism and specifically the application of it in *The Road*. The aim is to explore this style as an extremely suitable authorial choice for the eschatological allegory in the novel.

The fifth chapter will summarize the results of the previous ones and reach a conclusion, suggesting a possible reading of the novel and further research.

1.2 Cormac McCarthy as a traditional writer

Harold Bloom, a famous American literary critic and professor at Yale University, once in an interview[5] named Cormac McCarthy a genius, living classic author, mostly for his novel *The Blood Meridian* (which Bloom considers the greatest novel of the 20th century[6]). Such an ivory-library scented label is not without its negatives but McCarthy is without doubt one of the most famous American writers worldwide. Indeed, he might have accepted his role as the living Nestor, the keeper of literary tradition and the disciple of Melville, Poe, Faulkner and others, the author of Western civilization's epic story, and lastly the 20th century's prophet, a long time ago. His works, despite being overtly individual and characteristic in style and themes, are an evolution of the tradition in a synergic and dynamic style. In the modern era of progress, post-capitalism and post-modernism, McCarthy is unreservedly building the artifacts of our time from the good stones selected from the

[5] Harold Bloom on Blood Meridian, link
[6] Bloom, "Introduction."; 1.

chaos and ruins of nowadays, half an archeologist in Elliot's terms[7], weaving the stories and painting the images in new, starkly sublime configurations.

Cormac McCarthy was born in 1933 in Rhode Island, to Charles Joseph and Gladys Christina McGrail McCarthy. He changed his first name (originally Charles, after his father) to the Gaelic version *Cormac* later in his life, thus reflecting on his Irish ancestry. When he was four years old, his family moved to the rural Knoxville, Tennessee. His early works would then present this Southern setting (*The Orchard Keeper, The Child of God, Outer Dark*), only to later move to Southwest (with the so called Border Trilogy) and potentially back with *The Road* (the mountains in the novel are never explicitly named but the directions, esp. of the ocean, imply or suggest the Appalachians). Until he entered the University of Tennessee in 1951 (studying physics major and leaving after two years and joining the US Army), he was raised in Catholic schools and acquired his first and only academic degree at Knoxville Catholic High in 1951. This upbringing did not result in him being an orthodox Catholic author, like Flannery O'Connor, for example, but certainly left a strain of affection towards exploring the darker, gothic side of the human soul, since, we must bear in mind, during McCarthy's childhood the Catholic church was still a pre-Vatican II institution where suffering and violence was part of the religion's outer image and popular perception but also a cultural and theological specific. Given his formative childhood years correspond to this era, McCarthy could be considered a child of the orthodox Catholic culture. However, while religious thought is very important to McCarthy, it is not necessarily just Christianity dominating his works (his contemplations are inspired by Judaism and deism, too): there are many philosophical schools of thought he draws his views from, esp. Nietzsche,

[7] T. S. Elliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent." *Norton Anthology of American Literature*, 1874.

Kierkegaard. The mystical Christianity of Böhme[8] together with deep philosophical insight create wondrous juxtapositions, esp. in character forming, that intrigue the readers and create many different approaches to his works' reading. Every other reading of McCarthy's novels is different and readers with different cultural backgrounds can explore one of his works for many years and still be mesmerized and befuddled about the authorial intention.

This background of the author, religious and philosophical, would explain his often cited reactionary world-views[9]. Steven Frye, another famous critic and the author of one of the most famous critical works on McCarthy, *Understanding Cormac McCarthy,* and editor of just recently released *The Cambridge Companion to Cormac McCarthy*, even uses the term "reactionary"[10]. Frye suggests that this should not be understood in the political sense, since there is little of politics in McCarthy's works, but as a literary term describing the circumstances of the last two centuries in the USA the author utilizes as his American romance novels' settings. One might agree with Frye, nevertheless, McCarthy is a reactionary not in the sense of political activism (such as, for example, the Tea Party movement) but in the sense of deeply rooted basic political thoughts governing (in theory) the political practice of parties.

He is the disciple of the Southern Agrarians, a group of literates of the first half of the 20th century gathered around the Vanderbilt University, who not only engaged in literary criticism (although the theory of *New Criticism* is one of their most important contributions) but also in political philosophy of reactionary conservatism opposed to the Northern politics of progress and industrialization. This group included famous authors as R. P. Warren, Allan Tate (whose novel *The Fathers*

[8] Frye, *Understanding Cormac McCarthy*, 11.
[9] Woodward, *Cormac McCarthy's Venomous Fiction*, link
[10] Frye, *Understanding Cormac McCarthy,* 9.

touches the same archetypical relation and as *The Road* and also the clash of high and liberal civilizations as defined by prof. Roger Scruton)[11], J. C. Ransom and C. Brooks. Their famous collective work, *I'll Take My Stand*, is not a collection of literary essays but a broadly reaching work of general thought on historical and social issues exploring the third way of social organization (in between socialism and capitalism, both sharing the common denominator of industrialism), much alike to the theory of *distributism* propagated by Pope Leo XIII and also G. K. Chesterton and Hilaire Belloc. It is this unique "reactionary turn to the nature", fundamentally different to the current environmental activism in its basic principle of the human kind as the good keeper and master of the whole creation, that perhaps confused many a reader of *The Road* to consider the novel an environmentalist work.

McCarthy's characters, prevalently violent, grotesque, unholy and malign, also reflect another shard of the author's complex world-view. The disregard for and refusal of the Enlightenment's trust in the human kind's ability to improve and of rational positivism. McCarthy can hardly be accused of believing in human phylogeny following an individual man's ontogeny (i.e. human kind as a whole developing moral consciousness), for him the basic inducements of human evil remain the same since the beginning of time. The character of Judge Holden from *The Blood Meridian*, an eloquent monologist, is perhaps a development of Melville's Ahab, but certainly in the other direction, from half-reasoned lust for revenge to pure mindless and emotionless violence and murder. Frye considers McCarthy an authentically American writer[12]. If gruesome violence is the American vice, so to speak, then McCarthy's writings are the pinnacle of the dark American literary expression.

[11] Scruton, *Průvodce inteligentního člověka po moderní kultuře*, 9-14.
[12] Frye, *Understanding Cormac McCarthy,* 1.

There is one more peculiar side to McCarthy as a writer. Seldom would one find among the, for lack of categorization terms let us say "serious", writers a person so interested and invested in the field of science, especially outside the genre of the so called hard science fiction. This particular oddity must be fully taken into account when reading *The Road*, a novel verging on the hard science fiction subgenre of post-apocalyptic writing. McCarthy's connection to the scientific Santa Fe Institute is well known and according to Frye, the author delves into as diverse fields as chaos and complexity theory, all in the search of the possible divine principles of the universe existence. He is the only fellow at the SFI who holds no doctoral degree, yet he is considered to be "easier to talk to ... about the work that other scientists are doing rather than talking to the scientists"[13]. This writer-polymath (who used to have so many hobbies in his childhood) thus in many ways resembles the diver's attitude of Melville's Ishmael, a student of leviathans and cetology who is on "friend's terms" with contemporary science, yet is still discovering and outlining the founding principles of the universe by also contemplating the philosophical value of intuition and perhaps revelation.

The last pieces of the author's life's mosaic should be, in respect to *The Road*, his austere life of a society shunning writer, who often refuses to give interviews and lectures for money. Until his financial success with *All The Pretty Horses*, McCarthy was a famously forgotten writer (known mostly to critics rather than readers) avoiding the usual literary circles of, in Robert Frost's terms "contemptuary" writers, and living far from the madding intelligentsia crowds of New York and other cities. Upon persuasion by his first literary agent, McCarthy gave a few interviews later in his life, but he is still the antithesis of the postmodern cult of celebrities. It must be noted that a brief moment of cosmopolitan life in Europe with his British ex-wife

[13] Greenwood, *Reading Cormac McCarthy*, 10.

Anne DeLisle during the late 1960s was fruitful (he wrote his *Outer Dark* on Ibiza), however, before that, and especially after his return from Europe, McCarthy started living a life of Spartan simplicity. No other of his novels, even the autobiographically important *Suttree*, would show this part of him as the hyperbolically ascetic life of the father and his boy in *The Road*.

As stated above, McCarthy is a traditional writer, a story-teller of a world passing away, his Southern world of Appalachians and Southwest, of Knoxville and El Paso, where he lived most of his adult life. Frye mentions three different American literary traditions that McCarthy is probably tied to the most. The American frontier romance, the deeply philosophical and ambiguous novel of the nineteenth century (and the modernist movement of the 20th whose precursor was Melville's *Moby-Dick,* a novel McCarthy reads annually[14]) and the Southern gothic[15]. However, with McCarthy, it is often a new literary approach in every two or three novels. He cautiously reaps the fruits of not only American, but the whole Western world's literary and artistic (as well as philosophical and scientific) thinking, and so to Frye's three major sources of literary tradition one is obliged to add the subgenres of science-fiction, allegory, epic and mystery – and last but not least – the style of minimalism, an artistic approach previously explored in *The Child of God,* to a certain degree foreshadowed in *No Country for Old Men*, but fully developed in *The Road* and *Sunset Limited*. McCarthy draws from "the good writers", among which he cites Melville, Faulkner, Dostoyevsky, who "deal with issues life and death".[16] Other important writers would include J. F. Cooper, Hemingway, Hawthorne, Poe, Frost etc.

[14] Rocco, MOBY-DICK, Melville, a Modern, link
[15] Frye, *Understanding Cormac McCarthy*, 15.
[16] Walsh, *In The Wake of the Sun*, 1.

Cormac McCarthy's fiction is the most critically revered of his works. He might have written a few plays, but his main focus is still the human drama in a novel protagonist. For McCarthy, an autodidact philosopher and scientist, "Everything's interesting"[17] and the genre of fiction can "encompass all the various disciplines and interests of humanity"[18]. As for the dramatic form, he himself humbly acknowledged that his understanding of a dramatic dialogue is not as profound: this was when he collaborated on the staging of *The Sunset Limited* by Chicago's Steppenwolf Theatre Company in 2006 (even though the actor playing the role of Mr. White, Austin Pendleton, was "stunned by it" and said "you'd think it was his 16th play at least. The dramatic sense in it is at once traditional and frighteningly original"[19]). Nonetheless, the genre of fiction and the form of novel is indeed part of the individual and unique McCarthyian idiom: the reconstruction of the house of American literature by employing themes, characters, styles and other elements of fiction while redefining, or even ambiguously omitting them (and creating a significant empty space).

First of Frye's literary traditions, that McCarthy is exploring for elements, starts with the American (frontier or historical) romance. While the list of authors who submerged into this genre is long and quite colorful (from "high-brow" writers like Alexander Dumas, Victor Hugo, or Willa Cather to those "less critically acclaimed" as Zane Grey and many others), the onset of this genre is marked by one or two names – Sir Walter Scott and, in the American literature, James Fenimore Cooper[20]. McCarthy's novels often set their characters to the frontier, if not in the geographical sense (like the expansion towards the West in *The Blood Meridian*), surely in the sense of borders of the civilized society, in their own (perhaps imagined

[17] Greenwood, *Reading Cormac McCarthy*, 13.
[18] *Ibid.* 13.
[19] Luce, "Beyond the Border: Cormac McCarthy in the New Millenium." *The Cormac McCarthy Journal, vol. 6, 2008*, 7-8.
[20] Dekker, *The American Historical Romance*, 1.

– in Andersonian sense) subcultures, not unlike Ishmael in *Moby-Dick*, who leaves the society to join the circle of whalers. In Cooper's *Last of the Mohicans*, we find the concept of a noble savage juxtaposed to the "nobles" of the European civilization. The savage living in such harmony with the nature that an informed critical reading might find the elements of the pastoral, the genre of ancient Greek and Roman literature. There is little of romance in McCarthy (the lack of well developed female characters is specific for McCarthy) but the theme of pastoral is certainly present. Since his *Orchard Keeper* (the orchard standing itself as the ideal pastoral setting), McCarthy uses the denial of pastoral existence as one of the narrative forces driving his characters. *The Road* introduces a hyperbolic loss of such natural paradise after a catastrophe (the origin of which will be explored later, suffice to note that it is probably not entirely human-caused, as many readings suggest). The frontier is present but no longer a habitat of noble savages, but of "the bad guys" or at least covered in the darkness of unknowing (the repetition of "I don't know" suggests thus). The American frontier becomes the wasteland of Bible and T. S. Elliot and McCarthy transforms Cooper's American exceptionalism into simple universalism where human nature is unchangeable regardless of history and new lands and civilizations, thus transforming the basic elements and boundaries of the frontier romance genre. The development of the historical romance that went through the 19th century as far as Faulkner and the Southern literary tradition, is what McCarthy respects in keeping the intervention of outside social and historical forces on the fates of the characters, but imbuing them with symbolism. The American (esp. Southern American) nation bears the guilt not dissimilar to the tribe of the Delaware Indians and shares the fate of the Mohicans. The western expansion in *The Blood Meridian* with its slaughtering and annihilation of not only Indians but also Mexicans (one of the best examples in this novel would be the description of a Catholic church of

Mexican origin found burnt and ruined by the "civilized" US cavalry) reflects McCarthy's viewpoint on the malign, violent experience of the frontier. The Western romance of cowboys as paragons of American individualism, freedom and self-reliance had been redefined and several years after the Southwestern works (*The Blood Meridian* and the Border trilogy) the American TV audience lost their *Bonanzas* (even John Ford's epic classic westerns and the anti-westerns of Sergio Leone where protagonists are famously unwilling to participate in the action starting the narrative and become involved in the situation only against their will in the well known "bad place at bad time" principle) to behold the dark side of Manifest Destiny in TV series like *Deadwood* or *Hell on Wheels*.

The second of Frye's literary traditions McCarthy continues to draw his inspiration from is the philosophical novels of the 19th century, and one might add leading up to modernism, Faulkner and overlapping with the Southern Gothic. These would be considered a subgenre of the American romance and would again include some of McCarthy's beloved authors, Melville, Hawthorne, Poe and Faulkner.[21] In comparison to a general historical romance, these would ponder on a range of religious, philosophical, metaphysical and mystical issues and the characters would acquire symbolical meanings that drive the narrative and help to pattern the theme the novel is concerned with. The Gothic element in many of those can be easily identified in McCarthy's works where he delves into the darkness of the abyss to search for a grail of unknown content. The darkness of human mind is a shared trope of Gothic fiction but unlike the protagonist of Allan Tate's *The Fathers,* or the more famous Tolkien's Frodo, who are stained by nihilism later in their lives, the abyss is already a home to many of the characters and the *bildungsroman* starts for the kid (*The Blood Meridian)* or the boy (*The Road)* inside of it, the only exit being a journey

[21] Frye, *Understanding Cormac McCarthy*, 12.

through until hope and light, faith and human moral qualities like altruism are reached and acquired as the protagonist's driving *weltanschauung*. McCarthy's works daringly explore the abyss not necessarily to support nihilism but to understand the human drama and modern dilemma[22]. In this sense, Melville's Ahab and his mono-maniacal insanity induced by the surreal whiteness of the leviathan are to be considered as similar in effect as the above mentioned darkness.

