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**The Narrative of Solitude in Mary Shelley's *The Last Man*, Margaret Atwood's *The Year of the Flood*, and Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*.**

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MA of English

Spring 2015

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**The Narrative of Solitude in Mary Shelley's *The Last Man*, Margaret Atwood's *The Year of the Flood*, and Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*.**

A thesis Presented

By

John Nelson Balsavich

Submitted to The Graduate School of Bridgewater State University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts

May 2015

### **Dedication and Acknowledgements**

I am grateful to the following individuals, all of whom were instrumental in the production of the thesis. I would like to express my appreciation to Dr. Benjamin Carson and Dr. Ellen Scheible for serving as readers for my thesis. Thank you for your feedback, criticism, and overall support. I am grateful that you took time to be readers for this thesis.

To my parents and sister who have supported me with love, kindness, and patience throughout this process. Thank you for providing me with a loving and supportive family, as well as reading parts of my thesis for me.

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## Introduction

The solitude of the last human being on earth is the subject of the growing fascination among both writers and critics. Although most of the emphasis in the criticism is placed on societal issues, changes to ecology, issues relating to war, and man produced scientific and technological disasters, I am interested in the challenge posed by solitude's effect on narration. The thesis is involved in an examination of humanity through its study of solitude, and is thus situated in the ongoing study into the concept of the posthuman. For the latter half of the twentieth century to the present there has been a discussion into what constitutes posthumanism. Gregory Castle in *The Literary Theory Handbook* explains the phenomenon of posthumanism as being: "an epoch in which humanity undergoes a fundamental change in being (in every sense: social, cultural, physical, psychological, and intellectual" (266). It was during the eighteenth century that philosophers and other thinkers came to consider the human being as "not only a better class of being but a perfectible one" (266). The challenge to this idea of a perfect human being came from Friedrich Nietzsche. As Gregory Castle explains: "The human standpoint was unquestioned until Nietzsche put forward the proposition that human being is neither a natural estate nor a transcendent one, that humanism and all that is noble about humanity is not a fact of nature but the result of an interpretation" (267). The chief object of posthumanist critique is the idea of the perfect human subject that was emphasized by Enlightenment thinkers. In other words, the thought of what it means to be posthuman undermines the idea of a stable and autonomous human subject, and provides a challenge to traditionally held beliefs of what it means to be human. Through this changing definition of what it means to be human, the thesis looks at how the last person experiences and lives as a solitary figure in a world devoid of humanity. The key to understanding the lived experience of the last person is through the act of narration.

I am investigating the theme of solitude through three novels. *The Last Man* (1826) by Mary Shelley explores the absence of society because of a plague that decimated the world's population, resulting in a gradual emptying of the world of humans, their makers of civilization, and their

accomplishments. The story is narrated exclusively by Lionel Verney who wonders who will read his story after he becomes the last remaining man. Shelley narrative does not fully explore solitude but instead establishes a demarcation line between solitude as a divorce from society. Furthermore, while Shelley's novel is the first one to explore the post-apocalyptic theme to such an extent, it is also the first work that directly addresses the challenge of narration under the condition of solitude, the absence of the reader or listener. In other words, 20th and 21st century post-apocalyptic fiction did not start the process of probing the challenges to narration as a result of solitude.

Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* (2005) chronicles the experiences of a man and his son as they make their way through a dangerous new world in which society has devolved into something horrific and inhuman. The last person is the father because the son is too young to remember anything of the past, and further, cannot comprehend the horrors of the world the way the father can. This leads to a sense of tragedy for the father, as he is unable to express to another person his fears and concerns about the world. *The Road's* presentation of such a bleak world seemingly without hope engenders a profound look at morality and what it means to be human.

Finally, in *The Year of the Flood* (2009) Margaret Atwood constructs a world where corporate bio-engineering as run amok as a result of man's negative influence on nature. Atwood effectively maneuvers her plot from the present day destruction of the world back to the past in order to provide a reason as to why the human population was rendered extinct. Like Shelley, who ends the world with a plague, Atwood uses a bio-engineered plague to empty her world of humans. In *The Year of the Flood* the narrative focus on the character of Toby provides another exploration into the theme of solitude. Throughout most of the story, Toby occupies the rooftop of a health spa; all while being convinced that she is the only person left alive in the whole world. The novel looks at the ways in which Toby interacts with this new world which is a world of limitation for her because throughout most of the novel she does not leave the rooftop of her building.

In exploring narrative under the condition of ultimate solitude, the thesis positions itself within the philosophical backgrounds of Jacques Derrida and Emmanuel Levinas. In his final seminar *The Beast and the Sovereign, Volume II* Derrida reads *Robinson Crusoe* alongside the works of Martin Heidegger in order to explicate upon themes of solitude, the beast, and death. Specifically, the look of the removal of a societal context and how this affects the titular character is of great interest in the investigation of solitude and its effect on the narrative. Another work of Derrida's that is important to my thesis is *The Animal That Therefore I Am* which is a critical examination of the relationship between man and the beast. In particular, Derrida uses the animal to explore a myriad of issues concerning how humans have traditionally defined themselves, which Derrida argues, is in opposition to the beast.

For Emmanuel Levinas, the responsibility of the self is secondary to the responsibility that one has before the Other. The works of Levinas *Time and the Other* and *God, Death, and Time* stress the need for society in understanding the human condition. His philosophy places emphasis on the fact that the humanity of the other must first be recognized before the humanity of the self can be achieved. The complete removal of the human race, or the belief that others are gone, means that the last man or woman has no one to enter into an ethical and meaningful relationship with. This interest of Levinas then is crucial to the focus of the thesis.

In addition to the works of Derrida and Levinas, the thesis also takes into consideration Paul Ricoeur's theories regarding the relationship between time and narrative. In *Time and Narrative* Ricoeur examines how narrative relies on time in order to properly express itself. While subsequently, it is through the act of narration that time is able to have meaning. As William C. Dowling in his book *Ricoeur On Time and Narrative* explains "that irresolvable gap between a time of the world and a time of the soul -- becomes the gap between an instinctive sense that the world is meaningful and an ineradicable anxiety that it is not" (35). For Ricoeur there is, thus, a human factor in exploring time's relationship with narrative. As Ricoeur sees it, narrative allows for the expression of human action, while selfhood is thus defined by the ability to narrate oneself. However, for Ricoeur an audience is required for the story



to be received in order to contain any sort of meaning. In the case of solitude, there is very few if any one left to serve the role as audience, and thus as a result the narrative of the last person becomes disrupted. It is here where the thesis launches its own investigation into how narration of the self can still occur in spite of this absence.

A crucial aspect of these three literary texts is a reimagining of the physical space that is the result of absolute solitude. The reconfiguration of this space, resulting in a new geography, leads to a challenge in the narration of the solitary figure. The first chapter, “A New Geography,” looks at the idea of space in a physical sense and how the absence of others, results in a physical transformation, thus becoming unfamiliar to the last person. As Derrida explains, the world is like, “an island whose map we do not have. We are in it and we want to go toward it, and we do not know which way to turn to take our first step” (*The Beast*...61). It is not just the reconfiguring of the landscape and the need to reorient oneself that is the focal point of this chapter but the idea of what is lost in the process that being the former signposts of civilizations that acted as guiding markers to assist people in making their way through the world. *The Last Man*, *The Road*, and *The Year of the Flood* all have particular emphasis on the diminishing value of these signposts that takes place following the absence of society. In Shelley’s novel it is the accomplishments of humanity that have lost their importance. The landscape of *The Last Man* is also affected as the gradual absence of humanity is explored through the lens of romantic ideals of nature. No longer is man seen as the dominant force upon the landscape rather, *The Last Man* shows the return of nature in lieu of mankind. Finally, there is an understanding of space as distance or proximity. The plague that will eventually wipe out the human race originates far away from the main setting of England; throughout the story, the pestilence spreads to encompass the whole world, drastically changing the landscape as it gradually kills off the human race. *The Last Man* questions what happens once the human race is gone, along with what meaning their monuments and accomplishments hold in such an absence.

The loss of values in *The Road* is expressed through roaming hordes of humans cannibalizing themselves. *The Road* does an excellent job at showing how the markers of civilization have lost their

value. In particular, the idea of the road and what the house or interior space represents undergoes a paradigm shift once humanity has devolved into cannibals. A road, an ultimate marker of civilization in any society, becomes a place of danger in McCarthy's novel where anyone can fall victim to the cannibals. The function of the road therefore loses its value for the main characters. The house or the interior space also loses its values. Traditionally, houses were places of security and comfort against the dangers of the outside world. However, in *The Road* houses no longer carry this meaning, and instead become spaces where the threat of cannibalization may be greater than out in the open. The dichotomy between inside and outside is thus distorted.

*The Year of the Flood*, like Shelley's novel, also sees a return of nature upon the scene once the majority of the humanity is rendered extinct. In this new world, Toby must make sense of her new situation while dealing with a hostile world no longer meant for humans. Toby's world is even more limited, as she remains inside a former spa which becomes the entirety of her world. Toby's stay in the spa room is self-inflicted, as she is too afraid to venture outside. It is her fears of what is out there which prevents Toby from leaving and discovering that she is not in fact the last person. This fear of the outside not only restricts her freedom immensely, it also underscores her belief that she is the last person left alive. *The Year of the Flood*, therefore, allows the reader a glance into Toby's limited world and grants access to how she maintains her sense of self within this limited space.

In thinking about absolute solitude a question emerges: if human beings are no longer the dominant force on the planet, then who comes to replace them? The second chapter, "The Beast vs. Human," explores this question by positioning the beast or the animal kingdom as the new dominant species in the world. The absence of humanity and the replacement of humans by the beast leads to a challenge in narration, as the last person no longer holds a seat of primacy. The challenge for narration is to think about what it means to be human when being human has lost its meaning because the beast now reigns supreme. How is humanity maintained, let alone narrated when the beast is now dominant? The

novels selected all look at the ways in which the animal kingdom has surpassed mankind, and how the characters in the three novels cope with this new paradigm.

In Shelley's novel the question of what will happen to the world once mankind is gone can be extended to include the buildings of mankind. In particular, the zoo, a man made building used to house and control animals will disappear once the human race is no more. The caging of the animal, thus symbolizing the control that humans have over the beast no longer means anything once the human race becomes extinct. Additionally, in the beginning of the novel Lionel compares himself to a beast. He does so because as he narrates his life before the events of the novel, he explains that he is removed from the rest of society, in a state of semi-solitude. This connection with the beast, while in solitude and removed from societal influence, foreshadows the emergence and domination of the animal kingdom after the plague annihilates the human race.

There are no animals present in *The Road*, at least not any animal that would prove a threat such as in *The Year of the Flood*. Rather, it is humanity itself that has become bestial, as the threat of cannibalism is something the father and the son must contend with. One harrowing scene that shows the level of human depravity is when both of the father and son come across a house of human victims being farmed for their body parts. This scene has a twofold effect. First, there is the idea that human beings are eating other human beings and second, there is the idea of humans being kept as livestock, similar to how animals were once kept. The idea of the human race becoming bestial is contrasted with the father and the son who avoid others, not only out of fear of being devoured but also as a means to maintain their own humanity. Thus, the struggle against the cannibals is a major point of conflict for the father as he fights to keep him and his son alive.

Finally, the idea of the animal kingdom surpassing mankind is also a major factor in *The Year of the Flood*. The novel deals with a world that has been ravaged by corporate bio-engineering, resulting in the creation of new creatures such as the Pigoons. These creatures were originally kept under control and did not pose a threat to anyone. Following the collapse of society, the safety measures used to keep these

animals in place are no more, and as a result of this they start to spread across the landscape. The Pigeons are deadly because of their increased intelligence which enables them to move to the top of the food chain. They thus become the dominant force, and one that Toby must be cautious of if she is to survive in this new world.

The third chapter, "Time in Solitary Narrative," is a study of how the nature of time plays into the understanding of narrative. According to Paul Ricoeur, temporal experience is crucial in allowing for narration to occur, at the same time it is through the reconfiguring act of narration that time is able to hold meaning at all. In addition, Levinas sees time as not having any meaning unless it is placed alongside an understanding of the Other. If the act of narrating is how one is able to understand one's life, and narrative only exists in a relationship with time, which in turn depends upon the relationship with others, then solitude by its removal of others results in a challenge to narration. All of the literary works have in common a disruption in the traditional human comprehension of time. The chapter examines the ways in which the solitary figure experiences time as its meaning is disrupted in the absence of all others. The importance of time is that it enables to narration to occur, thus giving human existence its meaning.

The understanding of time in a societal context and the removal of said context emerges in the novels of *The Last Man*, *The Road* and, *The Year of the Flood*. In all of these works, time takes on a different meaning in solitude than it does in a societal context. What becomes crucial is how the characters in each book are able to keep track of time when the traditional methods of keep time no longer apply. It is this disturbance of temporality, and the ability to situate oneself in time in order to properly narrate oneself, that forms the study of this chapter. The characters in each novel need to rely on time, but time is told or measured differently than in a traditional societal context. Solitude, therefore, results in temporality being comprehended in a different manner than what is traditionally assumed. There is, thus, through this disturbance in the comprehension of time, a challenge to the act of narrating oneself.

In *The Last Man*, when the plague is moving across the world, there is the belief from Lionel that his children will continue to live on when he passes away. There is a sense though, that as the plague

progresses that the next generation will also be wiped out. Therefore, the passing of time from one generation to the next no longer occurs once the plague kills of everybody. In the end it is Lionel as the last man who must make sense of keeping time.

In the world of *The Road* there is a constant danger of being killed or eaten by other human beings, thus creating a sense of urgency for the father and the son. Neither the father nor son keeps track of time in any capacity because they are too focused on surviving in the present. The world is also in a perpetual state of winter, suggesting that the passing of the seasons as a marker of time no longer occurs. In other words, the traditional understanding of time through both natural means as well as human conception no longer exists.

Finally, Toby still has an understanding of time but this understanding is thrown into constant doubt as she contemplates time's meaning. Specifically, Toby understands that both the past and the future are inaccessible to her and that the present is constantly changing. Toby does attempt to keep track of time in order to ward off insanity. One method of keeping time is through the daily tasks that she performs. These tasks becoming ritualistic for her and in a sense replace the traditional ways of keeping time. Toby, in a sense, lives for these tasks, and by doing so continues to live on to the next day. However, the nature of time is one that Toby ruminates on and appears to be in constant doubt over. Furthermore, Toby struggles with letting go of the past, and as a result of this inability to move on becomes a prisoner of her own memories.