As for the Modernist influence (this term being elusive to a holistic formal definition but one can select Faulkner and Eliot as the most important personas for McCarthy), one might find it not only in McCarthy's rather Faulknerian works like *The Orchard Keeper* or in the Baroque language of *Blood Meridian*, but in the general attitude and endeavor to create a high artifact (as opposed to the post-modern resignation of many of his contemporaries), which, as the case of *The Road* unveils, is possible with no ornament, too. There are multiple other literary characteristics McCarthy shares with the Modernist movement. First and foremost is the cultural skepticism. The wasteland of *The Road* is not just a bleak setting for a post-apocalyptic narrative, but also the *Waste Land* of Eliot (and again, not only in the sense of corruption but also in Eliot's Christian allegory of the wasteland/desert as a place for spiritual trials). The character of Judge Holden is the ruler of *The Heart of Darkness* found not in Africa, but on the Southwest of the USA. The disdain for progress and modernization of the world and the destruction of one part of American civilization (still representing a social order, however flawed) during the Reconstruction Era are familiar modernist themes. The second modernist influence would be the relation towards readers and public – the urge to shock, be it by form or violence, and thus stimulate the public's aesthetic feeling. Both these varieties of influence then merge into a literary experiment of "mystery-inducing method"

[22] Frye, *Understanding Cormac McCarthy*, 13.

(similar to Eliot's “mythical method” as introduced in the essay *Ulysses, Order, and Myth*[23]) where the symbolical events from the American past have to be repeatedly contemplated in various configurations to help us understand our present (via the faculty of intuition) and the timeless mysteries we share with our progenitors but we lost in the white noise of the digital era.

The third of literary traditions mentioned by Frye is the Southern Gothic. This central subgenre of the southern literature is distinctive thanks to the driving theme of historically forced conditions of the post-bellum American South. The main *topos* of the genre is the corruption revealed after the Confederacy’s defeat and the dismembering of the long existent social ties. The most common conventions are decaying corpses and buildings, violence, rape, psychological pain and sociopathic behavior. These elements of fiction help McCarthy to emphasize the inherently fallen nature of the mankind and produce horror and fear in the reader.[24] The lost paradise of the pastoral South is a *contrapunctus* inducing both nostalgia and existential *angst*, both of which urge the reader to search for the mystery interwoven between the lines. Both noble and ignoble characters are subjected to tragic narratives of rises and falls and the thematic and stylistic combination set McCarthy apart from other 20th century novels. Behind most of the characters are Biblical symbols in a similar manner as Melville’s Ahab is the Hebrew king of the Old Testament. They are trying to convey something about the mystery of suffering and, unlike in social realism, prevent us to identify with them[25]. The specific language style, combining high and low registers where a complex description is put in contrast to characters’ minimalistic dialogues in regional dialects then bring forward the influences of Twain and Hemmingway.

[23] "ULYSSES, ORDER, AND MYTH", link
[24] Frye, *Understanding Cormac McCarthy*, 14.
[25] Greenwood, *Reading Cormac McCarthy*, 17.

Apart from the above mentioned literary traditions, analysis of McCarthy's *The Road* would be terribly incomplete without the mention of minimalism as an artistic movement and approach. This reaction to modernist experiment has its roots in the second half of the 20th century. While in literary circles this term was often derogatory or disreputable[26], the main self-conscious current of this movement would be found in visual arts and music after the WWII. The founding principle is well explained in famous (and probably wrongly associated) quotes of the German architect Ludwig Mies van der Rohe: "less is more" and "God is in the detail". The basic principles of minimalism are reduction and new patterning of the old. In visual arts, it was Ludwig van der Rohe who helped to define this movement in both Europe and America, while in music we have to consider names like Arvo Pärt, Henryk Górecki, Steve Reich, or Philip Glass. The European minimalism is often exploring mystical and religious themes, while the American tends to reductive formalism. Upon considering all these features of the minimalist movement, one can conclude that after Hemingway and Carver, it has a new champion in the person of Cormac McCarthy, whose *The Road* and *Sunset Limited* are minimalist from the onset of their first lines.

[26] Hallet, *Minimalism and the Short Story–Raymond Carver, Amy Hempel, and Mary Robison. (Studies in Comparative Literature)*, ix.

2. Literary influences with regard to *The Road*

As stated in the introduction, the different influences and elements of fiction McCarthy uses as "the building stones" for his fiction, and esp. his novel *The Road*, require to be analyzed in the framework of the three literary traditions mentioned by Frye. The following subchapters will attempt to find these by the method of juxtaposition or comparison. Each of the literary traditions will be represented by one subchapter dealing with one major and, if need be, several minor works. Those works will be compared to *The Road* foremost, but potentially with other McCarthy's works, if such an additional comparison could reveal more about the creative process behind the *The Road*. The first goal is to discover as many elements as possible in the limited space of this work. The final achievement, however, should be finding those literary influences that will be worked with in the subsequent chapters, for example those that will be necessary for the stylistic analysis of minimalism in *The Road*.

The first subchapter will deal with the literary tradition of American (historical) frontier romance. The major work to be compared to McCarthy's novel will be James Fenimore Cooper's *The Last of the Mohicans*. The eponymous element of the frontier romance is indeed the frontier, or the setting of wilderness. It will be analyzed as a subject in itself.[1]

The second subchapter, dealing with philosophical novel of the second half of the nineteenth century, will compare *The Road* with a major work of the 19th century American literature, Melville's *Moby-Dick*. It will consider influences of the Western

[1] In Cooper and others, wilderness is the incubator of the mythic hero. In *The Road*, McCarthy reconfigures the wilderness into a wasteland which serves as a place for survival (not in providing resources but supplying a form of cover from the antagonists or those who live no longer in agreement with natural order and are implicitly corrupted) and spiritual test and growth. Other major elements will be the clash of civilizations, characters as mythical heroes and, of course, the death.

thinking and religion on Melville and McCarthy and the symbolism both the authors' novels share[2].

The third subchapter will focus on the Southern literature. It will deal with the elements of fiction in Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying*, for example the archetype of journey and the effect it has on the development of characters, narrative mode etc.

In the fourth subchapter, the so called post-apocalyptic subgenre will be explored. The main focus will be the novel *A Canticle for Leibowitz* by Walter J. Miller. Apart from that, the chapter will discuss the pitfalls of defining this subgenre and some motifs from popular culture.

2.1 The American frontier romance

While other novels mentioned above bear resemblances and are often cited by critics as American romances (for example *The Scarlett Letter* or *Moby-Dick*), this tradition will be mostly explored on the comparison with James Fenimore Cooper's *The Last of the Mohicans: A Narrative of 1757*. The reason is that, according to Dekker, the father of all historical romances would be Sir Walter Scott who developed what Dekker calls a *Waverley*-model[3], the basic paradigm of the genre of historical narrative that many would apply in their respective national settings. And it is Dekker who states that the first to successfully do this in the USA would be "the American Scott", J. F. Cooper. Cooper's novels under the common name of *Leather-Stocking*

[2] For example, the topos of the sea. It is the refuge of a frontier for Ishmael and the final destination of the father and the son. It also carries with it the old Western symbolism of danger and death, foreshadowed as such in both *Moby-Dick* and *The Road*, either as the home of the Leviathan or the simple cold catalyzing the illness of the father.

[3] Dekker, *The American Historical Romance*, 29.

Tales are the good start to explore this genre and his most famous novel has, even on the first sight, many resemblances and shared intertextualities[4] with *The Road*.

The early American frontier novel was itself a continuation of the Western literary tradition. Similarly to Scott, Cooper's novel references many previous writers and poets and each chapter is introduced by a quotation from earlier literary texts[5]. However, the American political climate (always an external feature of historical novel writing) required that the myth of the feudal noble be transfigured as to support the newly emerging democracy and thus break from Scott's model on thematic grounds at least.

The clash of two civilizations and cultures, one unspoiled and traditional, the other corrupt and progressive, is one of the main themes of historical novel. Cooper was presented with historical facts of the Native Americans and the original settlers living seemingly in harmony and the European civilizations intruding this landscape. In Cooper's novel, these basic elements are not only represented by the tribes of Delaware and others, but significantly by the characters of Chingachgook and Hawkeye (real name Natty Bumppo). The theme of civilizations is certainly reconfigured in *The Road*, where the ending of one culture is pictured in hyperbole.

McCarthy presents the reader with a holistic destruction of the old civilization caused by an uncertain force of progress. The frontier, a border of cultures, of *The Road* becomes temporal, rather than spatial, with the old civilization appearing in its ruins bearing the mark of time and to full extent only in flashbacks and dreams of the father, the division intensified by the fact that colors only appear in the dreams while everything else is in shades of grey. The old civilization is certainly not pictured as pure and morally unambiguous, but this is one of the major differences of McCarthy's

[4] The *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, for example

[5] For example, the final abduction of Cora by Magua, not dissimilar to *Iliad*, and the following tragic consequences are well foreshadowed by the quotation from *The Merchant of Venice*, famously stirring the events by Shylock's insistence on the rule of law and justice.

writings and the pro-American romances of the 19th century[6], especially Cooper's novel. While Uncas or Hawkeye are never loosing the moral direction, the woman (mother) in *The Road* has the predominant, archetypical characteristic of a human being with its moral compass lost in the crucial historical moment of total annihilation. Neither the father is certain of his moral decisions and actually has to be reminded by the boy, a child of the new civilization, of the basic principles of the old one (for example, helping the old man "Ely")[7]. The father's repeated "I don't know" is symbolical of his loss of moral direction.

The new "un-civilization" the father and the boy travel through is marked by the loss of basic principles like the rule of law and a higher common principle, but there are at least two subthemes that appear both in *The Road* and *The Last of the Mohicans*. The first being the oral tradition versus books and the second represented by human artifacts.

In Cooper's novel, the basic distinction between the new American and old European culture is marked, among others, by the means of transferring knowledge. The oral tradition is considered by the Native Americans and by Hawkeye to be the proper form of keeping the cohesive myths of communities and even acknowledging simple truths of individuals:

"It is one of their customs to write in books what they have done and seen, instead of telling them in their villages, where the lie can be given to the face of a cowardly boaster, and the brave soldier can call on his comrades to witness for the truth of his words."[8] or "'Book!' repeated Hawkeye, with singular and illconcealed disdain; 'do you take me for a whimpering boy at the apronstring of one of your old gals; and this good rifle on my knee for the feather of a goose's wing, my ox's horn for

[6] Frye, *Understanding Cormac McCarthy*, 9.
[7] McCarthy, *The Road,* 171-177.
[8] Cooper, *The Last of the Mohicans,* 32.

a bottle of ink, and my leathern pouch for a cross-barred handkercher to carry my dinner? Book! what have such as I, who am a warrior of the wilderness, though a man without a cross, to do with books? I never read but in one, and the words that are written there are too simple and too plain to need much schooling; though I may boast that of forty long and hard-working years.[9]'"

In *The Road*, the books are present in the ruins of many houses but bear no practical value in the desolate world, if not for being an extra burden to toil with. The books are the symbols of the old civilization[10]. The positive remains of the old civilization are preserved in the stories about the "good guys" the father tells his son. Indeed, not only have to be the moral principles transferred to the boy to become a man of the new civilization, the son has to understand this very principle of a story or myth as a cornerstone of culture in the terms of historical novel[11].

The other mentioned subtheme is human artifacts. In the case of both Cooper's and McCarthy's novel, the symbolism is well carried by the barreled weapons, the rifle and the revolver. The difference of a "white man without a cross"[12] and the Native American is strongly pictured by the very name Hawkeye was given by the natives – *La Longue Carabine* – The Long Rifle. In McCarthy's novel, the difference between the "good guys" and "the others" (or Other) is not only the insistence on ritual, stories etc., but also the use of artifacts in a traditional way, not grotesque or twisted (even if the traditional way of the revolver is a *misericorde*[13]). The cannibals on the road, in contrast, carry primitive weapons, baseball bats with chains etc.

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[9] Cooper, *The Last of the Mohicans*, 140.
[10] "When he looked back the old man had set out with his cane, tapping his way, dwindling slowly on the road behind them like some storybook peddler from an antique time, dark and bent and spider thin and soon to vanish forever." McCarthy, *The Road,* 185.
[11] "They don't have to be true. They are stories. Yes. But in the stories we're always helping people and we dont help people." McCarthy, *The Road,* 286.
[12] a man of "pure White", Caucasian race, ethnically from the European civilization
[13] a weapon used in the Medieval times to deliver the mercy stroke

A special artifact, with regard to the American frontier romance, is the map the father uses to navigate on their journey south. The fact that the two protagonists require a map to navigate around the Appalachian mountainous landscape represents a serious transformation of a frontier hero. The father and the boy thus remind more the characters of Heyward, Cora and Alice in Cooper's novel, who can only travel near the roads. This transformation is especially visible if we consider that the father is able to scavenge for basic supplies, in the tradition of a typical self-reliant frontier man. However, the source is not the wasteland (frontier) anymore, but the ruins of the ravaged civilization.

The archetype of journey and finding the correct directions and, at last, the final destination, is of course titular to McCarthy's novel and certainly one of the building stones, if not the major one, the author borrows from not only American but the whole Western literature[14]. The map and the journey carry multiple layers of symbolism. One striking feature of the map, while understandable in consideration of its constant usage, is its decayed state of being torn to pieces. Consider the description:

> "The tattered oilcompany roadmap had once been taped together but now it was just sorted into leaves and numbered with crayon in the corners for their assembly. He sorted through the limp pages and spread out those that answered to their location."[15]

In juxtaposition to the thesis and critical theories of how McCarthy and minimalist style works (patterning of sound and tone color, see chapter 4), this description exemplifies the act of map reading as a symbol of placing selected elements in their proper positions, i.e. the artistic or poetic creation as a journey,

[14] From Homer's *Odyssey* to Bible or contemporary travel writing
[15] McCarthy, *The Road,* 43.

where the final hero is the author himself. This symbolism is intensified by the boy's meta-subjective understanding of the map as not just a geographical tool but another world where he observes his own miniature version[16].

While the wilderness, woods or jungles can serve well in many a novel as a first-plan setting, the American frontier romance handles the frontier as more than this. Similarly, the wasteland in *The Road* is not exclusively the setting, but above else the subject. In Cooper's novel, the function of the wilderness is pretty straightforward – in the tradition set by W. Scott, it is the mythical space where the hero is born. This pastoral construct of an untouched, prehistoric nature is the original birthplace of a hero with no vice.

With McCarthy, this literary device undergoes a reconfiguration. The rich, pastoral wilderness becomes the post-apocalyptic wasteland. The omnipresent ash, burnt woods and spoiled water together are the adversary elements to the heroes (contrasting with the frontier romance). The repeated descriptions of bleak, grey and hostile world create a surreal picture of a place where culture would never be established again, a place far away from the warmth and water. The only use of the wilderness is as a hiding spot from "the other", i.e. survival. The cave where Hawkeye and others hide in Cooper's novel is thus expanded to all of the nature.

The most important transformation is that McCarthy combines the element of frontier with the element of Biblical and Eliot's wasteland – the landscape in *The Road* develops into both mythical and mystical space. The character of the boy undertakes a spiritual test and growth the same way Christ did in the wilderness[17]. This interpretation can be well supported by the character of Ely, who Frye considers,

[16] "He sat studying the twisted matrix of routes in red and black with his finger at the junction where he thought that they might be. As if he'd see their small selves crouching there." (McCarthy, *The Road*, 90.)
[17] Matthew 4:1-11, *Bible*, New King James Version

on one hand, as the Satan[18]: a reading that is well established by the narrator's description as a beast, or snake[19]. The building of a mythical hero thus transforms into a building of a spiritual, even Biblical, hero of the son whom the father describes as the word of God[20].

The comparison of the characters of the two novels reveals more elements. Among those one may find the mythical relation of father and son (the protagonist) between Chingachgook and Uncas, the last blood of the old world, and the selfless love the father has to develop towards his son as a result of the loss of the mother. The first relation can be studied on the burial rites happening in both novels. The places of the deceased and the mourning are interchanged, and so is the basic mood. In Cooper's novel the death of Uncas generates the feeling of melancholia, while in McCarthy's novel the death of the father is accompanied by a feeling of tragic catharsis as the boy is found by "the good guys" and the author suggests his survival with them. The biblical interpretation of the father-son relationship as being the bridge between the Old Testament (an overreaching theme of McCarthy's previous novels) and the New Testament is also suggested by Frye.[21] The mythical aspect of the father and the son is also underlined by their namelessness: they represent the archetype of everyman and at the same time the very basic archetypes of ancient and religions myths: the father and son relationship[22].

The other type of relationship, the supplementing of motherly love by the father, could be seen if one considers the scene in Cooper's novel where Cora Munro

[18] Frye, *Understanding Cormac McCarthy,* 176.
[19] "His long and yellowed claws scrabbled at the metal. [...] He jerked his head when he swallowed." McCarthy, *The Road*, 174.
[20] "If he is not the word of God God never spoke." *Ibid*. 3
[21] Frye, *Understanding Cormac McCarthy, 171*
[22] From Kronos and Zeus to the two parts of the Holy Trinity and further

falls on her sister and offers her life for her[23], something the father in *The Road* contemplates often. The theme of a missing mother and her substitution is, thus, another shared element between the two novels.

There is one more approach to characters that Cooper and McCarthy share. It is the complete or severe lack of interiority of characters presented to the reader by the description of an omniscient narrator, internal monologues, streams of consciousness or other similar devices: in *The Road* in the case of the boy (not the father). The mythical heroes are rather created by being symbols interfacing with the thematic setting and the historically important events in the plot. In *The Road*, McCarthy's limited omniscient narrator lets us peak into the dreams of the nameless father but that would be as far as psychology goes.

There is one important side of a historical romance, the romance between a man and woman itself. Cora and Uncas symbolize the potential of a historical union between the two different cultures (Core being presupposed for that, since she is not a woman "without a cross"). Unfortunately, their fate is tragic and there is no marriage. In *The Road*, the man and woman's union is suggested but McCarthy builds a different tragic end when he chooses the woman as a symbol of hopelessness and resignation in the face of cosmic tragedy. This is indeed in line with the author's previous works where female elements are scarce and lacking in detail. The world of McCarthy is a masculine and violent one.

The penultimate of the elements of fiction that the comparison of *The Last of the Mohicans* and *The Road* can supply us with is the notion of "the other", the existence and knowledge of it, a certain "gnosis of evil". In Cooper's novel, the otherness is not connected to each of the two civilizations. The basic divider is the

[23] She eluded the grasp of the savage, and reckless of her own safety, threw herself on the bosom of Alice (see Cooper, *The Last of the Mohicans*, 138.)

French and Indian war. The division of the warring parties is simple in the case of the Europeans. The French are the enemies, but not necessarily "the other". At the end of the novel Tamenund, the prophet of the Delaware tribe[24], contemplates the history and political relations between the Native American tribes formed primarily by their older, inter-tribal hostilities. This is where the source of the real other is identified: Hurons and their savagery and low social status. As mentioned above, both Cooper and McCarthy in general seldom portray characters internally. Thus, it is the acts and setting that describe Hurons as brutes, and most importantly, monsters able of infanticide[25] and cannibalism, a theme that resonates in *The Road*:

> "The flow of blood might be likened to the outbreaking of a torrent; and as the natives became heated and maddened by the sight, many among them even kneeled to the earth, and drank freely, exultingly, hellishly, of the crimson tide."[26]

McCarthy has proven very well that he can employ "the other" as the vehicle of primal fear and other features like violence and cannibalism. In his excellent novel *The Blood Meridian*, there is a description of the Comanche tribe in attack that would indeed embody the fear of otherness[27] and if this passage were not as long, it would deserve its place as an explanatory note in a dictionary's entry of *fear*. In *The Road*, the other is omnipresent, if concentrated around the ruins and the roads. The father and boy are from the beginning struggling between the Scylla of the other and Charybdis of the inhospitable wilderness. While most of the characters whom the two protagonists meet on their journey are forms of otherness, the best example is the

[24] "Art thou not Tamenund — the father, the judge, I had almost said, the prophet — of this people?" Cooper, *The Last of the Mohicans,* 378.
[25] "he dashed the head of the infant against a rock, and cast its quivering remains to her very feet. ", *Ibid.* 215
[26] *Ibid.* 216
[27] "A legion of horribles, hundreds in numbers [...] like those vaporous beings in regions beyond right knowing where the eye wanders and the lip jerks and drools." McCarthy, *Blood Meridian*, 55.

cannibals, or slavers, they meet on the road and later in a derelict house with a horrifying cellar. The ever-present danger and the fear become the topic of many a conversation between the father and the son, indeed their very state of mind.

The last element explored is one typically McCarthyian, i.e. death. Saul Bellow once praised McCarthy as an author writing "life-giving and death-dealing sentences"[28]. The death of a hero both with Cooper and McCarthy is a symbol of a dying civilization. Uncas and the father both belong to the old, noble one, which is destroyed by the forces of human progress or a potential divine intervention. The motif of death in *The Road* is, however, multifaceted. For the mother, it is the merciful ending and this particular face of death applies to the contemplated killing of the boy by his father or his own suicide, too. Last but not least, the death is perhaps the very driving force of the narrative, the fear of it being an understandable reason in a situation where all hope is lost, and so is any reason to fight and continue walking.

There is one more motif in both Cooper's and McCarthy's novel that deserves attention. It is the ocean, or sea. With Cooper, it symbolizes the pure culture in its very peak. The Delaware tribe is known to rule the land up to the Atlantic. With McCarthy, sea is the final destination of the journey. However, this motif of sea will be explored to more depth in the following subchapter.

2.2 The philosophical novel

As previously mentioned in the first chapter, McCarthy is a writer of many philosophical interests. While the setting of his novels is regional, the appearing main

[28] Walsh, *In The Wake of the Sun,* 1.

characters are always put into a philosophical context[29]. Via his protagonists, McCarthy explores both Western and non-Western philosophical conceptions, from ancient to modern times, from Gnosticism to Christian existentialism. His latest novel is well arguably, with enough textual evidence[30], dominated by Christian mysticism. Particularly, McCarthy develops the mystical notions of Jakob Böhme, a medieval Lutheran thinker. The use of the archaic word *salitter*[31] in otherwise predominantly sparse and modern vocabulary of the novel is emblematic enough and the accompanying sentence "The salitter drying from the earth" (the presence of God leaving this world) sets in the Christian allegory (see chapter 4).

According to Allen Josephs[32], the original title of the novel was *The Grail*, as evidenced from the typescripts now in Alkek Library, Texas State University in San Marcos. The Christ-like features of the boy emanate from many a piece of text in the novel, the best example perhaps being his reply ”I am the one [who has to worry about everything]” – an utterance similar to many of Christ’s and even the Old Testament God[33]. Thus the search for divine presents itself as the basic philosophical framework to be concerned with during the juxtaposition of *The Road* to Melville's *Moby-Dick*. However, other elements will be considered, too.

While Melville’s most famous novel can be read as a simple allegory, it would be a simplistic and reductive reading.[34] The novel continues the tradition of the frontier romance with allusions to Native Indians and the noble savages galore, Queequeg being the first among the many equal references. The setting moves to the sea and the theme of whaling is dominant but the undercurrents of the historical

[29] Frye, "Histories, Novels, Ideas: Cormac McCarthy and the Art of Philosophy." *The Cambridge Companion to Cormac McCarthy*, 4.
[30] Josephs, "The Quest for God in The Road." *The Cambridge Companion to Cormac McCarthy*, 134.
[31] an essence of God, fire or light (see *Ibid*. 139)
[32] *Ibid*. 134.
[33] for example, "I am the way" in John 14:6, or "Behold, the Lamb of God" (bearing our sins) in John 1:29, or the very minimalistic "I am that I am" in Exodus 3:14
[34] Quinn, *Lectures on American Literature*, 105.

novel and the frontier are visible and necessary to understand the full scope of this philosophical novel.

The critique of American expansionism present in Melville's novel[35] is something McCarthy definitely shares with him. The ruins of a Catholic church building in *Blood Meridian* (set in around 1850s; see above) picture with clarity the horrible wrongs done by American armies and their affiliated raiding hordes during the Mexican War. McCarthy's previous works also share the rich style employed by Melville. However, with *The Road* and this thesis in mind, one has to consider primarily the symbolism in *Moby-Dick,* and that to its limits.

Christian motifs fully appear in Melville's novel as early as the visit of Ishmael to the Whaler's chapel of Quakers. The character of Father Mapple and the description of the painting on the wall of the pulpit[36] establish the symbolism of the minister or any priest as a sailor. One might consider that, for example, the Pope of the Catholic Church is often pictured as the captain of the great ship of Christendom in stormy waters, the first captain being Saint Peter, appointed by Christ himself[37]. The bark of Noah, saving those in grace with God[38], is perhaps another source of this symbolism. One of the fatal pitfalls of Ahab, apart from his monomaniacal urge for revenge, is that he seldom offers charity to his ship's crew. The disdain for captain's duty, often reminded to him by Starbuck, pictures him as the enemy of God.

In the very same chapter, Father Mapple reads the story of Johan and the Leviathan, a punishment of God. This is a biblical allusion that deserves place in the

[35] Quinn, *Lectures on American Literature*, 106.
[36] "Between the marble cenotaphs on either hand of the pulpit, the wall which formed its back was adorned with a large painting representing a gallant ship beating against a terrible storm off a lee coast of black rocks and snowy breakers. But high above the flying scud and dark-rolling clouds, there floated a little isle of sunlight, from which beamed forth an angel's face;", Melville, *Moby-Dick*, chapter 9.
[37] Christ saving Peter's bark, Mark 4:35-41
[38] Peter, 3:20

very beginning of the *The Road*. The father dreams about a cave resembling the insides of the biblical whale:

> "In the dream from which he'd wakened he had wandered in a cave where the child led him by the hand. [...] Like pilgrims in a fable swallowed up and lost among the inward parts of some granitic beast."[39]

The man's dream certainly opens many other interpretations, the Parable of Cave[40] being the most obvious one. However, McCarthy is alerting the reader that the following story might have a mythical interpretation, too. More so, if one considers Christ referencing the three days of Jonah inside the whale as his own resurrection[41], the Christ-likeness of the boy leading the way inside this dreamy cave is suggested from the very beginning.

While Moby-Dick, the white whale, is first juxtaposed to the Leviathan from the Bible[42], later in the novel, through Ahab's enmity with God, he represents God himself. The quest of finding the white whale, eluding in the dark waters, resembles a search for the divine. This corresponds to the theme of the journey of the man and the boy. Considering McCarthy's philosophical background, the chapters in *Moby-Dick* dealing with mock encyclopedic science, something Melville expressed as a criticism of the rigid scientific tradition[43] stemming from the era of Enlightenment, and the voyage itself can be further developed as a Gnostic (or transcendental, mystical) search. The nature presents signs the art of cetology can describe, but only if those signs are percept by a certain individual, they reveal more about the nature of the Universe. In *The Cambridge Companion to Herman Melville*, John Bryant writes:

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[39] McCarthy, *The Road*, 1.
[40] Platón, *Ústava*
[41] "For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth." Matthew, 12:39
[42] Kings, Mathew 12:38 etc.
[43] Quinn, *Lectures on American Literature*, 106.

> "There is a persistent lub-dub heartbeat built into his works, a large-scale transcendental two-ness of form that derives not from external contingencies of composition but from a deeper personal necessity, a need to discover within our actual world a primal other world of ideality"[44].

The search on the road is the mission of the father in McCarthy's novel (and the reader, eventually), who can, by observation of his own son, reveal his potentially divine character (see chapter 4). In early typescripts of the novel, McCarthy reveals more about this. For example, while meeting with Ely, the father repeats three times that his son is a god[45]. In the final version, many straightforward comments of the father about his son were removed – in a typical Hemingwayesque way of concealing everything but the "tip of the iceberg".

The irony Melville uses on many levels in his novel[46] is based on the play with cultural signs and their traditional, primary and even universal meanings, the two-ness mentioned above. Among the major signs explored is the whiteness of the whale contemplated in chapter 42. Ishmael is unsure about its meaning to him. The whiteness, necessarily[47] combined with the basic frightful element, is considered key to understanding the whole novel (at least by Ishmael, the narrator)[48]. This strengthens the reading of the voyage as a search for the divine mentioned above, but the chapter presents more detail: the concept of whiteness as the universally human symbol of purity, nobleness, justice, the Sublime and, finally, divinity and Christianity[49]. In *The Road*, we find a snowflake described as the last Eucharist[50]. The

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[44] Levine, *The Cambridge Companion to Melville*, 68.
[45] Josephs, Allen. "The Quest for God in The Road." *The Cambridge Companion to Cormac McCarthy*, 137.
[46] the coffin made for Queequeg as a lifesaver for Ishmael, the marriage scene, the deliverance and delivery done by Queequeg etc.
[47] "that it is not the whiteness, separately regarded, [...] by bringing together two such opposite emotions in our minds," Melville, *Moby-Dick*, 289.
[48] "explain myself I must, else all these chapters might be naught." *Ibid.* 287.
[49] "the very veil of the Christian's Deity", *Ibid.* 295.
[50] McCarthy, *The Road*, 15.

fear resulting from the combination of whiteness and danger is a transcendental fear that "strikes more of panic to the soul than that redness which affrights in blood"[51]. Looking into the eyes of a white albatross, a bird supposedly "unknown to the men ashore"[52], Ishmael thinks he had "peeped to secrets which took hold of God". This is, of course, in concordance with the Hebrew God of the Old Testament – the beholding of whom by any mortal man results in fright and death[53]. At the end of this chapter, nature as a "laureate" of God is described as the painter who reveals the whiteness by the "great principle of light"[54].

Now, it is necessary to consider the concept of *salliter* again, as the key word. The essence of God is light, and fire. In *The Road*, the symbol of whiteness as the all-encompassing color of colors is used to describe the skin of the boy as ghostly pale[55], and further into the text the boy's resemblance to Christ is even more explicit[56], but it is also transformed by McCarthy (via Jakob Böhme) into the omniscient light and fire that envelopes the boy:

> "Is it real? The fire? [...] It's inside you. It was always there. I can see it. [...] There was light all about him [...] He took the cup and moved away and when he moved the light moved with him."[57]

According to Josephs, in the original typescript, this passage was more developed and the light literary radiated from the boy in a "constant and slow emanation"[58]. The symbol of light as a divine characteristic is further developed by irony, in similarity to

[51] Melville, *Moby-Dick*, 290.
[52] *Ibid*, 290.
[53] Exodus, 33:20
[54] Melville, *Moby-Dick*
[55] McCarthy, *The Road*, 39.
[56] "So white. Knobby spinebones. The razorous shoulder blades sawing under the pale skin." *Ibid.* 233.
[57] *Ibid.* 296-298.
[58] Josephs, Allen. "The Quest for God in The Road." *The Cambridge Companion to Cormac McCarthy*, 139.