The final chapter of the thesis, "Facing Death in Solitude," looks at how the last person confronts his or her own mortality. Death is of course a natural part of life. For the philosopher Martin Heidegger, dying is not a shared experience; it is something that each individual faces alone. Michael Inwood in his book *Heidegger: A Very Short Introduction* explains Heidegger's thoughts concerning death: "In death one cannot be related to others as one may be in dying. Death is not unique in this respect" (77). Thus, death for Heidegger becomes the ultimate solitary experience. Consequently, thinking about death while in the state of absolute solitude magnifies the sensation of being alone. Emmanuel Levinas's and Jacques

Derrida's commentaries on death and solitude are of interest to this chapter, especially because in the case of Levinas, there is a challenge to Heidegger's claim that death is a solitary experience. Levinas, with his emphasis on the other, stresses the societal importance in understanding death. In this case, death is understood through alterity, or the relationship with others. In solitude there is no other person to enter into a relationship with which results in a disturbance to the comprehension of death for the last person. Derrida's views on death also contain a societal component, and for him the importance of death is in the role that the survivor assumes. It becomes the survivor's responsibility to not only make sure that the dead are properly laid to rest, but that the departed will ultimately be remembered by those who still remain. The narratives of solitude subvert this notion, and therefore form the question as to who will perform this function for the last person once he or she passes away. Another question into the nature of death and its relationship with absolute solitude deals with the issue of why the last person does not end their own life. If there is no one left, and the world has been so altered as a result of this absolute solitude, what keeps the last person from taking his or her own life? The greatest tragedy that is posed in exploring the relationship between death and solitude is the inability to share the narrative of one's own experiences.

*The Last Man* depicts a world that is dying of the plague, and as the effects intensify Lionel begins to fear that he will lose his family and friends. There is also an understanding on Lionel's part that there is going to be no one left to bury the dead and pay last respects. This is ironic because ultimately it is Lionel who is the last one and therefore takes on the role of the ultimate survivor. Lionel's state of solitude also causes him to question whether or not he should just end his life.

*The Road* perhaps has the most harrowing account of death, as the father and son who make their way across a post-apocalyptic landscape must contend with the threat of being devoured by cannibals. Unlike the other texts which give their characters a chance to breathe, there are few moments in *The Road* that give the father and the son any chance to rest. There is a constant threat of danger that they must contend with, casting the father into the role of a survivalist. In addition to this survivalist theme the

father wrestles with the decision on whether or not to kill his son to spare him the pain of such a mutilated world. The most chilling moment occurs after their encounter in the house of the cannibal victims. The scene is so shocking to the father that he orders the son to use a gun on himself. The scene of human depravity that the cannibal house invokes in the father makes him consider ending it all.

Toby's solitary condition also causes her to reflect at times on the friends she believes she has lost as a result of the bioengineered plague that rendered most of humanity extinct. The difference between her and Lionel is that Lionel by witnessing the death of his friends, family, and countrymen is able to provide a first-hand account of these deaths. In Toby's case, the death of humanity has happened prior to the events in the novel, and therefore she does not witness the death of the human race the way Lionel does. What is ironic about her situation is that Toby is not actually the last person left; she only believes herself to be because she is too afraid to leave the ostensible safety of her rooftop spa. The world is not completely dead, and while the reader is aware of this fact, Toby is not

## Chapter One: A New Geography

Absolute solitude, by the removal of all humans from the world, results in a transformation of the landscape that the last remaining person must cope with and adapt to in order to survive. The changing of the physical space in which these stories take place provides a challenge to the act of narration, as the last persons must make sense of what has happened to the transformed world. The transformed world brought on by the absence of all humans contributes to the idea of a new geography. This new geography is a physical change to the landscape resulting in the markers of civilization losing their original function. Furthermore, by the removal of all other humans from the world, the new geography disrupts the social context of explaining the world. The social context of understanding the world disappears, and with this disappearance the signposts and markers of civilization also lose their value. All of this results in the last person having to make sense of the new geography of the transformed world. By attempting to make sense of a world without its societal influences, the last person must engage in an act of re-orientation. Each of the books selected for the thesis deal with a transformed and in some cases a ruined world. In *The Last Man* there is the emptying of the world of its human population by a deadly plague. And finally, both *The Year of the Flood* and *The Road* are post-apocalyptic novels exploring what happens after catastrophes wipe out the majority of the human race and how this affects the landscape. In the former, the focus of the chapter is on the character of Toby and her stay on top of a rooftop spa which becomes her own world; while in *The Road* the world has fallen into such ruins that all signposts have lost meaning. The first chapter, therefore, examines the ways in which the absence of all other humans alters the physical landscape in which these stories take place, resulting in the removal of signposts used for guidance, and requiring a need for the last person to reorient themselves in this new landscape in order to better narrate their story.

Jacques Derrida's fascination with the concept of the island is explored in his final seminar, *The Beast and the Sovereign, Volume II*. In his seminar Derrida remarks that the world is like, "an island whose map we do not have. We are in it and we want to go toward it, and we do not know which way to



turn to take our first step” (61). The world as island creates a paradox, for Derrida argues that the totality of the world is limiting and one cannot grasp or fully comprehend it. The world is vast, but it is this vastness that results in an inability to ever fully comprehend its totality. Derrida uses the story of Robinson Crusoe, marooned on an island, to explore the idea of being-alone-in-the-world, and thus away from society’s influences. This removal of everything, including other human beings, means that Crusoe must adapt to this new and unfamiliar landscape if he is to survive. The world for Derrida is like an island. It is small but this is ultimately paradoxical as one is never able to fully realize the totality of the world.

The world as island contributes to a feeling of imprisonment because of the limitation imposed as a result of not being able to access the entirety of the world. Even though the landscape is different because of the absence of human beings, the last person found in each novel must still make sense of the changed world if he or she is to survive and, most importantly, effectively narrate his or her experiences. The remaking of the physical landscape, as the result of absolute solitude, means that the last person must adjust to this newly altered world. The following works that the thesis looks at all use the world as island motif to show the limitations of the world that the last person now inhabits.

*Robinson Crusoe* is set on an actual island but differs from the other works in the thesis because society still exists at the end of the novel, and Crusoe eventually returns to civilization after an extended stay on the island. In contrast to this, the other works have the complete and final end of society as their primary narrative focus. In other words, there is no going back to how things use to be for the last person. Mary Shelley’s *The Last Man* utilizes space to establish Lionel’s distance and proximity from the world ending epidemic. During the first part of the novel, the narrative makes references to the plague, but the reader is informed that this plague is happening in other lands and not in England where the story takes place. The narrative further contributes to the idea of space and proximity by having the focus of the story on the characters and not the plague itself. Even though references are made to the plague the story, at least for the first part, decides to focus on the characters and their own drama. It isn’t until the book’s

second volume that the plague finally comes to occupy the novel's focus. Even when the plague begins to make its presence Lionel explains: "We, in our country isle, were far removed from danger and the only circumstance that brought these disasters at all home to us, was the daily arrival of vessels from the east, crowded with emigrants, mostly English" (225). England is an island, and there is a sense that being an island removed from the rest of the world in which the plague is ravishing the population, will keep them safe. However, the plague still comes. The physical space that the characters believe will keep them safe is gradually reduced as the story progresses.

The gradual reduction of their ostensible safe space away from the plague, ties in with the theme of imprisonment and limitation of the world as island. The narrative acknowledges the island motif when Lionel points out how, "we stood, as a ship-wrecked sailor stands on a barren rock islanded by the ocean, watching a distant vessel, fancying that now it nears, and then again that it is bearing from sight" (295). Putting aside the obvious connection to *Crusoe*, there is still a sense of hope that they will be saved. However, Lionel and the other survivors are running out of space to hide from the plague. The world as an island initially entraps the dwindling characters as their physical space of safety is chipped away. Another example of the island motif occurs when the characters make their way to Dover in an attempt to escape the plague. They soon discover, however, that Dover, "was overflowed -- many of the houses were overthrown by the surge which filled the streets, and with hideous brawlings sometimes retreated leaving the pavement of the town bare, til again hurried forward by the influx of the ocean, they returned with thunder sound to their usurped station" (368). The island theme is present here, only this time the water or ocean is overtaking the land underscoring the imagery of a beseeched island. The scene is showing the physical reduction of the land by the ocean on which the characters can safely stand.

Eventually the remaining characters perish at sea with the exception of Lionel, thus making him the last man. Like *Crusoe*, Lionel finds himself companionless on the shore of a new land: "For a moment I compared myself to that monarch of the waste -- Robinson *Crusoe*. We had been both thrown companionless - he on the shore of a desolate island: I on that of a desolate world" (448). It is important

to note that the island Lionel is marooned on is the world itself. The plague has emptied the world of its population changing it into a deserted island in which Lionel is the only one left remaining. Later on, Lionel compares the difference between his plight to that of Crusoe. He reasons that Crusoe was able to return to society, while he, Lionel, is unable to do so because society is now gone. He ruminates on what this means and says, “to none could I ever relate the story of my adversity; no hope had I...I alone bore human features; I alone could give articulation to thought” (448). Lionel is truly the last man, alone in a world that is like an island.

In Margaret Atwood’s *The Year of the Flood* the world as island motif manifests itself in Toby’s physical location atop a rooftop spa in which she spends most of her time. The opening paragraph establishes the world that she lives in: “In the early morning Toby climbs up to the rooftop to watch the sunrise. She uses a mop handle for balance: the elevator stopped working some time ago and the back stairs are slick with damp, and if she slips and topples there won’t be anyone to pick her up” (3). Toby lives in a world absent of most other people because if she falls there would be no one to help her. Furthermore, the idea that the elevator has stopped working for some time indicates that the world has been in this state for some time.

The theme of imprisonment or limitation is also established early in the story when the narrative describes how Toby, “turns to the dark encircling wall of trees and vines and fronds and shrubby undergrowth, probing it with her binoculars. It’s from there that any danger might come. But what kind of danger? She can’t imagine” (5). The passage shows the limitation of Toby’s new world. Although she is able to survey the land with her binoculars, it remains inaccessible to her. The totality of the world is beyond her reach, as Toby is able to see the outside world but is unable to go there because of how dangerous the world has become. Furthermore, the world has become so dangerous, that Toby is unable to fully imagine what kind of dangers are actually out there. Another example that reinforces the theme of the world as island and sheds light onto the potential dangers that Toby faces out in the real world occurs later on in the story: “She trudges up the stairs to the rooftop, hoists her binoculars, surveys her

visible realm. There's motion in the weeds, over the forest edge" (237). The motion in the weeds could be the genetically engineered Pigoons that have evolved to a point in which they are a threat to humans. This is the potential danger that Toby faces if she is to leave the safety of her spa. The spa provides what she needs and keeps her safe from the outside, but it also serves as a prison. It protects her from danger while also limiting where she can go. The spa has become her island, trapping her within and revealing to her the limitations of the world.

Similarly to how the characters in *The Last Man* have to leave behind the comforts of their home, eventually Toby has to leave the spa and venture out into the world. Before leaving she makes one last survey of the world she has been accustomed to: "She'd climbed up to the rooftop before they left, scanned the fields. No pigs...none in plain view. How little I've ever been able to see, she thinks" (366). With her final goodbye to the spa there is a realization on Toby's part on just how limiting her rooftop garden is. Toby surveys the world as part of her daily routine, and while she was able to see it, she never tries to access it. The spa serves as the world as island motif, in that Toby's preference to remaining there produces an imprisoning effect as she can see the outside, but it is off limits to her because of how dangerous the world has become.

Finally, Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* also uses the world as island motif to show the limitations and the impossibility of fully grasping the totality of the new world. The scene that best exemplifies the world as island motif occurs near the end of the novel. Throughout the story, the father and his son are trying to make their way to the coast while avoiding any potential danger that would result in either of them losing their lives. It is a world largely devoid of humanity that the father and son must navigate through in order to stay alive. When they do at last reach the coast, the narrative explains: "They stood on the rock jetty and looked out to the south...Long curves of beach beyond...Out there a gray desolation. The endless sea crawl" (220-221). The endless sea crawl is especially poignant, as it is similar to how the ocean in *The Last Man* took over Dover, serving as a reminder to those characters that the physical space

of safety is gone. The father and son realize that they cannot go anywhere; they cannot escape because this is the new world. It is a world that they must learn to contend with.

The scene of the coast occupies a considerable section of the narrative and also results in an exchange between the father and son. The son asks the father: “How many people do you think there are alive?” To which the father asks, “In the world?” The son says yes and the father says he does not know. Finally, the boy asks, “How long can we stay here, Papa? The father answers, “We’ll see” (243). The boy knows that this means they will not be able to stay much longer. The son understands that they cannot stay on the coast, and that they will have to keep moving. The moment of revelation in which there is recognition of the world’s limitation, and that there are not many people left in the world happens at the coast. The father and son are abandoned like cast aways. The coast was the objective for the father and the son, but when they arrive at it, it is only to comprehend just how restrictive the new world is. The coast only serves to reinforce the insular and therefore inescapable nature of the new world.

The new geography that becomes the norm once absolute solitude alters the landscape is a world in which the markers of civilization, or the signposts used for proper guidance lose their value. These signposts were taken for granted before and always allowed clear directions as to where one was going. Now, with the absence of society, they have lost their value. The question now is: how does one make sense of a world in which the guiding markers no longer hold their original meaning? The challenge this poses to narration is that if the last person is unable to gain his or her bearings, then he or she will not be able to effectively convey the story. Instead, all the time and energy would be spent trying to make sense of the new world. All the works in the thesis deal with the gradual or sudden disappearance of the markers of civilization and how the characters react to their disappearance.

In Shelley’s novel *Lionel* chronicles the gradual emptying of the world’s human population while also exploring the effect that this has on the landscape. There is an emphasis in his narration on the abandonment of buildings and other manmade objects. Lionel’s first account upon entering London after the arrival of the plague shows what has happened to the city after its population has been reduced:

“London appeared sufficiently changed. There were no carriages, and grass had sprung up high in the street; the houses had a desolate look; most of the shutters were closed; and there was a aghast and frightened stare in the persons I met, very different from the usual business-like demeanour of the Londoners” (250). The theme of emptiness is further reinforced by how the grass is growing higher, indicating that nature is now taking over the space of man. The changing of the landscape as a result of man’s gradual removal from it has started.