Melville. While hidden from their foes, the father or narrator's thoughts put in contrast the darkness of a starless night and a blessing:

"All through the long dusk and into the dark. Cold and starless. Blessed."[59]

The symbolism of fire (the carrying of which McCarthy first deals with in *No Country for Old Men*[60]) offers another interpretation, that of a Promethean "torch of civilization". However, this is not in contradiction with the general Western mythogenesis that shows that the myth of Prometheus and the Christian description of Christ are interrelated. Furthermore, in the Book of Revelation, John beholds Christ with his head and his hair white like wool, as white as snow, his eyes as a flame of fire[61]. There are more references to fire there, including angelic fires etc., so one can understand that fire might not only be associated traditionally with hell and diabolic beings, but also with Christ and God[62].

Christian symbolism found in both novels further includes the symbol of fish, even though Ishmael understands that from a scientific point of view, whales are mammals. The setting of the whales, their behavior as minor characters, and other literary features are, nevertheless, typical for the fish[63]. While Melville's novel is undeniably swarming with them, it is a surprising theme in *The Road*. In the very end, as a coda, one finds a paragraph describing trout in a pond. The maps and mazes on their back that metaphorically describe the world gone, never to be "put back or made right again"[64], combine the symbolism of eschaton with that of the fish as Christians, the people reflecting the light of God[65]. Trout are mentioned three times in the novel, always as something belonging to the past. Given the fact that during the

[59] McCarthy, *The Road,* 121.
[60] At the end of the novel, sheriff Ed Tom Bell describes his dream about his father carrying the fire towards the darkness and waiting for Ed there.
[61] Revelation, 1:14;
[62] In Exodus, God appears as a burning bush
[63] for example the phrases "school of fish/whales" or "fast-fish, loose-fish" in chapters 88 and 89
[64] McCarthy, *The Road*, 307.
[65] "[Trout] reflecting back the sun deep in the darkness like a flash of knives in a cave.", *Ibid.* 43

Rapture[66], all the people in grace with God are supposed to disappear, there seems to be some textual evidence for trout as a Christian symbol.

Apart from general Christian themes in *Moby-Dick*, once again we find by comparison the theme of a father. Chapter 88, School and Schoolmasters, describes how the alpha male of a school of whales first procreates, then protects but later abandons its kin and becomes a solitary, ancient whale[67]. Considering that Moby-Dick, the white whale, is supposedly the most ancient of the sperm whales, by extension he becomes the father of the whole whale nation, just as Uncas as the last of the Mohican tribe[68] in Cooper's novel discussed above. The original Hebrew God, personified in the white whale, becomes the Father person of the Holy trinity in Christianity.

The next theme discussed here is the topos of the sea. In the two novels of Melville and McCarthy, the ocean serves as both the final frontier and a symbol of ending or death. Sea, or water in general, is a recurring symbol of death found in ancient myths and literature, from the river Styx as the divider between the realm of the living and the dead to, for example, Beowulf and the Anglo-Saxons' symbolism projected in their burial rites. The first mass annihilation of human kind mentioned in Bible is the Deluge. Even the ritual of Christian baptism is described as a death of the old body and soul (and rebirth in a new state). In Melville's *Moby-Dick*, this symbolism is found as early as chapter 7 – The Chapel. Death of the seamen mentioned on the tablets is presented as particularly woeful to the relatives as it leaves no ashes and the process itself is "a speechlessly quick chaotic bundling of a man into Eternity"[69]. Throughout the novel, death is the daily bread of the sailors

[66] Consider that at the end of the novel, the two boys are of the same age.
[67] Melville, *Moby-Dick*, 503.
[68] "My race is the grandfather of nations", Cooper, *The Last of the Mohicans*, 384.
[69] Melville, *Moby-Dick*, 131.

and, as does Ishmael, they boast they fear it not. The perceived immortality of the White Whale might as well be supported by the fact that the deepest sea is his kingdom.

In McCarthy's previous novel, *No Country for Old Man,* the author already pictures the dismal tides of human progress, the vertigo of human society's self-destruction. The whirlpool that swallows Ahab's Pequod extends the symbolism of death with the inevitability of it, as it is not in human capacity to fight the strength of the currents. In *The Road*, the death of the father is understood to be inevitable as soon as the narrator informs us about his cough and the proximity of it is foretold or foreshadowed by reaching the ocean – the coldness of the ocean being, in essence, the physical cause of death. The last textual evidence for the shared symbolism is quite literal in its metaphor:

> "The bones of seabirds. At the tide line a woven mat of weeds and the ribs of fishes in their millions stretching along the shore as far as eye could see like an isocline of death. One vast salt sepulchre. Senseless. Senseless."[70]

The sea in Melville's novel is also described by Ishmael as the frontier or wilderness where a man uninterested in the business of the inland civilization can found a refuge and, actually, enough adventure to break a depression cycle. McCarthy's characters' motivation to travel south is unclear and never explicitly mentioned, neither by the father, nor the narrator. However, when standing on the shores, the man imagines another world beyond the sea, where another man and his son are standing. This combines the symbolism of the sea as the death and the border. In this case, the border is between the two worlds, the present, material one in a process of its own undoing and the other imaginary, containing, as the father

[70] McCarthy, *The Road*, 237.

says, perhaps their counterparts[71]. Whether these are "carrying the fire", the father doesn't know. With Christian imagination and the death symbolism of the sea, these counterparts can be considered their souls, either with or without the grace (fire) of God. This reading can be strengthened by the repeated following word *vigilant* in the textual neighborhood, meaning apart from watchful also praying in the darkness.

The last element considered here are the biblical allusions to the characters in both novels. In *Moby-Dick*, we find Ishmael (the son of Abraham), Ahab (the Hebrew king of the Old Testament) and Elijah (the famous prophet who lived during the rein of king Ahab). As for Ishmael, the textual evidence is quite weak for any solid biblical interpretation. In case of Ahab, the similarity of the captain and the biblical king can be seen, if relying on his description in Kings 16-20, in their disobedience to prophetic warnings and the worship of devil (i.e. enmity to God), Elijah in *Moby-Dick* being the prophet.

With *The Road*, the situation is quite different and ambiguous. Firstly, no other character but the old man Ely bears a proper name (the rest are just the father, the boy, the thief, etc.). And Ely's name is actually uncertain, too. Allen Josephs writes[72] that connecting Ely with the biblical or Melville's Elijah is more than complicated. There is little to substantiate any link between them on the grounds of the theme of hospitality (sharing Passover meal) or anything else. To Joseph, the probability that McCarthy just wants to occupy the critics by simple inversion of character from a holy, venerable man to a madman, is nearing zero. The madness of prophets might be a Romantic notion, but this would be stretching McCarthy's idiom

[71] *Ibid.* 231.
[72] Josephs, "The Quest for God in The Road." *The Cambridge Companion to Cormac McCarthy*, 135.

too far. Josephs' analysis of the potential meaning of Ely's name is somewhat complicated but suffice to say Ely stands for annihilation of dinosaurs[73].

2.3 The Southern literature

While McCarthy is frequently cited as a literary disciple of William Faulkner, in *The Road* at least the most obvious linguistic inspirations – the Baroque and rich language and the complexity of structure and tone – are considerably reduced, if not absent. This style belongs more to his earlier novels such as *Blood Meridian*. The textual evidence of McCarthy's unbroken link to the Southern literature in general is perhaps most visible in the part of *The Road* where the father and son explore the horrifying cellar[74]. This allusion to slavery, even if reconfigured into a cannibalistic one, is well self-evident. The doric columns of the house remind the reader of a Southern slaver's mansion. The decay as a typical Southern theme is portrayed in another part of the novel[75], where one also finds a reference to an orchard, a connection of the novel with the Southern Gothic and his first novel, *The Orchard Keeper*[76]. However, the following analysis should explore some of the other elements of fiction McCarthy's had, deliberately or not, employed in his latest novel and are also found in Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying*.

The most important similar theme in the two novels is that of a journey. In the very first two paragraphs of *As I Lay Dying* the motif of a path or road is presented[77]. Later on, after Addie, the mother in the Bundren family, dies, her husband and her children try to respect her wish to be buried in Jefferson, a town several miles away

[73] *Ibid*. 135.
[74] McCarthy, *The Road*, 116.
[75] *Ibid*. 94
[76] a novel from the Southern Gothic phase of McCarthy's writing
[77] Faulkner, *As I Lay Dying*, 3.

from their home. The preposterous journey with her in a coffin might seem as a mockery of heroism, but as Cleanth Brooks states[78], heroism is always an act against common sense and invites a comic perspective, which is what happens in Faulkner's novel.

A journey as a heroic deed is an old Western literary motif from Homer's *Odyssey* onward. In the case of McCarthy's *The Road*, the journey resembles a spiritual quest, almost the mythic quest for the Holy Grail (as discussed above and supported by the description of the boy as a "golden chalice, good to house a god"[79]). The Bundrens motive to undertake the travel is unclear, the three most probable candidates being the promise given to Addie, the Southern sense of honor and genuine affection to a family member. The keyword *promise* is often repeated by the father to his son in *The Road*, and one can deduce that keeping a promise to his wife about protecting their child would be the main motivation to suffer the travel. Even amidst the hopelessness of the world, his sense of honor and fatherly love would keep him walking step by step while coughing blood.

The minor characters and the many obstacles and pitfalls on the way towards Jefferson or the ocean serve as the narrative catalyst to the shaping of the novels' heroes and especially to revealing their basic features. When the wagon with Addie tumbles on the river ford, the character of Darl proves to be the least heroic of the three older brothers. The fire in the barn changes the reader's understanding of Jewel as not a wild, self-absorbed and flamboyant man, but indeed a hero of action. The suffering of Cash and his altruistic attitude about his wounded leg is most visible when climbing several of the hills. In *The Road*, the first meeting with a man struck

[78] Brooks, *William Faulkner: The Yoknapatawpha Country*, 141.
[79] McCarthy, *The Road*, 78.

by lightning[80] presents the less caring side of the father and without the allegorical reading this would be the case of not freeing the cannibals' victims in the cellar, too. But the struck man "[...] looked down. As if he'd done something wrong"[81], therefore this man punished by God is not, in the simple vocabulary of the novel, a good guy. The fear that struck the heart of the father when he met the cannibals and their victims can be understood as an act of passion towards his son, therefore superior, esp. if the son is a Christ-like figure. The last encounter with the thief than presents the merciful side of the father, finally revealing his good character, even if under extremely temping circumstances to commit a murder and after the boy's pleadings. Generally, the father resembles more the character of Jewel, a protector of his mother's bodily remains, and stands thus in contrast to the character of Anse Bundren as a father. The man's heroism is only undermined by brief moments of hopeless dreams and thinking. In particular, the father's courage and self-sacrifice resemble that of Jewel and his illness reminds us the suffering of Cash. These virtuous characteristics stand against the world attitude of Darl, who is the observing and almost clairvoyant narrator lacking impulses for action and ending up in an asylum, and the hopeless "madman" and "false prophet" Ely in *The Road*. In *As I Lay Dying*, Faulkner suggests that heroism stands in opposition to a distant, philosophical and artistic observation – and McCarthy is in agreement.

The other contrast between the characters in Faulkner's novel is that of their specific idiolects. Similar to Jewel and Cash, the vocabulary and style of the father's is minimalistic. All three characters are heroes of action rather than poetic heroes. Faulkner describes his rather innocent characters by letting them repeat several phrases. For example, Dewey Dell repeats three times the phrases "New Hope. 3 mi",

[80] *Ibid*. 51.
[81] McCarthy, *The Road*, 51.

"too soon" or "I believe in God"[82], Vardaman's parts are marked with the predominant minimalistic direct speech referents of "says". Jewel's dialogues with others are simplistic and he repeats phrases, too ("One lick less"[83]). Addie's affection towards Jewel is expressed, among other means, by her liking his lack of wordiness. Cash repeats about his wanting his wound not to trouble anybody and about the coffin not to be in balance. Indeed, the chapters with Cash as the narrator are the shortest ones, the longest being a numbered list of a work procedure. The simplicity of words thus correlates with the innocence or virtuousness of character.

The character of Cash might be described as an enigmatic but semi-Christ-like figure. There are several marks, including the fact that he is a carpenter and he is the one physically suffering on the final journey. Also, Anse's remark towards Cash that "there is Christians enough to help you" acquires a strong ironical undertone, if one considers the hosts of the followers of Christ that did not help him with his cross on Golgotha. However, it seems Faulkner is more interested in (post) Christians virtues in the society of the South rather than creating a full scope allegory. The character of the son in *The Road* thus lacks its direct counterpart here.

The metalinguistic contemplation on words *per se* is another theme in *As I Lay Dying* that occurs in McCarthy's novel, too. The only chapter where the voice of Addie is heard delves into thinking about the words of motherhood, love and the proper name of her husband Anse. The Addie's reflection is that words are invented by those who need to assign a signifier to a signified phenomenon which they "know nothing about"[84]. This semiotic nature of words is also reflected in *The Road*, where the ending of the world bears similarity to broken links of the artificial signifiers,

[82] Faulkner, *As I Lay Dying*, 78-79.
[83] Faulkner, *As I Lay Dying*, 11.
[84] *Ibid*. 115.

when "the names of things [are] slowly following those things into oblivion"[85]. This relation the concept of a word and the world's existence is reflected in Genesis, where *logos* is the symbol for God and his wisdom as the creators of order in the universe. However, in McCarthy's novel, it is reconfigured according to the major theme of Apocalypse. The son being described as the word of God extends the notion of *logos*, as it is extended in biblical theology to Jesus Christ. The words the boy learns in *The Road* are symbols of the transition of wisdom from father to son and later on, when the boy talks to his dead father, they imply the new teachings of Christianity reborn – a transition to another version of the New Testament.

In several parts of Faulkner's novel we find the motif of water as a symbol for death. The most explicit text is the chapter where Whitfield is the narrator. The sin of his with Addie was not punished with a biblical deluge, i.e. death of Whitfield. The water as the punishment of God by death is elaborated in more detail in the chapters describing the crossing of the ford, where the log of wood, *deus ex machina*, hits the wagon. As shown in the previous part of this thesis, this is a shared symbolism with McCarthy's novel.

The last of the elements of fictions identified in this subchapter will be that of the narrator persona, i.e. the narrative point of view. In Cooper's *The Last of the Mohicans* the narrator is the third person one, in Melville's *Moby-Dick* the narrator is the first person one (Ishmael), but in Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying* we find a very complex application of the modernist first person's narrative voice – the stream of consciousness. In particular, Darl's first person voice verging on clairvoyance is probably closest to the technique McCarthy uses in *The Road,* where it is an obscure combination of the third person limited omniscient narrator, internal monologues and poetic visions. The personal pronouns *he* and *they* identify the third person

[85] McCarthy, *The Road*, 93.

narrator, in contrast to Darl's first person one, but the viewpoints and their range of vision seem to correspond to a high degree.

2.4 The post-apocalyptic subgenre

The creation of *The Road* started after the events of September 11, 2001 when McCarthy and his younger son John (the real life inspiration for the character of the boy) lived in El Paso, Texas. Before this event, there already had been a significant literary tradition of the so called post-Apocalyptic subgenre of science-fiction and the theme of ending of the world is actually to be found very early in the American thought and literature, as Procházka points out in *After History*[86]. This chapter will explore one of the works that currently stands in the centre of the subgenre and had a profound influence on its imagery, structure and cultural references.

First and foremost, the name of the genre requires a bit of an etymological and literary analysis. The original meaning of the Greek world *apocálypsis* means simply uncovering, or revealing to those who have the key for understanding[87]. This original denotation was later used in the title of the Revelation of John in its Greek translation. Only via this Biblical reference to the ending of human history the original word acquired another, contemporary meaning. Devoid of its Christian reference, the phrase "post-apocalyptic" started to refer to those works that simply concerned themselves with the end of civilization or a massive catastrophe. The term *eschatological*, i.e. referring to the end of the world, would be more suitable for them, thus, for the purpose of the thesis, this term will be used to describe this category (for

[86] Procházka, "Apocalypticism in American Cultural History." *After History*, 393.
[87] Merriam Webster Unabridged Dictionary, CD version

example, Miller's *A Canticle for Leibowitz*). The works that fail to philosophically contemplate eschaton and rather present us with sociological and economic changes caused by a man-made or natural catastrophe will be referred to as *post-catastrophical* (for example, Brin's *The Postman* or *Mad Max* movie series). Lastly, the works dealing with any elements relative to the biblical Book of Revelation will be referred to as *apocalyptical* (for example, Hawthorne's *Scarlet Letter* or McCarthy's own *Blood Meridian*). The broad term *post-apocalyptical* will be kept to include all of the above, since for its vagueness, it is widely used in secondary literature. In context of these categories and works, McCarthy's *The Road* will be presented as a truly apocalyptical text with elements of a postmodern allegory.

In the previous subchapters, the paper presented a comparison and analysis of elements found in some canonical works of the American literature. Walter J. Miller's *A Canticle for Leibowitz* might never establish itself as en entry in the canon of the Western, or even American, literature, but it certainly belongs among the select few important post-apocalyptic works. According to the Time magazine that lists this novel in its Top 10 Post-Apocalyptic Books (together with *The Road*), the author only published one novel during his lifetime, but "he only needed one to make a mark"[88]. Immediately after its publication, the novel won the coveted Hugo Award for best science fiction in 1961. In course of time, the novel had a profound influence on the popular culture and new media.[89] According to the previously established categorization, this novel would be considered eschatological and only bordering with apocalyptical due to a connection to a Christian medieval legend that will be presented here.

[88] Top 10 Post-Apocalyptic Books, link
[89] The famous *Fallout* videogame series incorporates many references, including fallout shelter dwellers, buzzards, blueprints, medieval-like orders and its motto "War never changes", a reflection upon the eternal sinful nature of mankind (central to Miller's novel, too).

The novel is extraordinary in the midst of other similar bestselling fiction in its incorporation of the Catholic Church as the central narrative topic and Catholicism as something non-other (esp. in the American literature framework). Modern science-fiction in general is sparse on Christian motifs, if not intentionally ignoring any religious belief. Given the enigmatic persona of McCarthy, it would be speculative to unequivocally state that he was familiar with Miller's novel. Nonetheless, there is at least one significant similarity to support such a statement. Also, it is reasonable to assume that a traditional writer such as McCarthy would read some of the most influential preceding novels of this subgenre.

Miller's novel is divided into three very distinct parts set in three different eras (dated about 2600 to 3800 AD), vaguely reminiscent of the Dark Ages, Renaissance and modernity. The most important of those, in respect to comparison, is the first part titled *Fiat Homo*. Following a nuclear catastrophe named "the flame deluge", the remaining survivors turn against scientific knowledge and execute a "simplification", i.e. burn anything related to science, books and people alike. The Catholic Church survives and in these neo-medieval times offers protection to scientists. Six hundred years later, the novel starts with Brother Francis of the Albertian Order of St. Leibowitz on his Lenten fast in the desert.

The theme of wasteland as a spiritual place is treated rather ironically. Brother Francis beholds a tired, old man resembling a wandering monk. After an initial confrontation, the man reveals to Francis a location where a nuclear fallout shelter is hidden, containing artifacts related to the founder of Francis's order, Beatus Leibowitz. While the artifacts are genuine, such findings will endanger the process of the undergoing canonization of Leibowitz. Francis's vision of man in the desert is thus under constant scrutiny by Abbot Arkos quoting: "I don't know anything that could damage the case worse than a whole flood of improbable 'miracles.' A real

incidents, certainly [...] But there can be too much [miracles]!"[90] However, in the second part of the novel, the theme of desert reappears as the spiritual place of conversion of a hermit named Benjamin.

The description of the desert and the monastery located somewhere in Utah introduces several elements typical for the post-apocalyptical fiction and certainly reminds us of those creatures whom the father and son meet with on the road:

> "Grotesque creatures who prowled the fringes of the desert often wore hoods, masks, or voluminous robes to hide deformity. Among them were those whose deformity was not limited to the body, those who sometimes looked on travelers as a dependable source of venison."[91]

The cannibalism occurring in the post-apocalyptic wilderness is emphasized by the means of death of Brother Francis at the end of the first part when he is shot by one of the so called Pope's children (mutants protected by the popes from early times and considered as innocent as infants) screaming "Eat! Eat!" and when most of his body is consumed by the cannibal who leaves some of the corpse to the circling buzzards[92].

The monastery of the Albertian Order is situated near a desert road leading to a place familiar to McCarthy: El Paso, the city where the original idea of composing *The Road* struck the author. Further more, the roads in Miller's novel are considered the most comprehensible and accessible artifacts of the "the Ancients"[93] as the knowledge of other, technically advanced works is lost. As in *The Road*, where the roads will stay here "for a while"[94], they represent the most enduring artifacts of a lost world (as the Roman *viae* did in the Middle Ages).

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[90] Miller, *A Canticle for Leibowitz*, 52.
[91] Miller, *A Canticle for Leibowitz*, 11.
[92] *Ibid.* 128.
[93] The members of the civilization lost at the end of the 20th century
[94] McCarthy, *The Road*, 44.

The first part of Miller's novel examines with substantial irony the value of human artifacts. Preservation of the Ancients' knowledge is the foundation and devotion of the monks of the Albertian Order. Brother Francis is a copyist who spends fifteen years illuminating a copy of a technical blueprint he found in the shelter and many other monks are "memorizers" who learn by heart encyclopedias and other books, in fear of another simplification. This restoration and transfer of knowledge of the world lost resonates in the father's lessons to his son. However, even if McCarthy's father character is considered a biologist or doctor[95], there is never a transfer of any, even elementary, scientific knowledge. More so, as they progress on the road, he attempts to conceal the beauties of the artifacts from the boy, as far as regretting to find the well supplied fallout shelter[96]. For the father, the realities of the new world are vital to understand and respect, and any remembrances or sweet dreams of the past present danger[97]. As the preserved knowledge in Miller's novel actually results in eschaton, both authors' attitude seems similar.

The single most important element of fiction is to be found by comparing Miller's desert wanderer (the same person as the hermit of the second part) and McCarthy's old man named Ely. Neither in Bloom's *Cormac McCarthy's The Road* nor Frye's recent *Cambridge Companion to Cormac McCarthy* (specifically Allan Joseph's essay *The Quest for God in The Road*) is there any identification of Ely as the central character from the medieval and later Christian legends of the Wandering Jew. Bloom argues that this character is based on the prophet Elijah but only supports it by the similarity of the names:

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[95] During the encounter with the cannibal, the father explains: "To hear it you will need a frontal lobe and things with names like colliculus and temporal gyrus and you wont have them anymore.", McCarthy, *The Road*, 67.

[96] "He could not construct for the child's pleasure the world he'd lost without constructing the loss as well and he thought perhaps the child had known this better than he. [...] Even now some part of him wished they'd never found this refuge.", *Ibid.* 163.

[97] "He said the right dreams for a man in peril were dreams of peril and all else was the call of languor and of death.", *Ibid.* 17.

"[...] and that his name is Ely, an allusion to the Hebrew prophet Elijah, to whom both John the Baptist and Jesus Christ are often compared, particularly in Christ's manifestation at the Apocalypse or Judgment Day."[98]

However, as Allen Josephs points out, there is little textual evidence apart from the theme of sharing Passover meal. Ely hardly resembles the bold and courageous prophet challenging Baal:

"Ely, whether factual or some perverse nom de guerre, is the only person in the novel endowed with any sort of proper name. Why? What – beyond urging the critics to hustle – is the significance of the name? [...] Some of the criticism takes Ely to allude to Elijah, a connection I fail to see expect on the most superficial level. The wise old biblical prophet, other than caricature or intentional reversal, he is not; even less is he Melville's Elijah from Chapter 19 of *Moby-Dick* – and I don't understand any link beyond some weird possible version of Elijah's sharing of the Passover meal, a flimsy tie, for what it is worth, seen also by Phillip A. Snyder in the context of hospitality."[99]

Further in his critical text, Josephs attempts to answer his own question by elaborating a connection to the town of Ely in England and its cathedral named the Ship of Fens, *believed* to be built on Cromwell's Rock, a meteorite that helped to eradicate dinosaurs. For Josephs, decoding this should result in understanding that the cataclysmic event in *The Road* was not man-made and should be understood as either a natural catastrophe or God-made punishment.[100] Somewhat overlooked remains the fact that Ely, at the end, confesses that this is not his real name[101].

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[98] *Ibid.* 39
[99] Josephs, Allen. "The Quest for God in The Road." *The Cambridge Companion to Cormac McCarthy*, 135.
[100] *Ibid.* 135-136.
[101] McCarthy, *The Road*, 183.

Since Ely is a textually prominent character of the novel[102], identification of him as the Wandering Jew could prove to be pivotal to understanding *The Road* as a work with elements of a Christian allegory. Therefore, the history and iconology of this legendary character has to be considered first.

The medieval legend is first documented[103] in *Flores Historiarum*, a chronicle written by a Benedictine monk Roger of Wendover (d. 1235). The source was a visiting Armenian Bishop but the legend appears even earlier on in Italy and the probable origins go as far as early Christians. However, the legend owes its widespread fame to a German chapbook[104] published in 1602 during the Lutheran reformation. Given McCarthy's interest in the Lutheran mystic Jakob Böhme (1575-1624), this particularly characteristic literary motif of the era is hard to believe to have eluded him. The chapbook and the legends mostly rely on the Passion narrative in the Gospel, esp. John 21:22 and Matthew 16:28. In general, the Wandering Jew was damned by Jesus during his way to Calvary to wander the world until Christ's second coming[105].

In her thesis regarding the artistic image of the Wandering Jew stereotype and its transformation since the Middle Ages to neo-Nazi propaganda, Joanna L. Brichetto presents the basic iconology divided into nine points describing images, stories and allegories: the Wandering Jew possesses a walking stick or staff, a beard with or without long hair, head covering, purse, shoes or sandals, distinctive clothing, physical mark, distinctive bearing or posture and formal compositional themes.[106]

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[102] Regarding the scope of dialogue with the father, it is the second character, after the son.
[103] The Catholic Encyclopedia, link: see "Wandering Jew"
[104] *Kurtze Beschreibung und Erzehlung von einem Juden mit Namen Ahasverus*
[105] The Catholic Encyclopedia: "When Jesus bore his Cross to Calvary, he passed the house of a cobbler, Ahasuerus by name, who had been one of the rabble to shout, "Crucify him." Sinking beneath his burden, Jesus stopped to rest at the threshold of the cobbler, but was driven away with the words; "Go where thou belongest." Thereupon Our Lord gazed sternly at Ahasuerus and said: "I will stand here and rest, but thou shalt go on until the last day." And since then the Jew has been roaming restlessly over the earth."
[106] Brichetto, *The Wandering Image: Converting the Wandering Jew*, 22.

The wanderer in Miller's novel is explicitly identified as the Wandering Jew, both textually and by narrative: "[he] was a spindly old fellow with a staff, a basket hat, a brushy beard, and a waterskin slung over one shoulder"[107]. He marks a stone pointing to the fallout shelter with the Hebrew letters לצ (lamed and tsadi, L-TS), an act that makes Francis and Arkos to misunderstand those marks as his name and thus mistake him for St. Leibowitz. This mistake is later confirmed[108] by the character of the Wandering Jew appearing as one and the same with many names (wanderer, Old Jew, Benjamin Eleazar bar Joshua) in the other two parts spanning over hundreds of years, thus confirming his eternal occupation as the observer of the vicious circle of mankind's history from one nuclear catastrophe to another[109]. In the last part of the novel, the identification is quite literal: "Because, Benjamin Eleazar bar Joshua, if all these years of waiting for One-Who-Isn't-Coming haven't taught you wisdom, at least they've made you shrewd."[110]

Identification of this character in McCarthy's novel is possible if several physical features, images and themes are compared in juxtaposition with Brichetto's typology summarized above. When the father and son saw Ely, "he tapped along with a peeled stick for a cane"[111]. The staff is also understood to be a piece of the cross Christ carried and a perpetual burden[112] and Ely actually "tried to hand [the father] the cane but he pushed it away."[113] When Ely was given a tin with fruit, as he drank "the juice ran down his filthy beard"[114] and he had "his fingers laced in his filthy

[107] Miller, *A Canticle for Leibowitz*, 8.
[108] "Now, now, Paulo. One of them once mistook me for a distant relative of mine--name of Leibowitz.", Miller, *A Canticle for Leibowitz*, 177.
[109] "*Sic transit mundus,* he murmured, looking back at the glow. He slapped the soles of his sandals together...", *Ibid.* 355.
[110] *Ibid.* 185.
[111] McCarthy, *The Road*, 171.
[112] Brichetto, *The Wandering Image: Converting the Wandering Jew*, 22.
[113] McCarthy, *The Road*, 176.
[114] *Ibid.* 174.

hair."[115] As for the head covering, he "had a filthy towel tied under his jaw as if he suffered from toothache"[116] and we read that "even by their new world standards he smelled terrible", which is a distinctive physical mark, if one is not to stretch the text interpretation and suppose that Ely is covering his mark by the filthy towel or his hand[117]. More so, even if the towel is not a head covering, according to Brichetto, the Wandering Jew missing a hat or cap can be interpreted as one adopting Christianity[118], an act that is in the earliest legends insufficient to remove the damnation[119].

Ely is described as having "no shoes at all and his feet were wrapped in rags and cardboard."[120] As Brichetto points out, "wearing no shoes indicates humility and is also a way to distinguish the wearer from properly shod figures nearby"[121]. If the Wandering Jew is not shod, his soles are notably thick, which corresponds with the cardboard Ely wears. The Wandering Jew's purse, a connection to Judas[122], might be larger and slung over shoulder[123], and we read that Ely "carried on his back an old army ruck-sack."[124] Brichetto notes that such positioning of the purse (on his shoulders or back instead of held in the hand) resonates with the Jewish peddler figure[125], a folk motif that appears at the end of the passage with Ely when he leaves "with his cane, tapping away, dwindling slowly on the road behind them like some storybook peddler from an antique time, dark and bent."[126] In a French variation of the German chapbook, the Wandering Jew has an ever-replenishing purse with five

[115] *Ibid*. 173.
[116] *Ibid*. 171.
[117] McCarthy, *The Road*, 172.
[118] Brichetto, *The Wandering Image: Converting the Wandering Jew*, 24.
[119] *Ibid*, 4.
[120] McCarthy, *The Road,* 172.
[121] Brichetto, *The Wandering Image: Converting the Wandering Jew*. 26.
[122] The passage where the father explains to the boy that there will be no more negotiating another deal (p. 175) echoes with Judas's later act in the Passion story of returning the silver pieces (Matthew 27:3).
[123] Brichetto, *The Wandering Image: Converting the Wandering Jew*. 26.
[124] McCarthy, *The Road,* 171.
[125] Brichetto, *The Wandering Image: Converting the Wandering Jew*. 26.
[126] McCarthy, *The Road*, 185.

sous[127], a description that could explain Ely's peering into the empty tin and "looking down into it as if more might appear."[128] The inquisitive questions towards Ely about the content of the ruck-sack and, above all, Ely's insistence on having nothing, certainly intensify this motif. The father's motivation cannot be explained by any ulterior motives, i.e. robbing a poor old man. The surrounding text rather implies that the father is assessing the character and truthfulness of Ely.