Another example of a marker of civilization losing its meaning is what happens to Windsor castle that the characters lived in. This place is a source of happiness, comfort, and security for the characters, as it provided solace from the troubles of the outside world, including when the plague was making its initial advancement. After the plague has decimated most of the population, Lionel returns to the castle only to discover that it no longer serves to be a symbol of tranquility and security. Instead, Lionel explains that, “It was a melancholy thing to return to this spot so dear to us, as the scene of happiness rarely before enjoyed, here to mark the extinction of our species” (307). Windsor castle was the space of Lionel’s happiness but now has become a space to which he reflects upon the gradual extinction of the human race. The role of the house as a place of dwelling, removed from the troubles of the outside world, has lost its function now that the human race is dying out. The world’s problems, in this case the plague, have begun to invade this space of supposed comfort and tranquility.

The role of the house and how that changes in solitude is further seen in the works of Atwood and McCarthy. The novels of Atwood and McCarthy, because they take place after the destruction of the world, both allow the characters in them to experience nostalgia for what is missing and what can never be recovered. Toby and the father still have access to the past via their memories, and it’s through these memories that the theme of nostalgia comes to the forefront. In considering the theme of nostalgia for what is missing, Derrida explains that, “the nostalgic push or drive is what, basically, far from pushing us towards this or that...is what pushes us towards everything, toward the world as entirely” (101). And later he adds to this thought: “a compulsive nostalgia, a drive that pushes it to be everywhere at

home...awakened by or for questions such as those that have just been posed. In other words, Dasein is defined by the drive to questioning” (107). In short, nostalgia is a part of the human condition. In the context of solitude, the absent social signposts eventually ties in with the memory of the last person. The works of both Atwood and McCarthy look at the role nostalgia plays in considering the absent signposts of civilization.

There is a challenge in thinking about signposts as the guiding markers of civilization because for most of her story Toby stays in one location. There is one signpost or marker of civilization that she does think about, and that is the house of her childhood. In *The Year of the Flood* Toby’s thoughts on the house are a way to invoke within her memories of the past, and she is able to recall the time when the house meant something for her, or so she thinks. For as the narrative describes: “And the past does come back to her: the white frame of her childhood, the ordinary trees, the woodland in the background, tinged with blue as if there’s haze...her father digging with a shovel, over by the pile of picket fencing; her mother’s momentary glimpse at the kitchen window” (238-39). This moment is one that invokes a sense of family, warmth, and security, all of which are traditionally associated with the home. This memory contrasts with Toby’s present situation of being alone in the world. Toby’s memories of the past can be read as a sort of nostalgia or longing for this happy moment. However, a moment of realization comes that throws this nostalgic memory into doubt. No sooner does the narrative set the scene, then it adds to it this: “But where is Toby in this picture? For it is a picture. It’s felt, like a picture on a wall. She’s not there” (239). All this goes to show that Toby cannot apply her past memories to her current situation because the house of her childhood is gone. The novel situates the house in the past, before the world was destroyed, thus underscoring the idea of the house in the present losing its function as being a place that engender family ties.

The setting of *The Road* takes place in a world in which the destruction has already happened but unlike *The Last Man* or *The Year of the Flood* there is no explanation given as to how it came to be this way. The narrative does not go back in time to show what the world was like before the calamitous

disaster befell it. The world of *The Road* is described as being, “Barren, silent, godless...He hadn’t kept a calendar in years” (5). Right at the beginning of the story the narrative gives a description of what the world is like. There is a sense of the world vanishing as the father and the son make their way through it. Again, the beginning of the novel gives credence to this theme, for when the father and the son walk through the world the narrative describes that, “The gray shape of the city vanished in the night’s onset like an apparition and he lit the little lamp and set it back out of the wind” (9). The world is vanishing as the father and son make their way through it because the signposts of society are now gone. This is the world of solitude, a world devoid of humanity and meaning.

In *The Road* there is a sense of nostalgia for the past world on the father’s part because of his memories of the past. The role of the house again comes to the center of our inquiry into nostalgia for what once was and how the present situation of absolute solitude has changed that. Throughout the novel, the father and the son are constantly on the move, not being able to remain in one place for too long for fear of encountering danger and worse, death. However, the father has a fascination with the interior spaces, or houses that he and his son encounter along the way. The son does not want to explore the houses the way his father does because for him the house does not hold the same meaning that it does for the father. The son has grown up in a world in which going inside houses can be dangerous, whereas for the father there is a nostalgic longing for the home because he can remember its original function as being that place of comfort. One scene that best illustrates the father’s nostalgia for the house happens when the father comes across a phone and decides to call his old house: “he picked up the phone and dialed the number of his father’s house in that long ago” (7). The father’s phone call shows that that there is an attempt to establish a connection to the past and what once was. When the son asks him what he is doing, when he makes the call, there is no answer from the father. The phone and the house no longer have the value they once did. The phone, which in the past allowed people to talk to one another and establish the importance of a bond or connection between two people is no more. And the house, even though it still stands, is unrecognizable to the son who inhabits that new world of danger. The father’s nostalgia for the



past sets him up as being the ultimate solitary character because even though he is with this son, it is only the father that truly remembers what the world was like before the calamitous disaster destroyed everything. It is his ability to remember that makes him stand out from the others in the story who either do not remember what happened or have given up their own humanity. The father cannot communicate with his son about any nostalgic feelings connected to the house because the function of the house does not mean the same for the son as it does for the father.

With the removal of the signposts used to provide direction, the last man or woman must engage in an act of re-orientation in order to move forward. The need to move forward relates to the theme of narration because if any of the characters gives into stagnation, then the narrative cannot proceed and the story of the last person would remain untold. With the absence of the signposts, the need for re-orientation becomes subscribed to the body of the last person. This need for the last person to engage in an orientation of the self, without the aid of societal signposts, serves to reinforce the theme of ultimate solitude.

The idea of re-orienting oneself in a world in which the guiding markers are no more is summarized by Derrida: “A decision, any decision seems - I say seems - always to come down to a path to be taken, or a track to be followed along a path to be determined” (44). Life is all about understanding the limitations of the world and the choices one must make as they go through it. Absolute solitude adds to the limitations of the world, and it is why Derrida uses the solitary island of Crusoe’s to explore just what it means to be alone in the world. For as Derrida notes, “this being-on-the-path is a finite and lonely being in a world: the world, like any island within it, is this place of the being-on-the-path that we are, through and through and always already....but in a being-on-the path in which we are both, undecidable, pushed and held back, the one and the other, therefore neither one nor the other” (99). And later, Derrida summarizes: “that, then, is what the world is, namely the whole in so far as we are in this path on the way toward it, but would it insofar as the path traces itself in it, breaks itself in it, opens itself in it, inscribes itself in it” (101). In spite of the societal absence there is still an engagement with the world by the last

person, as an understanding that decisions must be made in order to move forward. There is thus a constant sense of re-orienting oneself on the part of the last man or woman.

In discussing the need of re-orientation, Derrida relies on the narrative of *Robinson Crusoe* and how Crusoe himself adapts to his new habitation to illustrate his point. Even though Crusoe does engage in an act of re-orientation as a result of being stranded on the island, the key difference between Defoe's work and the other novels chosen for the thesis is that Crusoe is ultimately rescued from his predicament. He returns to civilization wherein the other novels, such a return are impossible. Therefore, emphasis on re-orientation is more prevalent in the other works because in those examples the world of civilization is truly gone, and these characters become that solitary last figure.

In Shelley's novel the characters eventually leave behind their ostensible safe space because the plague has decimated the population and if they do not leave, they too will perish. For a while, there was a possibility on the character's part of holding out hope that they would be spared from the plague. However, by the time the third volume begins reality has sunk in and they are forced to leave England. Before setting out, Lionel narrates how he, "spread the whole earth out as a map before me. On no one spot of its surface could I put my finger and say, here is safety" (260). The map of the world miniaturizes can easily tie in with the theme of the island and the limitations that the world as island imposes upon the characters. It also means that navigating through this world will be of great difficulty because the safe spaces no longer exist.

Despite the challenges they know they will face, Lionel and the rest of the survivors soon leave behind their home. Before leaving for good, Lionel explains how he, "looked with sad affection in the last glimpse of sea-girt England, and strained my eyes not too soon to lose sight of the castellated cliff, which rose to protect the land of heroism and beauty from inroads of ocean, that, turbulent as I had lately seen it, required such cyclopean walls for its repulsions" (377-88). This is the final goodbye to England, and it is interesting to note that Lionel uses the word heroism. There is a suggestion here that England was once seen a place of heroic figures and ideas pertaining to heroism but now all of that is gone, never

again to return. The characters are not just saying goodbye to their home, they are bidding farewell to all that they believe their home country represents. They are truly stepping out into a new world.

Another example of re-orientation in the new world occurs when they set sail for other parts of Europe. Lionel offers a prayer of sorts to the ocean decrying: "Ocean, we commit ourselves to thee -- even as the patriarch of old floated above the drowned world, let us be saved, and thus we betake ourselves to thy perennial flood" (440). This quote ties in with the remark made by Lionel about the map and how there was no longer any safe spot for them. The land is now seen as a place of death and destruction, having undergone this transformative process as a result of the plague. The ocean is now the place to travel and there is a sense in trying to appease it. However, this approach will not work because everyone, except for Lionel, dies at sea during a storm. In *The Last Man* the plague has reduced the world's population and as a result of this reduction, normal life and the values of humanity have become greatly altered to the point of being unrecognizable. The acceptance of this change and heading out into the world happens near the end of the story. Traveling by ocean, which now seems to have greater precedence than the land itself, shows the loss of value that the land itself has. The ocean ends up reinforcing the island theme, and finally results in a new path that the characters have to take.

Toby also leaves her space of ostensible safety. Her departure comes when she suspects that there may be other people in the world. Before leaving, Toby has a moment where she thinks about what the spa has meant to her during the time she has spent there. The narrative explains the effect that leaving the spa has on Toby: "It occurs to Toby that she may never see this vista again. Amazing how the heart clutches at anything familiar, whimpering, Mine! Mine! Did she enjoy her enforced stay in the AnooYoo Spa? No. But it's her home territory now: she's left her skin flakes all over it" (365). Toby is stepping out into the world for the first time since the reduction of its human population. In a way, she is acting in the way that Derrida describes about stepping out into a new world without a map but still needing to go forward on a path, thus calling to attention the need to properly orient oneself in spite of these challenges.

Another example of an act of orientation that Toby experiences happen when she is finally making her way through the world. The narrative provides an account of how, “Toby takes her bearings: downhill, to the east, must be the shore and then the sea” (384). Similar to how the father and son in *The Road* rely on the coast as an orientation point to make their way through the world, so too does Toby come to depend upon the sea to gain her bearings and assist herself in the orientation process. By leaving behind her spa, or her island, Toby eventually removes herself from solitude and in her journey soon confirms that she is not alone. Toby understands that the world she is moving through is one of potential danger and hostility, but she does not retreat from it. Rather, she moves forward engaging in the act of re-orientation as she does so.

Finally in *The Road* the world of the father and son is so dangerous that the narrative establishes from the beginning how, “Clamped to the handle of the cart was a chrome motorcycle mirror that he used to watch the road behind them” (6). The father pushes a cart full of supplies for him and his son, but as he does so he is using a mirror to constantly watch the road behind him. The orientation comes because the father has to consider all directions he is traveling in because an attack could come from any of these directions. This looking forward as well as backwards contributes to a feeling of disorientation that the father must overcome.

Another attempt that the father makes in orienting him and son to the coast is his use of an oil company map that is described as being “tattered” and “had once been taped together but now it was just sorted into leaves and numbered with crayon in the corners of their assembly” (42). This haphazard map is referenced by the father at numerous points throughout the story as he attempts to gain a sense of direction on where he and his son are headed. Even though the father does have a map to guide him, its condition is not ideal which adds to the theme of difficulty in navigating through the world. The father has to depend upon a map that is broken and tattered, similar to how the world he lives in is also broken and tattered. The father may have a map, but the world is changed so much that at times it almost seems useless to have one. Still, by referring to the map and keeping the coast in mind, the father is orienting

himself through the new world. The world that the father and son inhabit is a world with very little chances to rest because of the murdering hordes of cannibals that make up the landscape. Both the father and the son are constantly reorienting themselves in order to adjust to a world full of people that want to eat them. In order to survive and maintain their humanity, they must keep moving forward.

## Chapter Two: The Beast vs. Human

The characters in the three novels representing last human inhabitation face the emergence of the animal or beast as the new dominant species. Mary Shelley's *The Last Man*, places emphasis on the fall of the human race and the emergence of the animal as the new dominant species. In Atwood's *The Year of the Flood* Toby must deal with a new kind of animal that has been brought into existence by human experimentation. These new creatures, the Pigoons, become a primary threat to her existence. Finally, although animals are extinct in McCarthy's *The Road*, large segments of the human race engage in cannibalistic activity, thus losing their humanity and devolving into something bestial. Absolute solitude, the absence of all other human beings from the world, results in a new paradigm of the animals or the beast like entities fulfilling the previous role of dominant species once occupied by human beings. It is this paradigm that the last person in each novel must deal with in order to define his or her humanity.

Jacques Derrida's examination of the animal and its relationship with humans in *The Animal That Therefore I Am* and *The Beast and the Sovereign, Volume II* is crucial to the investigation of the theme of the beast in the three novels. Derrida's preoccupation with the animal concerns the notion of how animals were traditionally treated by philosophical thought: "Animal is a word that men have given themselves the right to give...They have given themselves the word in order to corral a large number of living beasts within a single concept" (32). It is not just the fact that humans have given themselves power over the animal, it is also what the animal lacks, or what humans have traditionally denied the animal. Derrida points out that the animal has been denied access to language, death, and finally an ethical treatment. Derrida challenges these notions asserting that, "It is not just a matter of asking whether one has the right to refuse the animal such and such a power...It also means asking whether what calls itself human as the right to rigorously attribute to man, which means therefore to attribute to himself, what he refuses the animal, and whether he can ever possess the pure, rigorous, indivisible concept, as such, of that attribution" (135). In other words, Derrida questions the traditional idea of how humans have defined themselves in the context of animals. In the three novels the last person must realize or make sense of his

or her humanity in the context of a new dichotomy that now favors the primacy of the animal or the beast over that of the human. The chapter explores the last person's relationship with the beasts through the prism of language, an attempt to hold on to past social and cultural values that have vanished with the absent human civilization, and finally ethical matters.

In terms of language Derrida argues that, "the animal is deprived of language. Or, more precisely, of response, of a response that could be precisely and rigorously distinguished from a reaction; of the right and power to "respond" and hence of so many other things that would be proper to man" (32). In being denied access to language, the animal is denied the right to respond. While it can react to external stimuli, ultimately, the animal is unable to respond and articulate its sufferings because of the lack of language. The ability to accomplish such a task belongs to mankind. The human access to language, which in turn is denied to the animal, reveals the human and animal dichotomy as the placement of humans above animals.