Ely's answers, instead of helping us decode his identity, help to build a chaotic and enigmatic profile. But in the light of reading this character in the above suggested way, some of the questions and answers actually prove to be more than a misleading thread for the critical effort. For example, the simplistic answer "I can walk"[129] would be a minimalist manifest of Ely's destiny, supported by his "I was always on the road"[130] or the reference to him being a solitary[131] observer of mankind's history in "God knows what those eyes saw"[132] or "Tell us where the world went"[133]. So would be the otherwise ambiguous response "I am ninety. [Father:] No, you're not. [Ely:] Okay."[134] The legends endow this character with a unique ability: whenever he turns one hundred, he is miraculously restored to the age of thirty[135], his age thus being indefinite in any point of time. His eternal wandering and immortality are later reflected in Ely's contemplation about being the last man on the earth and perhaps even his shaking of the head with a gesture of despair when the father threatens him about "going first" and later promises not to fear any harm[136]. The Wandering Jew's death-wish (end of his suffering) is reconfigured by McCarthy, and Ely answers that

[127] Brichetto, *The Wandering Image: Converting the Wandering Jew*. 25.
[128] McCarthy, *The Road,* 175.
[129] McCarthy, *The Road,* 177.
[130] *Ibid*. 179.
[131] Brichetto points out that the Wandering Jew is always seen alone, or with pilgrims asking him questions (Brichetto, 32.)
[132] McCarthy, *The Road*, 180.
[133] *Ibid*. 176.
[134] *Ibid*. 177.
[135] The Catholic Encyclopedia.: "Wandering Jew"
[136] McCarthy, *The Road,* 172.

he doesn't want to die[137] but he might have had before because "When you're alive you've always got that ahead of you"[138]. If the boy represents Christ, their meeting would represent the end of the Wandering Jew, the Last Judgment, as Ely reflects "When I saw the boy I thought I died"[139] and "I know this was coming. [...] I always believed in it."[140]

The legends and motif of the Wandering Jew bear strong anti-Semitic undertones. Ahasver, the character from the Lutheran chapbook, is not only connected to Judas but also to Satan. This symbolism of otherness was widely abused for anti-Jewish propaganda, resulting above else in the horrors of the WWII that are referenced in *The Road*, too[141]. Ely's resistance to reveal his name[142] can be interpreted (apart from the obvious Cabalistic reference) as the fear accumulated across the past centuries. His most enigmatic and nihilistic statement: "There is no God and we are his prophets" with its Islamic credo's structure could allude to the most recent exhibition of anti-Semitism in the late 20th century and the resulting despair, the loss of God's protection implied in the Old Testament.

If the character of Ely is thusly decoded, the motifs of death and eternal wandering and observance of history, together with almost perfect stereotypical physical description, dominate the whole passage with him. The legend connects the novel with the Middle Ages, an era where allegories were vital syntheses of the disappeared Classical and contemporary Christian culture. Combined with the reference to Plato's Allegory of the Cave at the very begging of the novel, the Wandering Jew legend (together with the Christ-like characters etc.) establishes

[137] Revelation 9:5-6
[138] McCarthy, *The Road*, 179.
[139] McCarthy, *The Road,* 183.
[140] *Ibid.* 179.
[141] The description of the boy as "something out of a deathcamp" (*Ibid.* 123.) directly following the event with the slaves in the cellar (*Ibid.* 116.)
[142] "I couldn't trust you with it.", *Ibid.* 182.

grounds for a reading of *The Road* as an allegory, if rather modern and open-ended in contrast to the medieval ones.

The obvious apocalyptic text that requires to be compared with *The Road* is the Book of Revelation, or Apocalypse, to be found as The Revelation of Jesus Christ at the end of the Bible[143]. In literary terms, its function is that of foreshadowing and revealing the events of the ending of the world and the fulfillment of history according to Christian mythology. This function is reflected in its very twofold structure where one part foreshadows the following, as Procházka points out in *After History*[144].

This literary device is masterfully applied to convey a feeling of horror in the part preceding the revelation of the terrible scene with the slaves in the cellar. The clothes, shoes and especially the cauldron used for rendering hogs, "all these things [the father] saw and did not see."[145] Since early in the novel, the death of the father is foreshadowed by his coughing, and the questions towards God, inquiring his existence[146], resonate with the biblical Passion story of Christ (the relation to which will be explored in more detail in chapter 3).

In *After History*, Procházka also explores the transformations of the apocalyptic myth in the American literature. His findings can be applied to *The Road*: the economic metaphor found in the Book of Revelation (and the economic nature of the Last Judgment), and its connection to the concepts of divine and human love identified by Procházka[147] in Hawthorne's *Scarlett Letter,* have their counterparts in McCarthy's novel.

[143] The connection of *The Road* to Bible will be more explored in chapter 3.
[144] Procházka, "Apocalypticism in American Cultural History." *After History,* 392.
[145] McCarthy, *The Road*, 115.
[146] "Are you there? Will I see you at the last? ... Oh God." *Ibid.* 10.
[147] Procházka, "Apocalypticism in American Cultural History." *After History,* 420.

During most of their journey towards the ocean, the father and the son have, apart from the gun, one companion of utmost importance, the grocery cart. The emphasis on its pure functionality as a carrier is expressed by the possibility to simply change this artifact of the old world for a new one, but the symbolism remains untouched. It is the symbol of transformation of the restricted economy[148] into the general economy based on free gift that cannot be reciprocated[149], a theme appearing in John's Apocalypse. Its lost function as means for exchange of goods is transformed into means of scavenging: in a world long after the catastrophe, finding useful remains or tins of Coca-Cola[150] verges on divine providence's intervention. Not unlike Hester's daughter, the cart is the treasure to be kept in safety and anything given from it symbolizes an act of charity, or distribution of God's charity, as in the case of the free gift of tin of fruits for Ely. The only exception when father imagines to abandon the cart is in mortal danger[151], when they have to "make a run for it"[152], as they do later. This might contradict this symbolism, but in Christian theology God's grace is distributed by his own sovereign authority[153] and by extension, his material gifts are too. This sovereignty is manifested when, similarly to the Jews traveling in the desert lead by Moses[154], the father and son find their manna (apples) after several days of starvation[155].

The apocalyptic theme of economic transformation is later emphasized by the contrast of the gifts with the uselessness of the gold krugerrands found in the shelter[156]. The means of exchange of Protestant America no longer posses any value

[148] The economy of the world left behind and metaphorically appearing in the mirror fitted to the cart
[149] Procházka, "Apocalypticism in American Cultural History." *After History,* 396.
[150] One of the few instances of irony in the novel
[151] The real treasure is undeniably the boy, embodiment and source of divine love as a Christ-like figure.
[152] McCarthy, *The Road*, 4.
[153] A theme found, for example, in Flannery O'Connor's work
[154] Exodus 16:13
[155] "They'd had no food and little sleep in five days", McCarthy, *The Road*, 111.
[156] *Ibid.* 151.

in a world arguably[157] destroyed by Armageddon (the first war described in the first part of Apocalypse). Indeed, the universality of this transformation and the global scope of the disaster are confirmed when the father throws away a Spanish coin and when we learn the Spanish origin of the wrecked ship[158].

The contrast of Hester's love towards Pearl with the economic scheme of Puritan millennialism in Hawthorne's *Scarlett Letter*, explained by Procházka[159], corresponds to the contrast of the unique relationship between the father and the son with the pure survivalist attitude of most of the other pilgrims in McCarthy's novel: the boy insists on them never to resort to cannibalism and the father actually envisions the terrible reversal to ape-like behavior[160]. The polarities of otherness are swapped when compared to Hawthorne, but this post-American thinking is quite characteristic of McCarthy.

Post-catastrophic works represent a rather vital stream in today's popular culture. In visual arts, an important branch to discuss given the poetic images in McCarthy's novel, one of the most influential works is the movie from 1980 - Mad Max 2. The costumes introduced in this movie inspired later presentations of post-catastrophic scavengers and cannibals to the point that this movie basically formed their iconography. The travelers we find in *The Road* wearing chains and iron rods and their extravagant outfits, the rather mischievous reference where the father searches for oil in a tanker, and the absolutely iconic post-apocalyptic dog[161] might shift the focus of the reader so much as to consider *The Road* to be an heir to this popular movie. However, one should consider these elements as something that rather creates a "mist around the tip of the iceberg" that can lead to an unfortunate

[157] The nature of the catastrophe being ambiguous and never fully revealed, this reading (explained in chapter 3) presupposes at least an allegorical divine origin of it.
[158] *Ibid*. 217 and 239.
[159] Procházka, "Apocalypticism in American Cultural History." *After History*, 415-417
[160] "like apes fishing with sticks in an anthill", McCarthy, *The Road*, 229.
[161] A symbol of friendship regained after social ties are destroyed

and titanic error in reading. Misreading of the novel as, for example, an environmentalist work dealing with effects of a manmade disaster (i.e. nuclear fallout), is however quite frequent[162]. One of the rather suggestive passages seemingly connects the catastrophe with a global nuclear war: "they pulled the morels from the ground, small alien-looking things"[163]. The reference to mushrooms might invoke the terrible beauty of a mushroom cloud, but morels actually look anything but like that. More so, the unique ability of mushrooms, bio-accumulation of radiation by mycelial networks (even years after a nuclear disaster occurrence) is well known and, for example, discussed again after Fukushima[164]. While radionuclides absorbed by mushrooms are only nearing the levels of hazard to health in the cases of lesser nuclear accidents, the amount of radiation after a global nuclear disaster wiping out mankind is theoretical, but arguably beyond measurement. It is highly improbably that the father, who seems to have above average scientific knowledge, would let his son eat the mushrooms in case of ever-present fallout. Morels, famous for growing near burnt dead wood and priced for their extraordinary good taste, seem to rather allude to a gift "from above" to the unfortunate pilgrims. While the novel's success might, in part, rely on the popularity of the post-catastrophic genre after 2001, this paper presents quite a different, strongly contrasting reading of the novel. In chapter 4, the novel's popularity will be explained by other means.

[162] Josephs, Allen. "The Quest for God in The Road." *The Cambridge Companion to Cormac McCarthy,* 135.
[163] McCarthy, *The Road*, 41.
[164] "Jsou houby radioaktivní?", link

3. Elements of allegory in *The Road*

The analysis of literary sources done in chapter 2 proved that a simple juxtaposition and comparison can produce some elements of fiction that assign a rather fruitful direction to critical interpretation of McCarthy's *The Road*. The chapters above confirmed what Frye writes: "the novel quickly emerges as a parable, a kind of biblical allegory that blends figurative and mythic qualities with the intimate emotional textures that naturally bind a parent and a child."[1] The figurative qualities contain the symbols, themes, archetypes and images already identified. The mythic qualities can be found, if we consider the novel a postmodern, open-ended allegory[2] with a link to Christian mythology. To establish a connection of the story in McCarthy's novel to the stories in the Bible and especially in the Book of Revelation, it is necessary to analyze some shared elements of fiction, i.e. elements of allegory.

After the opening of the novel with the allusion to Plato's allegory, the connection of the boy character to Christ is first mentioned in sentences simultaneously defining the father's inner emotional and existential tie to him: "He knew only that the child was his warrant. He said: If he is not the word of God God never spoke.[3]" From this point, we might trace multiple other descriptions of the boy as a Christ-like figure: the discussion of his godhood with Ely, the light surrounding him (see above, *salitter*) or the ever-present pleads to the father figure that exceptionally resonate with Jesus in the Gospel, the Passion story in particular. The structure of the narrative, nevertheless, projects the Passion story on the character of the father: his suffering, his climbing to the mountain-pass to a place where he remembers his own father, his careful steps and death at the end of the narrative,

[1] Frye, *Understanding Cormac McCarthy*, 164.
[2] see *allegory* in McHale's *Postmodern Fiction* where he explains the turn from Romantism to postmodern allegorical reading in the 20th century
[3] McCarthy, *The Road*, 3.

connect him with the Jesus Christ of the New Testament[4]. In a postmodern way, the synthesis of the mythical heroes with characters, in a medieval one-to-one basis, is non-existent. However, this division can be at least partially restored, if the doctrine of the Christian mystery of Trinity, i.e. oneness of the persons of God, is applied to the two sides of the father-son archetype: in this particular case, a unified duality of Christ (and time and space of history) found in his: "I am the First and the Last" (Revelation 1:17), reflected in God's "I am the first and I am the last; apart from me there is no God" (Isaiah 44:6), which is a synthesis of Christ of the New Testament (the father) with the one of the New Jerusalem (the boy), could enlighten some of the ambiguous allegorical elements in the novel that seem to appear without any order manifested by a narrative or poetic superstructure.

After the initial allusions, the text follows with images of refugees on the road. The description of tombs and charred corpses skirting the road as mummies, along with the pale bride in gauze[5], bring forward the images of Egypt and, in consequence, the Exodus of the Old Testament. The biblical connection of the image of the aimless wandering of the pilgrims after the catastrophe is later even strengthened by the image of the father returning to his home after forty years[6]. This imagery, however superficial, compares the old America to captivation, in extension with sin and evil, ever-present in McCarthy's previous fiction. It also helps to solidify the holistic interpretation of the allegory: at the end, before the father's death, the boy appears to be "from some unimaginable future, glowing in that waste like a tabernacle", the divine shrine of Exodus. From this point onwards, the elements of allegory can be divided into two groups: those referring to the Book of Revelation and those referring to the rest of the New Testament, specifically to the Passion story of Jesus Christ.

[4] That is not to say that this is the *only* aspect of the father character.
[5] McCarthy, *The Road*, 17.
[6] *Ibid.* 25.

In The Revelation of Saint John the Divine, Jesus Christ sends the message from God by an angel while John is on the island of Patmos "in the Spirit"[7]. The following prophetic vision describes the events that are going to happen and thus, obviously, transcends time. This corresponds to the element of dreams in *The Road*. McCarthy establishes the importance of the father's dreams in the very beginning. The vision of his son leading him trough the darkness of the cave foreshadows the moral and spiritual development of the boy that would happen on the road. Later, the father's dreams also transcend time backward, as memories: a distinction between those two is something the father finds hard to make. His siren daydreams about the world gone are, to him, something essentially dangerous. Nonetheless, this elusive state of mind is not unlike the "Spirit" in which we find St. John. There is one significant passage, where the prophetic nature of dreams in the novel is fully recognized as the boy predicts his father's death:

> "I was crying. But you didn't wake up.
>
> I'm sorry. I was just so tired.
>
> I meant in the dream."[8]

The frightfulness of prophetic dreams, later intensified to the point the boy refuses to share them, finds its counterpart in Revelation 1:17, where Jesus first reveals his identity to John: "Fear not; I am the first and the last." This particular line of Apocalypse is graphically emphasized in the novel as the only number in Roman numerals, when the father remembers the exact moment of the destructive event: "The clocks stopped at 1:17. A long shear of light and then a series of low concussions.[9]"

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[7] Revelation 1:9
[8] McCarthy, *The Road*, 195.
[9] *Ibid*. 54.

The dream of the cave introduces us to the archetype of journey. The very first traveler the father and the boy meet presents one of the features of this archetype: meeting significant minor characters that develop the picture of protagonists (see the analysis of Faulkner above). The descriptive phrases "he was as burntlooking as the country", "as if he'd done something wrong" and "he's been struck by lightning"[10] identify him as a symbol of the punished world, as described in Revelation 8:5 ("And there were noises, thunderings, lightnings, and an earthquake.") and foreshadowed by the trembling of an earthquake earlier[11]. The inevitability of God's punishment at the eschaton is commented upon when the father says: "There's nothing we could have done. [...] We can't share..."[12], reflecting also the finality of the Last Judgment[13].