Near the end of Lionel's story the animal becomes the dominant species, while mankind no longer exists. In one scene, after losing his only remaining companions, and thus becoming the last man, Lionel enters into the abandoned town of Ravenna. While walking through the deserted town, Lionel remarks: "I saw many living creatures; oxen and horses, and dogs, but there was no man among them....I stepped softly, not to awaken the sleeping town. I rebuked a dog, that by yelling disturbed the sacred stillness....The world was not dead, but I was mad....I was labouring under the force of a spell, which permitted me to hold all sights of earth, except its human inhabitants" (449). The key difference is that now there are no other humans left except for himself. The beast has claimed the space that mankind has left behind. It is important to notice that Lionel gives this town a sacred quality and remains silent out of respect for the departed race of mankind. He even rebukes a dog for disturbing the silence. The dog does not bark but rather yells, suggesting a human characteristic. The yelling of the dog illustrates the idea that language, which was denied to the beast, is here given to the animal. There is thus an emerging

understanding on Lionel's part that the world is not dead but rather it is only the human race that is gone. In the absence of the human race, the animal reigns supreme.

The issue of language also plays an important role in Atwood's novel. In *The Year of the Flood* human experimentation on the animal results in increased intelligence and other human characteristics being given to the animal, including a sense of language. Derrida explains the role of language and its relationship with the animal: "No one has ever denied the animal this capacity to track itself, to trace itself or retrace of a path of itself. Indeed, the most difficult problem lies in the fact that it has been refused the power to transform those traces into verbal language, to call it itself by means of discursive questions and responses, denied the power to efface its traces" (50). In other words, the animal cannot express itself through the means of a verbal language; that right belongs exclusively to mankind. However, this idea of language belonging to just man is questioned in Atwood's novel. In particular, there is a moment that takes place at the end of the novel when Toby is awakened by the sounds of birds. As she listens to their sounds, she comes to the realization that, "soon her own language will be gone out of her head and this will be all that's left in there. Oodle-oodle-oo, hoo hoom. These ceaseless repetition, the song with no beginning and no end. No questions, no answers, not in so many words" (349). This reflection is a moment in which Toby has an understanding that soon her own language, a defining marker of her claims of being human, may soon be gone from the world. This moment of clarity comes as she hears the birds singing in the morning. There is an understanding that the language of man is disappearing, while the language of the animal is emerging in its place.

The apocalyptic event in *The Road* has rendered nearly all life forms extinct, including animals. While the novel does not emphasize the animal, it still draws attention to the idea of the bestial and the inhuman. At one point in the novel, the father encounters one such individual who he has to threaten with violence in order to keep from potentially hurting his son. The description of the man is that he: "wore a beard that had been cut square across the bottom with shears and he had a tattoo of a bird on his neck done by someone with an illformed notion of their appearance" (63). What is interesting in the



father's description of another person is the image of the bird tattoo on his neck. The image of the bird is incomplete, contributing to the idea that the bird has been forgotten because it, along with other species, has become extinct. Thus, human language is vanishing from the world because the idea of the bird is now being drawn based upon an illformed memory. Moreover, because the human race is being replaced by cannibals the emphasis for the animal in *The Road* is not the same as it is in *The Last Man* or *The Year of the Flood*.

Language is disappearing from the world as the human race is replaced by the inhuman cannibals who now threaten the lives of the father and son. In one scene of unimaginable horror, the son comes across the remains of a dead infant: "What the boy had seen was a charred human infant headless and gutted and blackening on the spit" (198). The boy is rendered speechless by what he has witnessed, and the only thing the father can say in response is, "I'm sorry" (198). What the son witnesses is so traumatic that the father wonders if the son will ever speak again: "He didnt know if he'd ever speak again" (199). The scene with the infant suggests an assault against language because words cannot describe the horror of such an unfathomable moment. The transformation of the world has reached the point where the use of language to describe something so inhuman is inadequate. In other words, language is ineffectual in describing the current state of the world.

Past social and cultural values are crucial in understanding how each of the characters copes with his or her solitary situation of being the last man or woman. The appearance of the beast as the new dominant species raises questions for the last man or woman concerning his or her own humanity; and more importantly, how the last person narrates his or her experience in the absence of those past values of human civilization. The last person, therefore, attempts to hold onto values of civilization, when those values no longer hold their original meaning. In the absence of all others, what meaning do these social values hold? It is because of the dominance of the beast that there emerges a need on the part of the last man or woman to hold on to those past social and cultural values because doing so allows for an avowal of one's own humanity. It is crucial, therefore, that the last man or woman maintains his or her own sense

of self within the new dichotomy of animal over man, or the increasing inhumanity of a world devolved into cannibalism.

In the case of Lionel, there is no hope of ever having his story shared with anyone else. However, despite this knowledge, he still narrates his story but does so in a way that suggests a shared narrative through certain cultural values that once existed. Lionel, therefore, narrates under the pretense that the other exists. As *The Last Man* begins to reach its conclusion and the survivors realize that they can no longer stay in London, Lionel and his friend Adrian pay their city one final visit. Lionel observes: “birds and tame animals, now homeless, had built nests, and made their lairs in consecrated spots....Troops of dogs, deserted of their masters, passed us; and now and then a horse, unbridled and unsaddled, trotted toward us...everything was desert; but nothing was in ruin” (332). The city of London no longer belongs to mankind, as evident by the animals moving in to inhabit the city. Furthermore, there is a mixture of wild animals as well as domestic ones, suggesting that the domestic will soon become wild once the human race that has taken care of them becomes extinct. Additionally, what stands out about this passage is the description of how everything is deserted but nothing is in ruins. This last quote underscores the absence of humanity because the manmade buildings are still standing, but no human being occupies them. Instead, it is the animal that has moved in. The animal has taken over the interior space once belonging to mankind, further revealing the new dominance that the animal has now that human civilization is no more.

The idea of the beast being the dominant species also occurs at the end of the novel in a moment when Lionel comes across his reflection in a mirror. At first he does not recognize himself which prompts the question: “What wild-looking, unkempt, half-naked savage was that before me? The surprise was momentary. I perceived that it was I myself whom I beheld in a large mirror at the end of the hall” (455). Lionel has not seen himself in some time, and this causes him to be shocked by his appearance. Upon his initial inspection, he sees a savage before realizing that it is own reflection. The idea of seeing himself like a beast is connected to a remark that Lionel makes at the very beginning of the novel. It is

during these early moments that Lionel lives in a state of exile away from civilized society. In narrating his life at this time Lionel states: “My life was like that of an animal, and my mind was in danger of degenerating into that which informs brute nature....I continued my war against civilization, and yet entertained a wish to belong to it” (18-19). When Lionel is removed from others, he behaves like an animal. It is only after his entrance into society, that the beast like state within Lionel is subdued or repressed. By the end of the novel, with civilization extinct from the plague, the association with savagery and something beast like has returned in Lionel’s mind. It is when he is removed from other human beings that he again compares himself to the beast.

At the end of the novel, Lionel’s only companion is a dog: “My only companion was a dog, a shaggy fellow, half water and half shepherd’s dog, whom I found tending sheep in the Campagna” (467). The dog reinforces his solitary state, as it cannot talk or communicate with him. The dog is also continuing on with tending the sheep, even though its original master is dead. The dog now has the task of taking care of the sheep in the absence of a human being. What was once a job for man, now belongs to just the dog. In other words, the human value of work is no more and instead belongs to the animal that carries on in man’s absence. Lionel now lives with the animals in the sense that he is now part of their world, and this marks a return to nature and the state he was living in at the beginning of the novel. Lionel started off away from civilization, and now, with the world empty of its human population, he comes back to this state. His return to nature means that he is in the realm of the beast. By being alongside the beast, or underneath them, Lionel’s status of the last man is accentuated. He is the only remaining member of not only his race but also his own species.

Finally, at the end of the third volume, after becoming the last man, Lionel comes across some goats. Seeing these animals causes Lionel to panic: “No, no, I will not live among the wild scenes of nature, the enemy of all that lives. I will seek the towns--Rome, the capital of the world, the crown of man’s achievements” (460). Lionel, realizing the world is absent of other humans, vows not to live among nature but instead seeks to return to the city of man. He chooses Rome because it is the capital of

the world and the crown of man's achievement. However, when he does reach Rome he finds that there are no other men present. Instead, his attention focuses on two statues: "The statues on each side, the works as they are inscribed, of Phidias and Praxiteles, stood in undiminished grandeur, representing Castor and Pollux, who with majestic power tamed the rearing animal at their side" (461). The statues exhibit the traditional supremacy of man over animal, and relates to Derrida's argument of man's self-dominance over the animal: "The animal is a word, it is an appellation that man have instituted, a name they have given themselves the right and the authority to give to the living other" (23). The irony is that mankind is now gone, while the animal has become the new dominant species. In other words, the animal is no longer under the reign of mankind. The fact that this scene takes place in Rome is further significant because Rome being the capital of the world shows that the world no longer belongs to humans, it instead belongs to the animal.

In Atwood's novel *Toby* is still holding on to past values because she believes that she is the only one left alive. In the beginning of the novel she is at a swimming pool that has, "mottled blanket of algae. Already there are frogs...The luminous green rabbits, the rats, the rakunks, with their striped tails and raccoon bandit masks. But now she leaves them alone" (4). The animals make their appearance right from the opening pages of the narrative. And while traditional animals are listed, alongside them are the new, genetically created creatures from before the world was destroyed. The animals outnumber Toby, who does not disturb them out of respect for the former teachings of a group known as God's Gardeners and their leader, Adam One who Toby once lived with. During Toby's earlier encounter with the group, they ask her, "Surely you wouldn't eat your own relatives." To which Toby replied, "I would....if I was hungry enough. Please go!" (40). This conversation between Toby and the group's leader, Adam One, shows the difference between the two groups. While the Gardener's claim that they would not harm any living creature, Toby argues that she would if she was hungry enough. What ends up happening though, is an interesting reversal in which it is Toby who becomes the one not to eat any meat after spending time in the Gardener's commune and being exposed to their teachings and way of life. After the fall of

mankind, the reader becomes aware that the Gardener's teaching concerning the consumption of meat becomes lax to justify their survival, while Toby ends up being the one not to consume any meat. Her decision not to eat meat and honor the teachings of the Gardeners, shows the need for Toby to retain a sense of belonging in the absence of others which enables her to affirm her own humanity in a world in which the beast reigns supreme.

The bio-engineered Pigoons, a product of past human experimentation, become the primary threat to Toby's existence because their increased intelligence has placed them on top of the food chain, and as a result of this new placement they end up hunting her for food. When the Pigoons make their first appearance the narratives describes: "Three huge pigs are nosing around the swimming pool -- two sows and a boar...She's spotted pigs like this before, in the meadows, but they've never come this close" (18). Toby's space of safety is being invaded by creatures that pose a threat to her existence. As the last person, Toby is now at the mercy of the beasts who are hunting her for food; she is no longer at the top of the food chain. This threat to her existence causes Toby to shoot at one of the creatures, even though in the past she was instructed not to by Adam One. Toby is ashamed of her actions, and furthermore understands that the other Pigoons will not forget this transgression against them: "Pigs are smart, they'll keep her in mind, they won't forgive her" (19). The Pigoons are taking on human characteristics, in this case memory. The animal was previously denied memory, but now it has access to this trait. Again, this access to memory challenges the idea that the animal lacked something which in turn the human had access to, as Derrida previously argued. It is not just that the Pigoons will not forget what has happened, but that they will not forgive Toby. The human conceptions of memory and forgiveness now belong to the beasts as they surmount the human race in being the dominating species.

While the Pigoons serve as a primary threat to Toby, in *The Road* it is the father's fellow man that threatens to consume him and his son. In *The Beast and the Sovereign, Volume II* Derrida explains the horrific implications of cannibalism: "For here, what is the worst thing about cannibalism is that these people eat beings of their own species and thus, in a way, self-destruct, by putting to death, to living

death, their own species, their own lineage” (139). Derrida further argues that, “To have lost human dignity by being inhuman is reserved for humans alone, and in no way for the sea, the earth, or the beast. Or the gods...Only humans are said to be inhuman” (141). To be inhuman is a term usually associated with something bestial or belonging to the animal. Instead, Derrida argue that only man can become inhuman and bestial, the animal itself cannot be a beast. *The Road*, while absent of the animal, becomes the novel in which the beast is most prevalent. The beasts in this case are humans who have forsaken their own humanity by engaging in cannibalistic activity, and through this incomprehensible action are putting to death their own species.

In one harrowing scene, the father and son encounter the victims of cannibals being kept as livestock. While exploring another house, the father and son come across a secret passage that takes them into a basement. Inside, they discover a horrific sight: “Huddled against the back wall were naked people, male and female, all trying to hide, shielding their hands” (110). This horrific atrocity is further accentuated when the novel directs the reader’s attention to a mattress on which, “lay a man with his legs gone to the hip and the stumps of them blackened and burnt. The smell was hideous” (110). As these victims call out for help the father knows he cannot do anything for them, and further knowing the danger that he and his son are now in quickly makes his escape. While the father and son do not encounter any cannibals inside the house, they see other humans being treated as livestock for purposes of cannibalization. They bear witness to the inhumanity of eating human flesh, and the father realizes that this role of victim is a real possibility for both him and his son.

The scene of inhumanity that the father witnesses prompt him to command his son to kill himself if they are unable to get away. He instructs his son, “You put it in your mouth and point it up. Do it quick and hard. Do you understand? Stop crying. Do you understand” (113)? The father cannot bear the thought of his son being killed and eaten by cannibals, and as a result of this fear he orders the boy to take his own life. This moment of infanticide, the instruction of the son to kill himself, is an act of self-destruction, as the father killing his son is also a death sentence for the next generation. It is with this

moment that the full weight of the potential hopelessness of the world is felt. The world has come so dangerous that there appears to be little to no place for humanity left. It is a world, at least in the father's mind, in which fathers have to kill their sons.

The final issue is ethics, and Derrida's examination of Emmanuel Levinas's view of the face which forms a key component in Levinas's ethical philosophy is also important to the investigation of the relationship between the beasts and human under the condition of solitude. The face for Levinas is invisible, but it calls attention to the Other and the self's ethical responsibility towards the Other.

According to Levinas in *God Death, and Time*: "Someone who expresses himself in his nudity -- the face -- is one to the point of appealing to me, of placing himself under my responsibility: Henceforth, I have to respond to him. All the gestures of the other were signs addressed to me" (12). Colin Davis in his work *Levinas: An Introduction* explains that, "The face may be a real part of the human body available to be encountered, seen and experienced; but for Levinas it is before all else the channel through which alterity presents itself to me, and as such it lies outside and beyond what can be seen or experienced. Both the reality of the encounter and the elusiveness of the face are crucial to Levinas's argument" (135).

Therefore, the term the face or visage enables Levinas to describe the relationship between the self and the Other. However, when it comes to the animal and whether or not it has access to the face, Levinas does not know if the animal is privy to this concept. As Derrida explains, "This subject of ethics, the face, remains first of all a fraternal and human face...It is a matter of putting the animal outside of the ethical circuit" (106). Derrida acknowledges that Levinas does not include the animal in his thoughts, however, he points out that: "If I am responsible for the other, and before the other, and in the place of the other, on behalf of the other, isn't the animal more other still, more radically other?" (107). Derrida, thus, questions the idea that the animal is not the Other. In the three novels, the concept of absolute solitude means that the last person no longer lives in a world of Others in the sense that Levinas defined them as, i.e. other human beings. Instead, the Other becomes the animal, and issues of morality and ethics arise as a result of the animal now being the dominant species.

As the plague in *The Last Man* destroys the human population, there is a moment in the narrative in which Lionel explains that foreigners are coming into the country as their own countries have become uninhabitable. These outsiders are invading the home space of Lionel and his friends, and Lionel explains that these invaders were given the characteristics of animals and mythical beasts: “Gorgon and Centaur, dragon and iron-hoofed lion, vast sea-monster and gigantic hydra, were but types of the strange and appalling accounts brought to London concerning our invaders” (298). This army of outsiders is explained in terms as being something bestial and therefore inhuman. Later on Lionel and his friend Adrian ride out with an army in order to halt the advancement of the outsiders. However, during their battle Adrian calls an end to the carnage, citing claims to a universal brotherhood and recognition of the humanity found within each of them: “You are dear to us, because you wear the frail shape of humanity; each one among you will find a friend and host among these forces” (302). Adrian reminds the fighters that each of them is a representative of humanity, and that they must recognize the humanity of others, similar to Levinas’s philosophy. What is interesting though is Adrian’s later remarks when he instructs everyone to, “Cast away the hearts of tigers that burn in your breasts....let each man be brother, guardian, and stray to the other” (302). This call to dismiss the animal side demonstrates the belief of man being superior over the beast. It also shows the attempts made to hold on to humanity and not give into something animalistic.

Toby’s relationship with the animals also concerns itself with ethical implications and for this, Derrida’s account of Levinas’s thoughts on the animal, in particular the notion of the face, comes into consideration. For Levinas, the first commandment is “thou shalt not kill.” As Derrida explains: “Levinas promotes “Thou Shalt not kill”....It is the first commandment to come from the face of the other, being confused, in fact, with the very epiphany of the face” (110). However, the face Levinas is strictly a human feature, while the animal is not afforded this right. Again, according to Derrida: “If the animal doesn’t die (by killing it)....it is because the animal remains foreign to everything that defines sanctity, the separation and thus the ethics of the person as face” (111). In *The Year of the Flood*, before the human



race is rendered extinct, the group God's Gardeners, have, as a basis for their philosophy, a respect for the animal in that they do not eat them. They do not kill the animal, and thus are seen as giving to the animal what Levinas did not, a face and an ethical responsibility to not kill them.

Toby first encounters the Gardeners while working for a fast food chain that, of course, specializes in the slaughter of animals. While witnessing the group protesting these practices, Toby finds herself in an exchange with one of them. The group chants: "Spare your fellow creatures! Do not eat anything with a face! Do not kill your own soul" (40)! Thus, there is a connection between eating an animal and one's own soul evoking a close relationship between man and animal, and producing a sense of brotherhood between species. This notion of brotherhood is included in the idea of prohibiting eating something with a face, which refers back to Levinas. The Gardeners afford the animal the access to the face that Levinas does not, and by doing so they claim that no one should eat them. In other words, the face that gives credence to Levinas's first commandment of "Thou Shalt not Kill" which previously was denied to the animal is now given to them.

In *The Road* the bestial is not the animal, but rather other human beings that have given into acts of cannibalism. It is the cannibals that the father and son seek to avoid as they make their way through the post-apocalyptic landscape. An early example of this desire to avoid others occurs early in the novel. The novel describes how, "They (the cannibals) came shuffling through the ash casting their hooded heads from side to side. Some of them wearing canister masks. One in a biohazard suit. Stained and filthy. Slouching along with clubs" (60). This is the first appearance of other people besides the father and the son, and the appearance of these others causes the father to fear them. He is afraid because the description of this group of people is one that depicts them as being inhuman and like caveman, all of which contributes to the notion that they have regressed away from their prior humanity.

After his encounter with the man with the neck tattoo of a bird, the father reflects on how this was the first person other than the boy who he has spoken to in a long time: "This was the first human being other than the boy that he'd spoken to in more than a year. My brother at least. The reptilian calculation

in those cold and shifting eyes. The gray and rotting teeth. Claggy with human flesh” (75). The father refers to this man, the man he encountered after such a long time removed from interacting with a fellow human, as his brother; while at the same time, ascribing to this individual the characteristics of a reptile. The other, this reptilian brother, is made to be inhuman by the father who does not recognize the humanity of the other man. In his avoidance of others, the father ascribes to them the qualities of an animal, suggesting that it is easier for the father not to communicate with them in any form. The father is not wrong in this situation because the mouth of the man is “claggy with human flesh” meaning that the man has engaged in acts of cannibalism, justifying the father’s assertion of a beast like nature. What the encounter with the other man signifies is that mankind has now become something akin to an animal. There is a regression back to a state of animalistic nature that mankind has fallen into. It is this state that the father seeks to avoid for himself.

The father and son’s interaction with others shows the ethical implications in *The Road*. The father avoids others, or, if he is to encounter someone he either does not trust them, and or threatens them with violence. His son, on the other hand, shows a greater degree of compassion and desire to help out others. While rummaging through a house, the son sees another little boy: “A face was looking at him. A boy, about his age, wrapped in an outsized wool coat with the sleeves turned back. He stood up. He ran across the road and up the drive” (84). The appearance of this other boy prompts within the son a desire to take care of him by offering him food. In an exchange with his father he says, “I’d give that little boy half of my food” (86). The father, knowing that they cannot take on the responsibility of another refutes his son: “Stop it. We can’t” (86). This moment shows the boy’s humanity as he is willing to help out others to the point of giving away half of his own food to do so. The father, on the other hand, seeks to avoid others, including helping another child because he believes that they will not be able to take care of it, or that the child is being used as bait to lure them into a trap.

### Chapter Three: Time in a Solitary Narrative

The third chapter explores the importance of time and narrative within the context of absolute solitude. In the case of time, there is the idea that the expected means of understanding time through the traditional human perspective is challenged in the context of absolute solitude. While as for narrative, the chapter's examination of this concept looks at the need for the last person in each of the novels to express himself or herself in the absence of another person; and the challenges this absence of others leads to because there is still a need to receive and make sense of the story. The situation is paradoxical because what is the point of having narration with no audience? In *The Last Man* the narrative is a first person perspective with Lionel serving as the main narrator as he chronicles the gradual death of the human race. His narrative focuses on what is currently happening to the human population. The narration in *The Year of the Flood* is a third person narration that also explains the current world as it is. However, unlike Lionel, who becomes the last man at the end of his novel, Toby already believes herself to be the last person. As a result, Toby talks to herself and sometimes the other animals that prowl outside her rooftop garden. And finally, in *The Road* the reader does not have access to the father's thoughts. Instead, the father makes sense of his condition as being the last man through one sided conversations with God and even his own son, both of which underscore his solitude, as the conversation with God are one way, and the son is unable to process or fully comprehend his father's fears. The idea of being the last man or woman concerns itself with the nature of time and narrative, as each character takes on different forms of narration concerning the future, as well as different takes on the past which is also the past of humanity. Each literary text, because of the themes of solitude found within, deals with problems concerning temporal experience, as well as issues related to the act of narrating the experience of the last person.

To aid in the endeavor of exploring time's relationship with solitude and the effects that both have on narrative, the works of Paul Ricoeur and Emmanuel Levinas are consulted, in particular Ricoeur's *Time and Narrative Volume I* and Levinas's *Time and the Other*. Paul Ricoeur looks at the conceptualization of time in terms of its relationship with narrative, and argues that narrative explains

time, while consequently without time narrative itself has no meaning: “Time becomes human to the extent that it is organized after the manner of a narrative; narrative, in turn, is meaningful to the extent that it portrays the features of temporal experience” (3). In addition, William C. Dowling explains that, “In all human communities, Ricoeur will argue, the way that gap is closed is through a “third time” of narrative, in which consciousness discovers the alternative possibility of an external reality that belongs to the mind or soul alone” (35). It is, therefore, only through narration that a human being can conceptualize time. A major concern for Ricoeur relates to the question: how does one measure time when time does not remain still? As Ricoeur explains, “time has no meaning since the future is not yet, the past is no longer, and the present does not remain. And yet we speak of time as having being” (7). Ricoeur comments on the transitory property of time, and argues that time gains its full significance when it is articulated through human expression. In other words, Ricoeur highlights the importance of human expression and questions: “If there is no human experience that is not already mediated by symbolic systems and, among them, by narratives, it seems vain to say, as I have, that action is in quest of narratives. How, indeed, can we speak of a human life as a story in its nascent state, since we do not have access to the temporal dramas of existence outside of stories told about them by others or by ourselves?” (74). Therefore, the act of human expression is one that requires and calls for narration: “we tell stories because in the last analysis human lives need and merit being narrated....the whole history of suffering cries out for vengeance and calls for narrative” (75). The act of narrating is an essential part of the human experience that imparts to time its essential feature: “Time becomes human to the extent that it is articulated through a narrative mode, and narrative attains its full meaning when it becomes a condition of temporal experience” (52). In order for time to hold any meaning, it must be thought through a narrative mode, while simultaneously understanding that narrative itself depends upon the conceptualization of time. In other words, the perception of time is then bound to the human act of narration.

Likewise, the ability of an audience to follow a story is also pivotal to the act of narrating. Ricoeur stresses the relationship between the plot and the ability of the audience to follow it: “It is the act

of reading that accompanies the narrative's configuration and actualizes its capacity to be followed. To follow a story is to actualize it by reading it" (76). Therefore, there is a social requirement to narrative. In the novels that the thesis looks at the social aspect involved in the process of narrating and receiving the narrative is disrupted thanks to the conditions engendered by absolute solitude. The absence of others and the consequences of such an absence is also the focus of Emmanuel Levinas's *Time and the Other*. Levinas's philosophy is one that has a major interest in a societal aspect because of its emphasis on the responsibility that the self has towards others. According to Levinas, "It is banal to say we never exist in the singular. We are surrounded by beings and things with which we maintain relationship" (42). Solitude for Levinas is thus a tragic experience: "Materiality and solitude go together. Solitude is...the companion, so to speak, of an everyday existence haunted by matter" (58). He elaborates further: "Solitude is not tragic because it is the privation of the other, but because it is shut up within the captivity of its identity because it is matter. To shatter to enchainment of matter is to shatter the finality of hypostasis. It is to be in time. Solitude is an absence of time" (57). There is thus a need for others in order for time to hold any meaning. The works selected for the thesis all elaborate on the nature of solitude, and the question the question becomes, if there is no other human to enter into a relationship with, how then does the meaning of time emerge? If for Levinas, the meaning of time is understood through a relationship with the Other, and if solitude means the absence of the Other, then the conceptualization and understanding of time is altered. Furthermore, if the human component to understanding time is challenged as a result of solitude, then how can narrative, which as Ricoeur argues deals with time, contain any meaning? The chapter examines how the last man or woman deals with and makes sense of his or her solitary conditions, and the effects that this has on the conceptualization of time and the need for others to receive the story.

How each of the characters face time is expressed differently throughout each novel. Although time in a cosmological sense continues, how that time is experienced by the last person, or what precedence time is given within the framework of absolute solitude, is of interest to the chapter. In *The*

*Last Man* there is a sense that, as the plague decimates the human population, that time will no longer be understood through a human perspective. As the human population dwindles away, the emphasis on time and its traditional function through human perception become less clear and eventually even unimportant. This unimportance concerning the conceptualization of time happens when Lionel remarks, “the housewife’s clock marked only the hour when death had been triumphant” (277). The clock is now being used by Lionel to mark the time of death, and this contributes to the idea that time is running out. The main function of the clock is no longer to tell time. Instead, it is used to mark the approaching end of humanity.

At the end of the novel Lionel becomes the last man and comments on his new circumstance: “The day passed thus; each moment contained eternity; although when hour after hour had gone by I wondered at the quick flight of time...I remained alone of my race, --that I was the LAST MAN” (446). There is full recognition and acceptance on the part of Lionel that he is the last man. Time is now being kept by the last man, who feels helpless at how quickly it goes past. In narrating the struggle of his solitary existence Lionel laments: “I must continue, day after day, month after month, year after year, while I lived. I hardly dared conjecture what space of time that expression implied” (454). What disturbs Lionel is the idea of all of time and space becoming one, and therefore being hard to discern. Lionel must continue existing as the last person for the rest of time, and there is a sense of obligation on his part to continue onward because he is the last of the human race.

Lionel attempts to keep track of time, even though it is evident that doing so causes him grief: “I had notched the days that had elapsed since my wreck, and each night I added another unit to the melancholy sum” (457). The counting of his days only serves to accentuate his melancholy. After a year has passed he reveals that he is no longer keeping track: “A year has passed since I have been thus occupied...and I no longer guess at my state or my prospects” (467). As the story comes to its end, time no longer holds any meaning for Lionel. However, before the novel comes to its conclusion Lionel remarks how he: “made a rough calculation, aided by the stars, by which I endeavoured to ascertain the

first day of the new year” (467). Previously, Lionel attempted to keep track of time through traditional human means such as the clock. Now, at the end of the novel, he attempts to ascertain time through the stars. This keeping track of time through cosmological means is an interesting reversal of Augustine's views on the conceptualization of time. Ricoeur gives an account of Augustine's views on time as such: “Augustine alone dares to allow that one might speak of a span of time -- a day, an hour -- without a cosmological reference” (14-15). It was Augustine who reasoned that time was not just the product of the cosmos as Aristotle saw it but rather that the human dimension to the understanding of time was also crucial. Lionel, by using the stars in an attempt to tell time, shows that time is now being given back to the cosmos. It no longer belongs to the human race. Time is at an end for Lionel and the human race, and as a result of this time is returned to the cosmos.