An abundance of allegorical elements is to be found in the scene with the paintmasked bloodclan member. His demonic image of "eyes collared in cups of grime and deeply sunk. Like an animal inside a skull looking out the eyeholes"[14] strongly echoes the servants of the Beast in Apocalypse. The theme of diabolic otherness is underlined by his corrupted bird tattoo. The rachitic, lean stature reminds the description of the flabby and weak devil in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*[15]. The black billcap with the logo of some vanished enterprise born on his forehead carries an almost undeniable reference to the mark of the Beast[16], or by extension the Whore of Babylon symbolizing the captivation by the restricted economy of the pre-millennial world. The imminent threat the cannibal poses to the boy might find its

[10] McCarthy, *The Road*, 51.
[11] *Ibid*. 28.
[12] *Ibid*. 53.
[13] "He who is unjust, let him be unjust still.", Revelation 22:11
[14] McCarthy, *The Road*, 65.
[15] "But as I stood on this hillside, I foresaw that in the blinding sunshine of that land I would become acquainted with a flabby, pretending, weak-eyed devil of a rapacious and pitiless folly." Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*, 19.
[16] "He causes all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and slave, to receive a mark on their right hand or on their foreheads, and that no one may buy or sell except one who has the mark or the name of the beast, or the number of his name.", Revelation 13:16-17

correlation when one considers the character of the woman clothed with the sun[17], hiding before the snake of old, the Christian adversary personified as the Father of All lies[18], and the wife from the novel, the mother of the boy. His death, when he has bubbling blood dripping from his forehead after the father's rather military-like maneuver followed with a precise shot, seems to resonate with the ultimate sovereignty of God in Revelation as the single one being to give marks, the marks of the Beast being a twisted imitation done by its servant[19].

The character of Ely has already been dealt with above, but given the disunity of postmodern allegory, there is perhaps one more viewpoint to take on him. Supposing the father and son are, in different degrees, Christ-like figures, Ely could, indeed, relate to the biblical prophet Elijah. Thus, we would be presented with an almost medieval picture of Transfiguration that is juxtaposing the Christian understanding of Elijah as a "proto-Christ" of the Old Testament, and Christs of the New Testament and New Jerusalem. There is little textual evidence for this but this structural reading might be the missing link in search for the meaning of Ely's name. On the other hand, it might be McCarthy urging the hustle of literary criticism, as Joseph points out (see above, chapter 2.1).

Another allegorically significant meeting is the three men with a pregnant woman[20]. What follows is a grotesque parody of an aborted Christ's first (and in this context second) coming, i.e. the Adoration of the Magi or Nativity. The whole encounter lasts a single "long night"[21]. The setting is not only nocturnal, but also rural: "and the fields beyond"[22]. The three men carrying packs and the woman later

[17] Revelation, 12:1
[18] "The reptilian calculations in those cold and shifting eyes. The gray and rotting teeth. Claggy with human flesh. Who has made of the world a lie every word.", McCarthy, *The Road*, 79.
[19] Revelation, 13:14-15
[20] McCarthy, *The Road,* 207.
[21] *Ibid*. 208.
[22] *Ibid*. 208.

flee in fear, but the terrible sight of an infant charcoaled and gutted has impact on both the boy and the reader. The features of Nativity, the charity of gifts and welcoming, are transformed into cannibalism and abandonment. The boy internalizes this scene as twisted story of his own and seems never to speak again[23].

The major theme of the travel south is that of endurance, as we read in Revelation: "To him who overcomes I will give some of the hidden manna to eat"[24]. This moral teaching is reflected in the moments of suffering before the protagonists find the (supposedly nuclear) shelter after a peak in their suffering and hunger. For the father, the suffering is only warranted by his love to the messianic, divine figure of the boy, a passion towards God.

So far in the plot, most of the narrative elements related to the Book of Revelation. Upon reaching the ocean, the allegorical elements in narrative seem to shift the focus to the Passion story foreshadowed in the text describing the journey south. The sea or water as the symbol of death (or in Christian symbolism of change) was already discussed (see above chapter 2.2). Before the encounter with the thief, this archetype character is foreshadowed by the quickly coming night[25]. The darkness where they promise never to "leg to [...] no matter what", emphasizes the already growing distance between the father and the son, esp. as the boy continues to morally grow. It also refers to the swiftness and unpredictability of the second coming of Christ: "Behold, I am coming as a thief. Blessed is he who watches, and keeps his garments, lest he walk naked and they see his shame."[26] The constant alertness to the physical danger on the road evokes the *memento mori* warning concerning the preparedness of the soul for departure and the Last Judgment.

[23] McCarthy, *The Road*, 212.
[24] Revelation 2:17
[25] McCarthy, *The Road,* 249.
[26] Revelation 16:15

In Christian iconography, one of the most prominent symbols of change is the Penitent (Good) thief. The rather unambiguous evocation in the character of the thief in McCarthy's novel not only foreshadows the father's death following the Passion story, but also reflects the change in moral superiority of the boy over the father, who actually contemplates to commit a murder. The pursuit sees the father stopping and coughing, as bereft of strength as Christ on Calvary. The thief first defends his action with a knife against a gun, but after beholding the divine boy, just as the Thief of the Cross, his spiritual change is initiated: "The thief looked at the child and what he saw was very sobering to him. He laid the knife [...] and backed away."[27] The roles interchange and it is the father who steals the clothes, committing an immoral act but simultaneously evoking the image of Christ in Revelation, who disrobes the guilty so others see their shame. The boy's pleads to save the thief are followed by his minimalistic assumption of moral, messianic superiority: "Yes I am, he said. I am the one."[28]

Few pages later, after the father is shot by an arrow, McCarthy presents his own version of the Pietà: "A woman was sitting in the corner holding the man. She'd taken off her coat to cover him. As soon as she saw him she began to curse him [...] Scrawny, lank gray hair."[29] This imagery foreshadows the imminent death of the father, but McCarthy also fills in the missing theme of motherly love and creates juxtaposition to the character of the wife, this itself foreshadowing the woman at the very end of the novel.

After a travel around the coastline and near a ruined bridge over a tidal river, one finds a sentence that implies the father's hopelessness but simultaneously a unity of the two characters: "What are we going to do Papa? he [the father] said. Well what

[27] McCarthy, *The Road,* 274.
[28] *Ibid*. 277.
[29] *Ibid*. 283.

are we, said the boy."[30] In a typical McCarthyian ambiguous style, the boy's reply can be interpreted as a question towards the father, as well as the reader. Later on, as the father lies dying, the suggested unity of the two characters is expressed when the omniscient subjective narrator's viewpoint shifts to the boy and back to the father[31]. The Passion story completes when "[the boy] stayed three days [...]"[32] and the good news, the basic morality, is spread by the boy: "She said that the breath of God was his breath yet though it pass from man to man through all of time."[33]

In general, a modern allegorical reading suggests the following: on the narrative level, the father evokes the Passion story of Jesus Christ while the boy corresponds more to the notion of Christ's second coming. On character level, the father tends to be a postmodern pagan, a Camusian hero who knows goodness but lacks a spiritual faith or hope[34] to support it, while the boy, in contrast, represents the spiritual development of Christ before his crucifixion.

Apart from the Pietà mentioned above, there are many more possible allegorical images. To name a few potential pairs: the fading sun and moon of Revelation (8:12) and the cold glaucoma, the fallen stars (Rev. 6:13) and the starless nights, the third of the burnt trees and the ashes, etc. One might even consider the suspicious missing of number seven[35] in the novel, especially as it otherwise contains all other basic numerals in plentitude: what is not in the text might bear as strong significance as what is textually there. But such findings would be easier with the typescript of *The Grail* (see above) and might as well be an overstretching with little textual evidence. The last allegorical element relates more to the minimalist style and will be discussed below.

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[30] McCarthy, *The Road,* 295.
[31] *Ibid*. 299.
[32] *Ibid*. 301.
[33] *Ibid*. 306.
[34] "They went on. Treading the dead world under like rats on a wheel.", *Ibid*. 292.
[35] With the exception of 1:17 on the clocks, but this is still seventeen.

4. Minimalism as the stylistic choice

4.1 Origins and characteristics of minimalism

In previous chapters, the analysis of literary influences and elements of allegory produced some of the "building stones" McCarthy uses as the material for his minimalist novel: themes, symbols, structures, archetypes, characters, settings, allegorical elements etc. The origins and select characteristic principles of minimalism need further introduction to analyze the functions of this stylistic approach in *The Road*.

Defining minimalism tends to follow the obstacles of the definition of postmodernism, the philosophical and artistic movement it relates to the most: figuratively speaking, there is enough minimalisms for each one of postmodernisms. The best definition is probably by examples from its history. Similarly to postmodernism, its death is repeatedly announced, yet this is probably the best evidence of its prosperity[1]. Unrecognized and masked, this style has entered everyday lives of people around the globe by the backdoors of commercials, movie scores[2], architecture, visual design and, at the end, literature as well. Minimalism's stance against modernist complexity and the musical serialism (criticized among others by Adorno, a literary as well as musical theorist) proved victorious and what has been a means of *avant-garde* musical and graphical expression in the 60's[3] in the United States has become the art form for the late 20th's century everyman. As Strickland points out, it is an artistic *lingua franca*[4] of today.

[1] Strickland, *Minimalism: Origins*, 1.
[2] From Kubrick's *2001: Space Odyssey* (1968) to Nolan's *Dark Knight* (2008)
[3] For example the Fluxus movement
[4] Strickland, *Minimalism: Origins*, 1.

However radical a turn, minimalism is not marked by discontinuity in artistic thought, or disdain for tradition. The famous American composer Phillip Glass was inspired by aboriginal music[5] and the genius of Arvo Pärt only emerged after years spent in artistic solitude contemplating the translation of the musical language of the Gregorian chant[6]. In literature, minimalism as a fully developed form is a comparatively recent mode, as Hallett observes[7]. However, the idea can be traced as far as Poe's *Philosophy of Composition* or Robert Browning's *Andrea del Sarto*, whose ridiculed artistic dictum "less is more"[8] has been adopted by the architect of Bauhaus movement Ludwig Mies van der Rohe and later fully expressed by painter Ad Reinhardt: "Less in art is not less. More in art is not more. Too little in art is not too little. Too much in art is too much."[9]

The stylistic analysis of *The Road* follows the theoretical framework of literary critical analysis of the American minimalism in Cynthia Hallett's *Minimalism and the Short Story*[10] and basic musical theory of minimalism as summarized in Štoudková's doctoral thesis about European minimalist music[11]. In her introduction, Hallett divides the characteristics of minimalism into two different and contrasting approaches[12]: one highly reductive (and applied in the short story, for example Hemmingway's tip of the iceberg aesthetic principle, fully manifested in Raymond Carver's short stories) and one that focuses on a single subject and its beauty when perceived without context (a "whole ice cube" effect). Štoudková mostly confirms this

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[5] See, for example, his famous movie score for *Koyaanisqatsi* (1983)
[6] See *Arvo Pärt: 24 Preludes for a Fugue* (2002)
[7] Hallett, *Minimalism and the Short Story–Raymond Carver, Amy Hempel, and Mary Robison. (Studies in Comparative Literature)*, 23.
[8] *Norton Anthology of English Literature, Major authors*, page 2012, line 78
[9] Strickland*, Minimalism: Origins*, 120.
[10] Hallett, *Minimalism and the Short Story–Raymond Carver, Amy Hempel, and Mary Robison. (Studies in Comparative Literature)*
[11] Štoudková*, Evropské podoby hudebního minimalismu*
[12] Hallett, *Minimalism and the Short Story–Raymond Carver, Amy Hempel, and Mary Robison. (Studies in Comparative Literature)*, 1.

division by naming two major musical streams in American (and consequently European)[13]: the first defined by maximal reduction and presenting an object of art as the simplest structure without a context, the second relying on repetition, shifting and construction of meaning by patterning basic elements into platforms that create a feeling of stability, order and unity by their stable rhythm. These platforms then carry an object that can achieve new contexts and meanings.

The reasons for applying a reduced musical theory of minimalism to the novel are two: the first is the formal richness of minimalist music that had an undeniable advantage of about twenty years of development and a rather greater number of artists-composers; the second the cues about music which McCarthy actually incorporated into his novel. The first reference is that of a music in a theater imagined in the father's dreams[14] (the imagery of gold scrollworks, sconces and columnar folds suggest a literally classical music, of the old world). The second is an almost overt reference to minimalist music: "He'd carved the boy a flute from a piece of roadside cane [...] and after a while the man could hear him playing. A formless music for the age to come. Or perhaps the last music on earth called up from out of the ashes of its ruin."[15] Lastly, the elusive coda at the end of the novel metaphorically connects the concept of mystery with a tone color characteristic for minimalist music, as the deep glens "hummed of mystery."[16]

The poetic function of minimalism Hallett presents refers mostly to the aesthetics of reduction as applied in short stories emerging in 1980's America. This paper, nevertheless, would like to present McCarthy's novel (specifically its style) rather differently: as a multilayered, elusive, enigmatic work including elements of poetic (even epic) prose; as a work that is certainly not as structurally reduced as a

[13] Štoudková, *Evropské podoby hudebního minimalismu*. 3.
[14] McCarthy, *The Road*, 18.
[15] *Ibid*. 81.
[16] *Ibid*. 307.

short story (even though it incorporates the aesthetic of reduction, too) but uses the minimalist technique as a poetic vehicle to create a pastiche of elements with a sense of unity. As Josephs remarks, the novel is plotted and "lies beyond the constraints of any particular category, imbued with its own sense of mystery."[17] Given the inherent relation of poetry and music, their structural similarities and the highly developed minimalist tradition in music, a musical metaphor might prove to be useful in the poetic analysis.

4.1 Functions of minimalism in the novel

The poetic prose quality of *The Road* manifests itself in the very beginning, as dictated by the novelistic tradition of foreshadowing the features of the following text by an initial emphasis. The alliteration and anapaestic pentameter in: "When he woke in the woods in the dark and the cold of the night" and the following poetic image of "nights dark beyond darkness" leave little doubt about the poetic qualities awaiting the reader.

The technique of aesthetic reduction is perhaps not the single and central artistic choice of McCarthy, but that does not exclude it. The author's orientation to archetypes of human relation (i.e. father and son) or narrative structure of a journey is self-evident. In comparison with the historical novel, the American frontier romance or even McCarthy's previous work, the number of characters and the structure of plot are simplistic. The imperfect phrases consisting of single nominal phrases or adjectives can simultaneously describe the states of mind and setting: "All

[17] Josephs, Allen. "The Quest for God in The Road." *The Cambridge Companion to Cormac McCarthy*. 143.

through the long dusk and into the dark. Cold and starless. Blessed."[18] In his poetics of reduction, McCarthy owes, directly or not, to all of the predecessors of literary minimalism listed by Hallett[19]: Poe, Chekhov, Joyce, Beckett, and Hemingway. And this despite the fact that *The Road* does not exactly fit her list of features of the American minimalist short story[20].

Edgar Allan Poe is perhaps one of the more influential figures. It would even seem, that McCarthy pays homage to Poe, referencing the old man from Poe's *Tell-Tale Heart*: "One of his eyes resembled that of a vulture–a pale, blue eye, with film over it"[21] by his metaphorical description of the boy feeding Ely as "a vulture broken in the road. [...] Grayblue eyes half buried in [...] skin."[22] This reference underscores Ely as not only the Wandering Jew, but also as a twisted archetype of an old man with a prophetic eye, now turned nihilistic and with no vision of the future. Poe's work with the universal human psyche is reflected in the very theme of eschaton as a trigger of the universal human fear connected, as Ely points out, with one's own death (once all people are dead, it is the death of death, the true ending).

Poe is there again, when McCarthy's character of the father thinks about beauty, engulfed in ashes of the wasteland: "All things of grace and beauty such that one holds them to one's heart have a common provenance in pain. Their birth in grief and ashes."[23] Here we find echoes with the "most poetical topic in the world"[24], the grief of the bereaved lover of *The Raven*. The sense of nostalgia, love for the lost things, is perhaps the defining emotion of the novel's coda with the image of glens with trout long gone. Also, the repetition of the simply sounding "nevermore" finds

[18] McCarthy, *The Road,* 121.
[19] Hallett, *Minimalism and the Short Story–Raymond Carver, Amy Hempel, and Mary Robison. (Studies in Comparative Literature)*, 12.
[20] *Ibid*. 25.
[21] Poe, "The Tell-Tale Heart." *Great Tale and Poems of E. A. Poe*, 1.
[22] McCarthy, *The Road*, 174.
[23] *Ibid*. 56.
[24] Poe, "Philosophy of Composition." *Norton Anthology of American Literature*, 718.

its continuation in minimalism in general, and in *The Road* in particular: for example, in the repeated notion of "blackness to hurt your ears with listening"[25], this McCarthy's own *raven* hidden as the answer to the neighboring textual riddle where the leads are the following "great pendulum in its rotunda"[26] and the paradoxical mix of emotions and "vestibular calculations in his skull"[27].

As calculated as the repeated beginnings of paragraphs in *The Road* are, so is their emotional effect. The verses ending "nevermore" find their formal correspondence with paragraphs starting "He woke [...]"[28]. Similar to the lover's napping in the first stanza of Poe's *Raven*, the father's states of mind are daydreams in a faint daylight of the sun diseased with glaucoma. This approach gives the apocalyptic wasteland a dreamy contour. The formal cohesiveness and unity Poe achieves in his poem by repetition is the very same McCarthy achieves by repeating paragraphs with the same phrase or theme – and has the same emotional effect.

The minimalist turn to emotions and rejection of rational modernist experiments (the twelve-tone composition in music, for example) finds its counterpart in Romanticism's dominant traits, as Hallett points out[29]. And as noted above, the Gnostic search that McCarthy shares with Melville's Ishmael reflects this. Nonetheless, there could be more of Poe in *The Road*, but all these key references to him might be an answer to Josephs' question, whether McCarthy is just tantalizing the critics (see chapter 2.4). If there is anything excessive, it can only be a mistake in McCarthy's conscious exclusion.

[25] McCarthy, *The Road*, 14.
[26] *Ibid*, 14.
[27] *Ibid*, 14.
[28] *Ibid*, 1, 13, 36 etc.
[29] Hallett, *Minimalism and the Short Story–Raymond Carver, Amy Hempel, and Mary Robison. (Studies in Comparative Literature)*, 26.

In the remembered trout and the trout in the glens, Josephs finds a homage to another writer, to Hemingway[30]. The riddle with Poe mentioned above is an example of Hemingway's tip of the iceberg technique, i.e. hiding just enough context to let the reader feel the answer. Nonetheless, let us focus here is the dialogues between the father and boy. McCarthy's typical characters, predominantly men, often engage in minimalistic dialogues and resemble the Hemingway-heroes[31]. With the character of the boy, McCarthy accepts the Hemingway's technique of hiding the elephant of social decay in a dialogue, as Hallett observes[32], but in effect reverses it. The boy, a manifestation of the ultimate morality, insists on direct answers. Be it abortion, killing or cannibalism, their forbiddance must be clear to keep the relationship between the two characters as pure as it should be.

The subtle dialogues and the importance of silence in Hemingway's *Hills Like White Elephants* lead to several observations based on musical theory. To set a framework, this paper presents the following imperfect, (post)structuralist juxtaposition of the novel's narrative and textual (poetic/prosaic) structure and the "structure" of minimalist music: (narrative – textual – musical) character, artifact – syllable/word – tone/sound; event– foot/phrase, sentence – melodic motif/rhythmical pattern; setting, imagery – verse/vocabulary, tone – tone color, timbre; plot – poem/fiction text – compositional form).

On textual level, McCarthy's dialogues seem to follow minimalist composer Steve Reich's unique approach called *phasing,* or *phase shifting*. Štoudková describes it as technique discovered in a musical studio when two loops (tapes) with different

[30] Josephs, Allen. "The Quest for God in The Road." *The Cambridge Companion to Cormac McCarthy,* 141

[31] Hallett, *Minimalism and the Short Story–Raymond Carver, Amy Hempel, and Mary Robison. (Studies in Comparative Literature)*, 37.

[32] *Ibid,* 38.

rhythm accidentally met[33]. This discovery lead Reich to composing works where repeating of musical cells in different speeds would produce harmony of sounds or tones at certain repeated points of time. For example, one loop would have two tones or sounds, the other twelve – thanks to different speeds, they will repeatedly meet. If we consider words and phrases as sounds and rhythmical patterns, dialogues in *The Road* could echo this technique of Reich in meeting of phrases and words across different voices with different tone colors and rhythms:

"What is it, Papa?

Nothing. We're okay. Go to sleep.

We're going to be okay, arent we Papa?

Yes. We are.

And nothing bad is going to happen to us.

That's right.

Because we're carrying the fire.

Yes. Because we're carrying the fire."[34]

If applied to the narrative structure, the two different submerged allegorical narratives of Christ (the chronologically progressing Passion story and the time transcending story of Apocalypse), would meet at the end, around father's death. This is, of course, close to Chekhov's building of the short story, however, Chekhov does not operate with two simultaneous (if hidden or allegorically suggested) narratives. The blending of the narrative voice at the end of the novel (see above) seems to support this reading.

The other important notion, to McCarthy as well as to Hemingway, is silence and its effect. Hallett illustrates this on the "uncomfortable silence"[35] in the

[33] Štoudková, *Evropské podoby hudebního minimalismu,* 7.
[34] McCarthy, *The Road*, 87.

mentioned Hemingway's short story, where the missing time between trains is filled with silence. In McCarthy's novel, the theme of wasteland best corresponds with silence: it is the negative space in minimalist sculture, or the external space of the "icecube". In other than minimalist music, silence is rather a means of rhythmical patterning. However, in minimalism the object becomes the subject. For example, Arvo Pärt uses silence as a moment to actively contemplate the mystery of the previous sound[36]. The setting of narrative structure (wasteland) thus corresponds to the negation of tone color, or precisely speaking, negative tone color (timbre) of silence. This technique of juxtaposition of sound and silence is a part of what Pärt calls *tintinnabuli*, a special meta-musical approach tied with meditation and search for unity with God through sound. As Štoudková discribes it: "In tintinnabuli, [Pärt] is alone with silence and discovers the beauty of a single sound. This sound, together with silence, comforts him and this is why he works with a very limited material, one or two voices. [my translation]"[37]

In an interview for BBC[38] done for the program Modern Minimalists in 1997, the famous Icelandic singer Björk asked Arvo Pärt about his music and she essentially compared the basics of the *tintinnabuli* approach to a talk between Pinocchio and Cricket. In response, Pärt extended this simile as a talk between two sounds (or tones): the first is the earthly voice of a person, the second the angelic voice of God. This dialogical archetype can, of course, be followed in its origin to as early as the medieval disputations of the soul and the body, Gregorio Allegri's *Miserere* and the Baroque form of the fugue and its technique of *contrapunctus*. This supports the claim that minimalism is indeed a product of artistic tradition. In effect, Arvo Pärt

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35 Hallett, *Minimalism and the Short Story–Raymond Carver, Amy Hempel, and Mary Robison. (Studies in Comparative Literature)*, 39.
36 see *Arvo Pärt: 24 Preludes for a Fugue*
37 Štoudková, *Evropské podoby hudebního minimalismu*, 21.
38 see Björk interviews Arvo Pärt, link

and McCarthy could be considered traditional artists. With McCarthy, this turn towards minimalism as a continuation of tradition is solidified with his *Sunset Limited*, a novel in dramatic form concerning two voices/actors, Mr. White and Mr. Black. However reversed their names are in contrast to expectations (perhaps a cue on the artificiality of skin color and the word as a sign), their argument about God follows the mentioned archetype.

In *The Road*, on the narrative level, this interaction between the two voices (sounds) is represented by the father and the son. The son is the "warrant"[39] for the father not only in the material, survivalist sense of not resigning to suicide, but also in moral sense, as Jiminy Cricket is to Pinocchio. By combining this interaction of two voices with the archetypes found in chapters 2 and 3[40], McCarthy presents the relationship of the two in a more complex manner and, in a result, the author works as a prism in uniting the basic spectral colors into one beam of light[41] with emotional and poetic effect on the reader. The tones of characters acquire more of their lucidity as they progress: at the meeting with the thief, the son becomes a clearer, high sound of Böhme's *salitter* while we follow the father's sound darkening towards murder.

The above suggested application of musical theory to this novel could probably reveal more ties of *The Road* to musical minimalism, with the work of Pärt, as well as the myriad of American composers. The application of traditional structural description to minimalist music proved difficult in musical theory and this might also suggests that works such as *The Road* might require a different critical approach, perhaps relying on the methods of minimalist music theory already developed.

[39] McCarthy, *The Road*, 3.
[40] father and son, two Christs, whiteness/light
[41] see for example the famous abstract cover by Storm Thorgerson for Pink Floyd's *Dark Side of the Moon*

According to Štoudková, the ideal of minimalist music is an everlasting sound[42]. This temporal transcendence is also noticed by Randal Willhelm in his essay concerning still lifes as the form of imagery in *The Road*: "In accordance with the ancient narrative of the Apocalypse, many of these objects are represented in such a way that they resemble still lifes".[43] The poetics of imagery is broadly analyzed by Willhelm and suffice to say that his metaphorical use of still lifes correlates with the relation of tone color and image in the above outlined framework. Nonetheless, this relationship of form and the story of Revelation leads to another function of minimalism in the novel.

As has been already pointed out, the novel contains an allusion to Plato's Allegory of the Cave. Following his stylistic turn, McCarthy also changes the subject of his study: the author who had been a professor of human evil becomes a student of divine goodness. Some of his themes, approaches and types of heroes remain: the evil is still present in the otherness of the bloodclans and the father connects the novel with the old artistic world of McCarthy, but the boy symbolizes an object that requires change in approach. Like Ishmael, McCarthy is no longer fascinated by Ahab and begins his diving into the metaphysical and transcendental sea where, perhaps, he might find the whiteness of the whale.

This epistemological turn results in creating a novel that is not only a postmodern allegory of Revelation, but as a whole an allegory of the very process of revelation, where minimalism is the stylistic vehicle, a verbal mirror of the content. McCarthy reminds one of the minimalist predecessors Joyce, only he does not convey a striking epiphany but a rather allusive, ambiguous revelation. By absorbing the mixture of basic elements of fiction and morality, the reader is released from the

[42] Štoudková, *Evropské podoby hudebního minimalismu*, 3.
[43] Willhelm, "Golden Chalice, Good to House a God': Still Life in The Road", 2.

chains of the cave but before they can behold the pure light, they can only see the shadows and mirrors, since, as Plato says, their eyes are yet not accustomed to light and cannot directly stare into the sun. Hiding this *salitter* in between the lines, McCarthy leaves the reader to go back to the cave of our reality and never be able to tell the other cave dwellers about what they experienced. As Faulkner's Addie knows, words are for those who now nothing about the things. With the technique of exclusion, McCarthy removes the explanative dialogue of Plato and Glaucon from the cave and creates a minimalist epistemological allegory for the postmodern everyman who is not a philosopher.

In a stricter sense, the novel is also a parable, where the style of minimalism underscores the message about the very minimal moral standards that are needed for our civilization to survive even the greatest horrors, if not the horrors of the 20th century. The journey of the protagonists might as well be a reply to Adorno's *Minima Moralia* in a sense that morals can be recreated even after an all-devouring fall of civilization. To extend Adorno's description of the American landscape and the roads that have no "*Ausdruck*"[44], the damaged landscape and the missing expression of American roads that are now blasted around the globe can be restored by following one of the oldest myths, the story of the Good guy first spread by in verbal form of the Good news and only imperfectly put into the Book: after a fall, only suffering and upholding of the basic moral code and rituals can have the restorative effect.

[44] Adorno, "Paysage", *Minima Moralia*, 48.

5. Conclusion

A literary analysis of a minimalist work poses some challenges that result from its abstractness and also from the limited sources of secondary literature in comparison with the vast existing criticism dealing with less contemporary streams of art. Thanks to the recent popularity of Cormac McCarthy, the demand for critical studies of his works has increased, of which the recent publication of *The Cambridge Companion to Cormac McCarthy* is a solid proof. Nonetheless, most of the criticism focuses on his earlier works that are easier to approach due to their shared features with the Southern Gothic and Western subgenres, both having been the object of critical praise or disdain for several decades now.

Furthermore, McCarthy as a writer seldom openly shares his artistic philosophies and one is left with his typically McCarthyian equivocal comments. Thus, as simple as the dialogues of his characters was the starting point and approach of this thesis – mere juxtaposition and comparison based on sources of literary tradition in McCarthy's work identified by Steven Frye. Hopefully, it managed to explore and find some relevant elements of fiction that support the understanding of McCarthy and his quite recent stylistic turn as an evolution of his own work; perhaps joining of his previous works filled with Old Testament features with *The Road* in similar way the biblical Revelation is joined to the New Testament. This is not to suggest that McCarthy is performing his own authorial second coming but there seems to be a notion of fulfillment of a promise when reflecting on this minimalist novel. Perhaps a promise of optimism given to his son John in an interior monologue in a motel in El Paso. Whatever was McCarthy's motivation, the apocalyptic vision in *The Road* is less diabolic than his previous works and less anxiety-producing than

many a post-apocalyptic fiction. The old McCarthy's version of eschaton would probably be in line with Robert Frost's proto-minimalistic poem *Fire and Ice:*

"Some say the world will end in fire,

Some say in ice.

From what I've tasted of desire

I hold with those who favor fire.

But if it had to perish twice,

I think I know enough of hate

To say that for destruction ice

Is also great

And would suffice."[1]

However, it is not necessary to envision the novel through, for example, Christian perspective to find "some goodness" in it. McCarthy tells a story where the saying "when it is dark enough, you can see the stars" – so universally human it is assigned to R. W. Emerson, Charles Beard and folklores of different cultures – summarizes many a reader's impression.

Minimalism, as Hallett notes, has been a target of ridicule for a few decades now and writers and other artists have often searched for a different label to avoid the "m-word."[2] In music, this taboo of minimalism is perhaps retreating more rapidly thanks to the critical acceptance and popularity of such "serious" composers as Reich, Glass or Pärt. Thanks to the already semi-titanic persona of Cormac McCarthy, who is now standing on the pillars of popularity himself, literary minimalism could attain its rehabilitation, too.

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[1] *Norton Anthology of American Literature*, p. 1774

[2] Hallett, *Minimalism and the Short Story–Raymond Carver, Amy Hempel, and Mary Robison. (Studies in Comparative Literature)*. ix.

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