Toby's understanding of time and her efforts to keep track of it differ from Lionel's. While Lionel's view on time gradually develops into having little to no meaning by the end of his narrative, there is an attempt by Toby to keep track of time while on her solitary rooftop. The reader's understanding of how Toby thinks about time occurs early in the novel: “It's daybreak. The break of day. Toby turns the word over: break, broke, broken. What breaks in daybreak. Is it the night? Is it the sun, cracked in two by the horizon like an egg, spilling out light?” (15). The word that stands out here is “broke” and its subsequent variations. There is a sense that time in this new world is broken, or that something is off with the natural flow of time. Toby, in her mind at least, is the only person left in the world that can tell or judge the passing of time. Already questions arise in Toby's mind concerning day and night, which represent simple passages of time. In her mind there is a disturbance or break to how night and day are perceived. Time, even at this early stage, is already being thrown into question.

While in solitude, Toby adapts a number of routines as part of her new life. The novel describes how Toby, “takes her baths in the early mornings, before the sun's too hot. She keeps a number of pails and bowls up on the rooftop, for collecting the afternoon-storm rainwater...She does her laundry on the rooftop too, spreading it out on the benches to dry (17). All of these activities are part of a routine that

Toby establishes for herself while in isolation atop the spa roof. The purpose of this routine is so that she can better adapt to her state of solitude. There is also a sense of carrying on the traditions of the past, even though there is no one left. The routine could further be indicative of the fact that these activities occupy Toby's time and allow her to hold off boredom and worst, potential insanity. They also tie in with what Ricoeur argues is fundamental to the act of narration: "The understanding of action, in effect, is not limited to a familiarity with the conceptual network of action and with its symbolic meditations. It goes so far as to recognize in action temporal structures that call for narration" (59). The activities that Toby engages in, as part of her daily routine, might be the means in which she maintains her sense of self.

Time is still an important part of Toby's life as evident by the daily routine she has for herself, along with her questioning of night and day and the idea of a broken time. All of this contributes to the notion that time still holds some semblance of importance to her even if she is not always fully able to comprehend it. However, the most significant piece of evidence that time holds meaning for Toby is the fact that she keeps track of it on some notepaper. As the narrative describes: "Toby's been keeping track of the days on some old AnooYoo spa-in-the-park notepaper. Each pink page is topped with two long-lashed eyes, one of them winking, and with a lipstick kiss. She likes these eyes and smiling mouths: they're companions of sort" (163). This way of keeping track of time through physical marks is comparable to Robinson Crusoe's method of timekeeping. In his story, Crusoe explains how he was able to keep track of time through a wooden post on which he notched the passing of days. Perhaps Crusoe did this to ward off insanity and maintain his sense of self, similar to how Toby had her routines. In both cases, Crusoe and Toby show that by marking the passing of time, there is still that importance to understanding time, and why keeping track of it is so vital. The need to maintain some understanding of time, while possibly being used to ward off potential insanity, ultimately reveals the importance of keeping time for Toby; and in addition ties in to Ricoeur's thesis on time and narrative's mutual dependence upon one another. If Toby does not have a sense of time, then her narrative would be in danger, and vice versa, if she could not narrate her experience then time itself would lose its meaning. By



sticking to routines Toby is able to provide some sort of outlet for her thoughts and action, both of which require narration to have meaning. And that narration depends upon time which Toby does keep of through the marks she makes on the notepaper. Lionel's time comes to an end when his story reaches its conclusion. Toby is the reverse, as her solitary condition is already established in the beginning of the novel. Toby, therefore, is required to maintain some semblance of keeping time if there is to be narration concerning her story.

Time gradually loses meaning in *The Last Man*, while in Atwood's novel Toby does attempt to hold on to it. In *The Road*, however, time holds no meaning to the extent that neither the father nor son gives it much consideration. The world of *The Road* is one of near darkness where the very concept of day and night is blurred which stresses that keeping time through natural means becomes difficult. Right from the opening the reader learns that the father, "hadn't kept a calendar in years" (5). And later that the father, "hardly knew the month" (29). Keeping track of time holds no significance for the father, and as a result time has lost all meaning. The novel even describes a moment in the story in which any understanding of time no longer holds any value. This moment occurs in a flashback during the unknown event that results in the world's current predicament of death and destruction. The narrative simply states: "the clocks stopped at 1:17" (52). It is not just the clock that has stopped, but the clocks. The plurality of the word "clocks" suggests that not only have all clocks stopped but the need to measure time through traditional human means has stopped as well. The interpretation of time is no longer to be treated according to the old principles of measuring time.

Finally, the novel explores time from both the perspective of the father and son. The son was born into the already destroyed world: "the last instance of a thing takes the class with it. Turns out the light and is gone. Look around you. Ever is a long time. But the boy knew what he knew. That ever is no time at all" (28). His birth into this ruined world greatly affects his perception of time because for him this is the only world that he knows. His understanding of time differs from his father because in the father's case, even though he no longer assigns to time any semblance of importance, he was part of the

old world in which time did have meaning. The only sense of time that the father has is the rare moments when he reflects back on a past that is no longer there. And the idea of a past no longer being there goes back to the paradox that Ricoeur looks at concerning the transitory property of time and the challenges that come about when trying to measure it. The father's past is no more which means he can never return to it. This nostalgia for the past belongs exclusively to the father, as the son is unable to envision a pre-destroyed world. The difference between the father and son further creates a divide between the two, contributing to the father's solitude.

The concept of the future emerges as the next crucial aspect in the discussion of time in the novels dealing with solitude. In considering the importance of the future, Emmanuel Levinas is essential because his views on the topic are within an understanding of the future in its relationship to the Other or society. According to him, "The future is what is not grasped, what befalls us and lays hold of us. The other is the future. The very relationship with the other is the relationship with the future. It seems to me impossible to speak of time in a subject alone, or to speak of a purely personal duration" (77). In other words, the future, like any conception of time for Levinas, is understood in the context of alterity. What does the future hold then if there is no Other? In the absence of others, the idea of the future is in danger.

The plague that empties the world in *The Last Man* makes its appearance in the second volume, or the halfway point of the narrative. During the early stages of the plague, not only does Lionel believe he is safe from it, he also takes time to conjecture about the future in a positive light. For Lionel, the future is something that will not only occur, he is positive that it will include members of the human race. He trusts that his son and by extension the next generation will survive the plague, and thus continue living on long after he himself has passed away: "We marked the difference of character among the boys, and endeavoured to read the future man in the stripling" (227). He further expands upon his optimism for the future via the next generation: "Here were the future governors of England; the men, who, when our ardour was cold, and our projects completed or destroyed forever...here were the beings who were to carry on the vast machine of society" (227). Lionel is providing an account of the natural order of time:

people live and die but there is a belief and understanding that as long as there are children, the human race will continue on into the next generation. What these expressions reveals is that there is optimism on Lionel's part that there will be a future and the possibility for the continuation of the human race despite the plague.

As the story progresses and the effects of the plague worsen, so do the beliefs in mankind's future also dwindle away. Later on in the story Lionel laments the future of mankind: "Why talk of infancy, manhood, and old age? We all stood equal shares of the last throes of time-worn nature. Arrived at the same point of the world's age -- there was no difference in us" (318). This nihilistic view on Lionel's part raises the question: why talk of life or the different ages of the current human race when none of that will matter? There is no longer any clear distinction between the old and the young, all have become victims to the plague. There is awareness to the considerable loss of life, as well as the breakdown of society. This is a world with no future, because, as Levinas articulates, the future depends upon a relationship with the other: "The future that death gives, the future of the event, is not yet time. In order for this future, which is nobody's and which a human being cannot assume, to become an element of time, it must also enter into relationship with the present" (79). This relationship with the present depends upon a relationship with others. Consequently, without another person there is no future, and because absolute solitude is the absence of all others, the world itself is without a future. It is at this point in the story where death has disrupted the natural order of time, and as a result of this disturbance the future of the human race is no longer a possibility.

In *The Year of the Flood* Toby relies on the memory of the past in order to function in the present because there is little to do in her present solitary state. Her daily routine is as an example of living through memory because a lot of those activities were things she learned to do in the past. While in the present, the novel describes how Toby occupies her time mourning and lamenting for the world of the past. Eventually Toby realizes the error of what she has been doing: "It's wrong to give so much time over to mourning she tells herself. Mourning and brooding. There's nothing to be accomplished by it"

(96). The significance of this moment is that time is still valuable because Toby understands that she is wasting it by mourning about what cannot be undone.

Toby understands that she cannot waste time mourning for the past world. She comes to the realization that, “She can’t live only in the present, like a shrub. But the past is a closed door, and she can’t see any future” (96). This commentary on being unable to access either the past, present, or future, can be tied in with the paradox of understanding the transitory nature of time that Ricoeur discusses in his work. The present is never still but in Toby’s case that is not the only reason why living in the present is so difficult. The conditions of extreme solitude, because there is no one to talk to, contributes to this difficulty. Toby is still able to understand the concept of time, but its meaning is in constant question. In her mind there is no one else but her; the future is devoid of society or the Other which, as Levinas argues, is how the future has meaning in the first place. While in her solitary state in the rooftop garden, Toby is unable to envision a future.

Toby never reaches the melancholic state of Lionel because eventually she does leave the rooftop, and by doing so is able to encounter other people. Such a return to a world of others is impossible for Lionel as his story renders him the absolute last man. Toby is only under the impression that she is all alone because she does not venture outside her rooftop. When she finally does leave behind her rooftop and her solitary condition, she is able to discover others people. Toby is able to establish a relationship with these other people, and this becomes crucial to Levinas’s understanding of time because for him alterity is the means in which time finds its value: “The situation of the face-to-face would be the very accomplishment of time; the encroachment of the present on the future is not the feat of the subject alone, but the intersubjective relationship. The condition of time lies in the relationship between humans, or in history” (79). It is only after Toby leaves her solitary experience and rejoins a semblance of society, that time regains its full meaning.

In *The Road* there is a sense of a limited future, and similar to Lionel’s later thoughts, it is a future associated with imminent death. What distinguishes the father’s view on the future from Lionel is

that there is almost no moment for the father where he is able to see any kind of positive or happy outcome for his son. The effects are so severe that early on in the narrative the father, while watching his boy sleep, asks himself: "Can you do it? When the time comes? Can you?" (29). The question is whether or not the father will kill his son to spare him the pain of a tortured and mutilated world. His struggles with the decision on whether or not he should kill his son accentuates the idea that time is running out, and that death is the only possibility he can foresee for the future. Whereas Lionel tries to envision a future for his children, the father, because of the bleakness of the world he inhabits, wrestles with the question of whether or not to kill his son a thought that never crosses the former's mind. Later on in the story the father's thoughts on a future associated with death intensifies: "He was beginning to think that death was finally upon them and that they should find some place to hide where they would not be found: (129). There is no future; the only thing that matters in this world is the present and the attempts that the father takes in guaranteeing the safety of himself and most importantly his son. This is a safety that will always be challenged because of the question of infanticide that haunts him. There is no thought given to the future, for the father's future is one where no positive outcome exists.

The father is unable to have any concept of the future because for him the current world is in such a ruinous state that any potential outcome for happiness seems utterly impossible. He laments: "There is no later. This is later. 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" (54). The idea of grace and beauty being born out of pain forms a connection between birth and death. In the world of *The Road* birth seems insignificant because of the prominence that death has when trying to think about the future. Later on the father and son come across another traveler who the father has a conversation with. Although he and his son have encountered others before, this is the first time that the father is able to have a conversation with someone other than his son that he is not pointing a gun at. During the course of their conversation the other man tells the father that, "People were always getting ready for tomorrow. I didn't believe in that. Tomorrow wasn't getting ready for them. It didn't even know they were there" (168). This echoes the

father's sentiments that the future is indifferent to the present and those who live in it. The father is unable to see the future, and the encounter with this other man only serves to reinforce the father's beliefs. What is ironic about this scene is that even though the father has found someone that he cannot only talk to, he has also found someone who shares similar ideas with him. Unfortunately, he is unable to form a connection with this other man. As a result of the father's inability to accomplish this human connection there is no welcoming or invitation extended to the stranger to come and join them. The father instead continues onward in his solitary state.

Finally, this chapter looks at the need for an audience or spectator to receive and make sense of the last man or woman's story. Ricoeur stresses the need for others in order to act as an audience for the story: "The pleasure of recognition is therefore both constructed in the work and experienced by the reader. This pleasure of recognition, in turn, is the fruit of the pleasure the spectator takes in the composition as necessary or probable. These "logical" criteria are themselves both constructed in the piece and exercised by the spectator" (49). Furthermore, Ricoeur argues that, "What a reader receives is not just the sense of the work, but, through its sense, its reference, that is, the experience it brings to language and, in the last analysis, the world and the temporality it unfolds in the face of this experience" (79). In other words, for any narrative to contain meaning an audience is required. Under the conditions of solitude in the three novels, any audience to act as the receiver for the last man or woman's story is absent. *The Last Man* is the only novel that employs a first person narration which begs the question: who is Lionel narrating to? At one point, Lionel directly addresses an undefined audience to ask them: "Does the reader wish to hear of the pest-houses where death is the comforter -- of the mourning passage of the death-cart -- of the insensibility of the worthless, and the anguish of the loving heart -- of harrowing shrieks and silence dire -- of the variety of disease, desertion, famine, despair, and death?" (267). In Lionel's case there is a need on his part for another person to understand the horrors of his current predicament. Ricoeur argues that the human experience is one that calls for narration, in part to articulate its own tragedy: "Because we are in the world and are affected by situations, we try to orient ourselves in

them by means of understanding; we also have something to say, an experience to bring to language and to share” (78). Lionel is doing just that by narrating to someone who is not there all the grief and suffering that is affecting the human race.

At the very end of the novel when Lionel becomes the last man, he narrates this new experience: “For a moment I compared myself to that monarch of the waste -- Robinson Crusoe. We had been both thrown companionless -- he on the shore of a desolate island: I on that of a desolate world” (448). There is a realization on Lionel’s part that he is truly and absolutely alone, and that there is no other human being left to be his companion. And yet, the narrative of Lionel does not end here as he still narrates his experience. The importance of narrative is that risk Lionel takes in the hopes that maybe somewhere there exists another who has survived the plague. This also underscores Ricoeur’s notion for an audience to receive and understand the story, as well as highlights the belief of Levinas that solitude is a tragic experience. Lionel is alone in a world without any other to hear his story, thus resulting in him telling the story to an imaginary audience. Lionel needs to narrate his story because being the last man means that he has the final say in the story of mankind. In order for him to tell his story, he creates an audience for himself so that the story can be told.

At one point during her stay in the rooftop garden Toby calls out, “Who lives here?” Which prompts her to realize: “Not me, she thinks. This thing I am doing can hardly be called living. Instead I’m lying dormant, like a bacterium in a glacier. Getting time over with. That’s all” (95). This is one of the only times in the story that Toby calls out to anyone. Most of Toby’s story in *The Year of the Flood* that focuses on her past. This verbal utterance to no one underscores Toby’s solitude, as there is no one to answer her. The call out to someone is tied in with the idea of a narrative needing an audience. In order for Toby to tell her story, she needs an audience to listen to it.

Toby eventually does come across someone or something else while in solitude. The posthuman Crackers, bioengineered creatures designed to be the next species of the planet are passing through the area outside her rooftop one day. The novel explains how Toby: “hears an odd sound. It was like

singing, but not any singing she'd ever heard before...It seemed to consist entirely of naked people, though one man walking at the front had clothes on, and some sort of red hat, and -- could it be? sunglasses" (164). However, Toby soon dismisses this as an illusion, as something too good to be true: "it must have been a hallucination... it was far too much to hope for, other people -- so many other people...they couldn't possibly be real" (164). The solitary state that Toby has been in for so long causes her to doubt her own mind, thereby dismissing the possibility of anyone else being out there as an illusion. Still, she has, if only for a moment, the hope that there is someone else out there, someone with whom she could converse with and be an audience for her story. Toby wants someone to talk to but ultimately concludes that it is impossible that anyone else is out there.

There is something else that stalks Toby's rooftop garden, the bioengineered Pigoons. Eventually, unable to bear their presence any longer she screams, "Asshole!" The narrative goes on to explain: "It makes her feel better to scream. At least she's talking to someone other than herself" (321). When this verbal utterance to someone other than herself occurs it is to another living creature, in this case the Pigoons. This begs the question: who else is Toby to speak to? The only other living creature she knows is the Pigoons who want to eat her. By calling out, however, Toby reveals her desire to communicate with someone or something other than just herself. Furthermore, she acknowledges that calling out to someone other than herself makes her feel better. By calling out the way she does Toby is expressing a need for others to hear her story.

In *The Road* the father's state of solitude is because of two reasons. The first is when the father realizes the difference between himself and his son because of their understanding or lack thereof of the world before its destruction. In one moment as he watches his son sleep the narrative explains that, "Maybe he understood for the first time that to the boy he was himself an alien. A being from a planet that no longer existed" (153). This moment foregrounds the realization on the father's part of the different worlds that he and his son inhabit because of their place in time. The father knows of the world that existed before the catastrophe changed everything, while for the son this post-apocalyptic world is the



only one that he has ever known. The solitary state of the father is highlighted here, as he is unable to talk to his son about the past. The son is not able to experience the past, and is unable to realize that such a world ever existed. The challenge to narration arises here because there is no one for whom the father can tell his story to, as his own son is unable to provide the role of audience.

The father's primary concern for the majority of the novel is on surviving the dangers that are a part of the current world. In particular, the father avoids other people because of the cannibalistic nature that some of the surviving humans have adapted. All of this makes the father weary and distrustful of other human beings, including the old man that he has a conversation with about the future. Nearing the end of their encounter, the father asks the old man why he will not tell them his name. To which the old man replies: "I dont want to say it...I couldnt trust you with it.....I dont want anybody talking about me. To say where I was or what I said when I was there...I think in times like these the less said the better" (171-172). The old man refusing to give his name is interesting, as no one else in the story, including the father and son are ever identified by a proper name. Narration usually concerns itself with naming the characters; however, no names are given at all during the course of the novel. The importance of names is absent in *The Road*, and the issue is given great prominence with this exchange. In addition, the father has his own fears about staying too long with this stranger besides not sharing names. The father goes into his own self-imposed solitude because of his unwillingness and or fear of approaching others. Even when he does encounter someone else, he is unable to reach out to them.

### Chapter Four: Facing Death in Solitude

The issue of dying in the context of absolute solitude results in the last man or woman having to confront his or her own morality. This confrontation of one's own mortality, within the understanding that the last man or woman faces death in the absence of all others, results in a challenge for the last person in narrating his or her experience. In *The Last Man* the focus is on the loss of the human race as observed by Lionel who eventually becomes the only remaining human being. In *The Year of the Flood* Toby is marooned on her rooftop spa and does not witness the various stages of the extinction of the human race the way Lionel does. Finally, the father in *The Road* is not only aware of his own eventual demise but also grapples with the decision as to whether or not to let his son continue living on without him. Death is so prevalent in McCarthy's novel because the danger of being eaten by cannibals is one that weighs heavy on the father's mind. The investigation of death under the condition of solitude is explored through three issues. The first is the question of suicide and why the last person does not simply end his or her own life now that the world is gone. The second issue concerns the burden of the last person as being the ultimate survivor of the human race, and with it the theme of memory. Finally, there is the role of burial and who ultimately performs the act of burying the last person. The condition of dying in solitude hinges upon how the characters in each novel project his or her situation as being the last one.

The two works of Emmanuel Levinas *God, Death, and Time* and *Time and the Other* are beneficial in exploring the issue of death and solitude. In *God, Death, and Time* Levinas acknowledges that one's relation to death is, "made up of the emotional and intellectual repercussions of the knowledge of the death of others" (10). Levinas understands death as being a part of alterity, and thus assigns to it a social understanding. This idea of death in a societal context is a repudiation of Martin Heidegger's thoughts concerning death. As Levinas explains, "Heidegger calls death certain to the point of seeing in this certitude of death the origin of certitude itself, and he will not allow this certitude to come from the experience of the death of others" (10). Heidegger sees death as being a solitary experience unique only

to the person who was experiencing it. In refuting Heidegger, Levinas points out that, “The love of the other is the emotion of the other’s death. It is my receiving the other -- and not the anxiety of death awaiting me -- that is the reference to death. We encounter death in the face of the other” (105).

Stressing the societal feature of death, Levinas argues that, “It is for the death of the other that I am responsible to the point of including myself in his death....The death of the other: therein lies the first death” (43). In other words, death is something that is encountered in the ethical responsibility we have toward other people as a result of our interactions with them. Furthermore, in *Time and the Other* Levinas insists that, “This approach to death indicates that we in relation to something that is absolutely other...as something whose very existence is made of alterity. My solitude is thus not confirmed by death but broken by it” (74). Thus, death is not a solitary experience in the sense that Heidegger argues. Instead, since death, as Levinas argues, finds its meaning in our interaction with others, it is through this societal understanding of death that ultimately results in one’s solitude being broken. In the novels that the thesis looks at, the issue of ultimate solitude means that there is very few if any other person for whom the last man or woman can enter into relationship with. Lionel is the last one, Toby believes herself to be the last one because she is too afraid to leave her spa rooftop, and the father is unwilling to have any sort of connection with anyone else. Without anyone to have a relationship with, how can death find any meaning? It is the objective of this chapter to explore the ways in which death finds meaning for the last man or woman.

A crucial aspect in solitude is the temptation of suicide. The issue of suicide is brought to the reader’s attention in each of the three novels as the last person struggles with the decision on whether or not to end his or her own life. In *The Last Man* Lionel is unable to bear the death of his fellow man, and addresses his invented reader: “My reader, his limbs quivering and his hair on end, would wonder how I did not, seized with sudden frenzy, dash myself from some precipice, and so close my eyes forever on the sad end of the world” (275). In mentioning the possibility of ending his own life, Lionel is directly addressing his invented reader in order to describe the horrors of the plague, as well as having to witness

the death of so many people. He asks, given the circumstance of what he is witnessing, why he does not end his own life? There is a suggestion that Lionel is perhaps asking for a reason or justification to kill himself.

The question of suicide reemerges near the end of the novel after Lionel becomes the last man. In two instances Lionel claims that, “Many times I had delivered myself up to the tyranny of anguish -- many times I resolved a speedy end to my woes; and death by my own hands was a remedy, whose practicability was even cheering to me” (456-457). The tyranny of anguish that Lionel delivers himself to means that the thought of ending his own life has greatly occupied his own mind. When the plague is at its peak and the human race is dying out, he talks about committing suicide because he is unable to watch the suffering of his fellow man. When he is all alone at the end of the novel, the thoughts of suicide reemerge prompting Lionel to question: “Why did I continue to live -- why not throw off the weary weight of time, and with my own hand, let out the fluttering prisoner from my agonized breast?” (464-465). Lionel is asking a question but there is no one to provide him an answer. Lionel is the last man, and as a result of his condition he has to resort to addressing an invented reader. It is as if he is asking permission, or trying to find justification to end his own life now that he is all alone. He needs the validation of others to justify the possible action that he desires to take. And yet, he does not take his own life. This perhaps refers to what Levinas says about the concept of suicide in *Time and the Other*: “Death is never assumed, it comes. Suicide is a contradictory concept. The eternal immanence of death is part of its essence. In the present, where the subject’s master is affirmed, there is hope” (73). In living there is an awareness of death. One cannot live without the knowledge of his or her eventual passing. Suicide ends up negating the immanence of death and therefore negates what it means to be human. Lionel does not kill himself and the reason for this is because he comes to see himself as the last representative of the human race, and thus the last chronicler of mankind. If Lionel ends his life then the entire human race is now extinct, and there would be no one to remember any human achievement. By not giving into the temptation of suicide, Lionel keeps alive the memory of mankind.

The thought of suicide also weighs heavily on Toby mind as she spends her days locked away from the outside world, holding on to the belief that she is the only living human being left in the whole world. At one point Toby realizes that, “She could take a shortcut. There’s always the Poppy in its red bottle, there are always the lethal amanita mushrooms, the little Death Angels. How soon before she sets them loose inside herself and lets them fly away with her on their white, white wings?” (96). This thought happens after Toby realizes that she cannot live in the present, while the past is closed off to her and the future remains unknown. The present is a state of uncertainty for her, and this causes her to come to the understanding that she cannot remain stagnate. However, Toby also has the understanding that because the past is gone and the future is uncertain that she must deal with all of this uncertainty by herself. This wondering about an uncertain future combined with her belief that those she knew and loved are now most likely gone, trigger within Toby thoughts of ending her own life if it need come to that.

Unlike Lionel, who, at the end of his novel becomes the last man once everyone else has died out, Toby does eventually come across others. One such person is Ren who Toby knew during her stay with the Gardeners. However, Ren is injured and as she sleeps, Toby contemplates a mercy killing to put her out of her misery: “Toby considers the powered Death Angels. It wouldn’t take much. Just a little, in Ren’s weakened condition. Put her out of her misery. Help her to fly away on white, white wings. Maybe it would be kinder. A blessing” (357). This is the first person that Toby has encountered after believing herself to be the only person left in the world. Ren could be a companion for her, and yet she questions whether or not she should kill her as an act of mercy. Toby is therefore planning on putting to death someone that could break her solitary condition. Toby may not want to commit suicide herself but by killing Ren she condemns herself back to her state of solitude, thus becoming stagnate and unable to move forward.

In *The Road* the father never once thinks about ending his own life because he is already aware that he is dying. Instead, the issue of death is turned towards his son and the decision on the father’s part as to whether or not he should kill his son to spare him from suffering the horrors of the world. In terms

of suffering, Levinas points out in *Time and the Other* that, “In pain, sorrow, and suffering, we once again find, in a state of purity, the finality that constitutes the tragedy of solitude....in suffering there is the proximity of death” (68-69). If the father does kill his son, then he is putting to death the next generation and thus the possibility of humanity continuing onward. The question weighs heavily upon the father that it causes him to lash out at God: “Are you there...Will I see you at least? Have you a neck by which to throttle you? Have you a heart? Damn you eternally have you a soul? Oh God, he whispered. Oh God” (11-12). The father expresses his frustration with God over what he has to endure, and as a result there is desire on the father’s part to lash out at God. This lashing out at God goes to the heart of what is at stake if the father is to kill his son, which is the end of something good and pure.

One of the father’s purposes, besides getting to the coast, is his attempt to avoid others for fear that they will hurt him and his son. After his encounter with the man with the neck tattoo of a bird, the father thinks to himself, “A single round left in the revolver. You will not face the truth. You will not” (68). The encounter with the other man, whom the father has to threaten with violence, forces him to confront the fact that he may have to kill his son if the situation ever gets dire enough for such an action. The emphasis on the single bullet implies that the bullet is for his son, and that the father has already made up his mind of putting to death his son. The use of the pronoun “you” begs the question as to who is addressing the father. Could the father be addressing himself or is there something else that addresses him? The reader knows that the father addresses God, but is God in this moment speaking to him? This seems unlikely as the question only serves to cause the father anguish. The other possibility for who addresses the father and torments him with the question of killing his son is the devil. The devil wants the father to give in to despair by killing his own flesh and blood. Regardless of who or what is addressing the father, the scene demonstrates that the thought of killing his son still haunts the father.

The moment in the novel that makes the father seriously consider putting to death his own son occurs after the two of them have escaped from the horror that is the house of the cannibals. After making their escape, the father sees the possible fate that could befall him and his son. It is at this

moment that the fear of being devoured by cannibals becomes a very real possibility. The following exchange goes through the father's mind: "Now is the time. Curse God and die. What if it doesn't fire? It has to fire....Could you crush that beloved skull with a rock? Is there such a being within you of which you know nothing? Can there be? Hold him in your arms. Just so. The soul is quick. Pull him toward you. Kill him. Quickly" (114). Breaking down this quote reveals a lot about the father's state of mind. For starters there is the comment about cursing God before he dies. This links into the theme of Satan as being the one who suggests that the father kill his own son. It is also connected to the idea that mankind should reject God because God has abandoned the world to a fate of cannibalization. All of this plays on the father's feelings of desertion and being alone in a world of murder and madness. The full significance of this scene is one that underscores the father's frustration with God, his feeling of abandonment, and finally the decision to whether or not to kill his son. However, the father does not give in and commit the act of murder against his only son. He instead makes a promise to him that, "I won't leave you...I won't ever leave you" and that, "He began to believe they had a chance" (114). In this crucial moment of deciding not to kill his son, the father fulfills the first commandment of Levinas: "Death opens to the face of an Other, which expresses the command 'thou shalt not kill'" (God, Death, and Time 106). The presence of death as he looks at his son invokes within the father the command not to kill him. In addition, this quote also ties in with a comment of Derrida's in *The Beast and the Sovereign, Volume II* on the issue of suicide: "It is possible that suicide is the way in which the unconscious (the wake, the vigilance of what cannot awaken), warns us that something rings false in the dialectic, by reminding us that the child always still be killed is the child already dead and that thus, in suicide -- in what we call suicide -- nothing at all happens" (181-182). The father's thoughts have always been occupied by death, and perhaps he now realizes that the state of the world is one in which death is even more prominent and inescapable than it was in the past. The father and the son are beings-towards-death and despite this knowledge, the father does not take the life of his son and instead vows to never leave him.

The second topic for consideration is the burden of the survivor as the one who carries on the memories of the departed. According to Levinas, "In the guiltiness of the survivor, the death of the other is my affair. My death is my part in the death of the other, and in my death I die the death that is my fault" (39). There exists a connection between the living survivors and the deceased in which the living have a responsibility to remember the departed. Derrida also takes up this idea: "I can then, I must then only carry the other in me, and address myself to him or her in me, promise her or him in me to carry her or him in me...Where there is no longer any world between them for them, at the end of the world that every death is" (169-170). The responsibility of being the last one and, therefore, the last member of the human race is now in the hands of the last man or woman who must now carry on the memory of mankind.

About halfway through his narrative Lionel makes the claim that, "I am not immortal; and the thread of my history might be spun out to the limits of my existence....I must complete my work" (239). Lionel realizes that because of the plague time is running out, and that he must continue serving as the role of narrator to chronicle all that is happening. This also foreshadows that he is going to be the last one. At the end of the novel, after the entire human race is extinct, Lionel narrates, "Fate had administered life to me...she had bought me for her own; I admitted her authority, and bowed to her decrees" (465). This revelation comes after Lionel asks why he continues to live and questions if it is right for him to just end his life. The issue of suicide is rendered moot when he understands that fate has given him life for a reason. There is a rediscovery of meaning and purpose that prevents him from killing himself. Lionel's moment of clarity as to what his purpose now it is refers to what Levinas says about the survivor's role in death: "The death of the other who dies affects me in my very identity as a responsible 'me' ....My being affected by the death of the other is precisely that, my relation with his death. It is, in my relation, my deference to someone who no longer responds, already a culpability -- the culpability of the survivor" (God, Death, and Time 12). In other words, even though one is affected by death being a



survivor means continuing onward. Lionel now understands that fate has saved him from the plague, and that he has an obligation as the last representative of the human race to carry on in their absence.

Lionel's understanding that he is to be that last representative of the human race causes him at last to acknowledge that he must record his own story. At the end of the novel he proclaims, "I also will write a book...for whom to read? -- to whom dedicate? And then with silly flourish (what so capricious and childish as despair?) I wrote, 'Dedication To The Illustrious Dead. Shadows, Arise, and Ready Your Fall! Behold The History of the Last Man'" (466). Upon making this decision to write his story Lionel adds, "I will write and leave in this most ancient city, this 'world's sole monument,' a record of these things, I will leave a monument of the existence of Verney, the Last Man" (466). The announcement of writing a book may in fact be the ultimate moment of Lionel's solitude. He knows that there is no one left to read the book, and yet he is going to write it anyway. He becomes the final chronicler of the human race and writes a narrative with the full knowledge that there is no audience for the narrative. By writing his narrative, the implication is that by doing so he holds off suicide. Lionel's purpose is not to die but rather to tell his story as the Last Man and to be that final representative of the human race. Lionel ultimately writes for himself in order to deal with the changed world and make sense of his new state of solitude. Although he writes for himself, as long as Lionel continues living the memory of mankind, its history, and accomplishments lives on through him.

Toby's purpose also emerges at the end of *The Year of the Flood*. However, throughout most of the novel her thoughts are turned towards the past that remains inaccessible to her. In one scene, after watching a creature known as a Liobam walking around the outside of her parameter, Toby thinks about her former friends: "How Pilar would have enjoyed seeing those, she thinks. Pilar, and Rebecca, and little Ren. And Adam One. And Zeb. All dead now. Stop it, she tells herself. Just stop that right now" (95). The appearance of the Liobam causes Toby to remember the past and the people she once knew. This is a moment of brief nostalgia that becomes broken when she realizes that most of the people she knew and loved are probably dead. Toby believes herself to be the only one left alive, and the memories

of her deceased friend's lives on in her. Toby is aware that she cannot dwell on this nostalgia because she cannot have thoughts of what use to be; she has to continue living on in the present. However, it is not until the end of the novel that Toby finally comes to realization that she has to leave behind not only her rooftop spa but the past as well.

Unlike Lionel who truly becomes the last living person, Toby does eventually come across people that she once knew, such as Ren. However, as it was previously noted, Ren is injured and Toby wrestles with the decision as to whether or not to administer to Ren a drug that would end her life. In regard to the decision facing her, the question emerges: Has Toby spent too much time in solitude that she cannot see herself with anyone else and thus feels the need to put the other to death? Eventually Toby's compassionate side wins out and she does not kill Ren. The narrative describes that Toby's, "homicidal impulse of the night before is gone: she will not drag dead Ren out into the meads for the pigs and vultures....Just to have a second person on the premise -- each a feeble person, even a sick person who sleeps most of the time -- just this makes the Spa seem like a cozy domestic dwelling rather than a haunted house. I've been the ghost, thinks Toby" (360). Her desire to have someone to break her solitude is what ultimately prevents Toby from taking Ren's life. This is the moment when Toby realizes just how alone she has been. Humanity is dependent upon the interactions people have with each other, and it this interaction that formulates the ethical responsibility that Levinas argues is prominent before all else: "The grandeur of modern antihumanism....consists in making a clear space for the hostage-subjectivity by sweeping away the notion of the person. Antihumanism is right insofar as humanism is not enough. In fact, only the humanism of the other man is human" (182). In the end, perhaps Toby recognizes this obligation of recognizing the humanity of another person, for she does not kill Ren. By not killing her, Toby gains a companion thereby breaking her state of solitude. Toby's condition of solitude was the result of her own belief that she was only one left, as well as her inability to move on from the past. Her comments on being a ghost also imply that she was hanging too much on to the past. It is only after she comes across another person that Toby's solitude breaks and she is able to find meaning again. The

meaning and purpose for Toby is to no longer live in the past, but to live in the present along with other people.

In *The Road* the father's attempts to hold on to any sort of meaning prove to be nearly impossible in the face of the devastated and inhuman world that he and his son inhabit. Even though the world is a dangerous place, there are still moments in which the father and son can talk with one another and one of these conversations reveals to the reader an attempt on the part of the father to keep alive some sense of meaning in a world ostensibly without any. The son says to his father, "And nothing bad is going to happen to us." To which the father replies, "That's right." The son: "Because we're carrying the fire" The father: "Yes. Because we're carrying the fire" (83). The father has told the boy that they are special because they carry the fire. The fire symbolizes the last hope for humanity that the father believes he and his son represent. This belief in the fire becomes something for the father to hold on to in order to make it through the day to day existence of a world descended into death and cannibalism.

Even though this theme of death is so prevalent, there are attempts made by the father to shield his son from this reality and to maintain his innocence. There is one scene, however, that happens upon reaching the coast that shatters the attempts made by the father to conceal from his son the truth of the world: "In the shallows beyond the breakwater an ancient corpse rising and falling among the driftwood. He wished he could hide it from the boy but the boy was right. What was there to hide?" (236). The coast not only reinforces the insularity and limitations of the world, it also forces the father to confront not only death itself but the irrefutable fact that his son is indeed aware of death. Previously, the father tried to protect his son from death and hide it from him. In the end however, he acknowledges that he can no longer do so. The son knows about death, there is nothing to hide. The truth of the world as not only being limited, but one that is also a world of death comes to full fruition here.

The world is such a dangerous place that, in his focus on surviving, the father does not have time for dreams. He tells his son: "When your dreams are of some world that never was or of some world that never will be and you are happy again then you will have given up. Do you understand? And you cant

give up. I wont let you” (189). The father forbids his son from having dreams or thinking about something else because any attention away from the current world could result in them being eaten by cannibals. However, part of being human is the ability to dream and to imagine, both of which are implicitly connected with the act of narrating. The father does not allow dreams or any kind of stories of imagination because the focus is on surviving.

It is only later, near the end of the novel, after witnessing everything he has, that the father finally gives his son permission to dream. He asks his son to tell him a story, but the son says he has no stories to tell and that the father already knows everything about him. This causes the father to say, “You have stories inside that I dont know about” To which the son asks “You mean like dreams?” And the father says, “Like dreams. Or just things that you think about” (268). The father now gives his son permission to dream, whereas before he warned him against doing so. The exchange ends with the father realizing that even though both he and his son have experienced horrible and unthinkable things, they are both still alive: “Well, I think we’re still here. A lot of bad things have happened but we’re still here” (269). This moment is significant because not only have the father and son survived death, they have survived giving death to themselves.

Out of the all the characters in each of the novels, it is the father who becomes the only one to die. His death occurs at the end of the novel and as he lies dying he tells his son, “You need to find the good guys” (278). All throughout the course of the novel, the father avoided interacting with others out of fear that they would harm him and his son. Now, the father tells his son the find the good guys. The son in turn asks his father: “Is it real? The fire?” The father informs him that, “Yes it is” (278). The father's realization that he is at his end refers to a comment Levinas makes in *Time and the Other*: “What is important about the approach of death is that at a certain moment we are no longer able to be able. It is exactly thus that the subject loses its very mastery as a subject” (74). The father is fully aware that he is dying, all while understanding that his son is going to live on. Although the father is aware of his death, he holds firm to his belief that the fire, that hope for humanity is in fact real. Even though he cannot carry

it with his son anymore, the boy must continue to do so. The child is that hope for humanity because he is able to enter into relationships with other people. He can show kindness and compassion that the father, because of his survivalist tendencies, could previously not. The father has placed his trust back into his fellow man because he is able to tell his son to find the good guys. However, the fear of being alone and without his dad causes the son to proclaim, "You said you wouldnt ever leave me." To which the father replies, "I know. I'm sorry. You have my whole heart. You always did" (279). In the end, the father is able to let go of his son during the moment of his passing. By doing so, the father guarantees that the human race is going to live on, not only because his son is alive, but because the father places his trust back into his fellow man. He is able to abide by the responsibility that Levinas claims are of the utmost primacy in the interaction with other people: "The other concerns me as a neighbor. In every death is shown the nearness of the neighbor, and the responsibility of the survivor, in the form of a responsibility that the approach of proximity moves or agitates" (God, Death, and Time 17). The father is able to not only trust that his son is going to continue carrying fire but that there are in fact good guys out there for his son to encounter who will take care of him just like the father did. The full restoration of humanity takes place during this moment as the father has placed trust back into his fellow man.

Finally within the context of absolute solitude the issue of burial and who remembers the last person once he or she passes away becomes disrupted. At one point in his narrative Lionel mentions that, "The massy portals of the churches swung creaking on their hinges; and some few lay dead on the pavement" (319). The church is a place where the funeral rites of the deceased are traditionally performed. It is the place in which the burial of the dead occurs and the survivors remember the departed. Levinas places emphasis on the need for another person to verify the death of the other as well as the role of keeping that deceased in one's memory. His view on the funeral is one that, "transforms the deceased into a living memory; the living thus have a relationship with the deceased and are determined in their turn by his memory" (88). There thus exists a relationship between the living and the dead in which the living carries on the burial rites of the deceased while also keeping the departed in their memories.

However, the plague that has diminished the world's population means that the church has lost this function of being in charge of the funeral rites. The comment on how the portals swung on hinges and that few lay dead indicates that the church has not been fulfilling its responsibility to the dead. The purpose of the church when it comes to honoring the dead has lost its value due to the diminishing human population. This foreshadows that once everyone is gone, there will be no one left to take on that role of survivor in order to remember the dead.

There are attempts made by some of those still remaining to hold on to the value of burial, and by doing so recognizing the importance that the survivor plays in respects to the departed. The character Lucy, whom Lionel and his company pick up on their travels out of England, is one such character. Lionel explains that, "Lucy, in desert England, in a dead world, wished to fulfil the usual ceremonies of the dead, such as were customary to the English people when death was a rare visitant" (364). Even when the human population is dying out and there is questioning as to what is going to happen to human value, there are still attempts made by some to hold on to these values. The human value of remembering the dead and the act of burial that accompanies this process is elaborated by Emmanuel Levinas: "The burial rite is a deliberate relationship of the living with death, through their relationship with the deceased. Here, death is thought and not simply described. It is a necessary moment in the conceptual progress of thought itself, and in this sense it is thought" (86). In this case, the human value of remembering departed by giving them a proper burial is practiced by Lucy in her attempts at fulfilling the role of the survivor in relation to the dead. Lucy performs this act because it not only means something to her; it enables her to preserve a sense of humanity. In other words, human values such as the funeral are being maintained even when the old world is vanishing.

Another example of the importance of burial is provided by Lionel: "We repined that the pyramids had outlasted the embalmed body of their builder. Alas! the mere shepherd's hut of straw we passed on the road contained in its structure the principle of greater longevity than the race of man" (389-99). Buildings, which are constructs of mankind, contain no meaning if there is no human to occupy or

give them meaning. The pyramids are also connected to the church in that they both become places that have a connection to the dead and the issue of remembrance. Jacques Derrida also looks at the role of the survivor and the function of the cemetery: “The survivor is able to verify each time that the dead one, identified by his or her proper name inscribed on the tomb, really is who he or she is, where he or she is, that he or she rests or responses in the right place, in the place of the dead, a place from which he or she will not return” (165-166). The pyramid, like the graveyard, is, as Derrida argues, a place in which the dead repose and that the survivors can visit. Once the human race is gone, however, what value do these buildings hold? Even though the buildings have outlasted their builders, as Lionel points out, once every human being is gone then the purpose that these buildings possess is no more. As long as Lionel remains, these buildings maintain meaning because he can conceptualize a purpose for them. Therefore, Lionel is the last one to have the collective memory of mankind. He becomes the survivor of the human race, and because of this it is his responsibility to not only remember mankind but also to remember the value that mankind has given to certain buildings such as the church or pyramid.

In *The Year of the Flood* the issue of memory and the role of the survivors when it comes to the burial of the dead no longer belong to the human race, and instead become subsumed by the animal. When the Pigoons return in an attempt to break into Toby’s rooftop spa, she observes the Pigoons acting in a manner that raises the possibility in her mind that they are having a funeral for the Pigoon that she previously killed. Toby questions, “Could the pigs have been having a funeral? Could they be bringing memorial bouquets? She finds this idea truly frightening” (328). Perhaps Toby is scared by what she is witnessing because the animals have challenged her assumed role of the survivor in remembering the dead. The role of remembrance is instead taken by the beast, and now that this has happened what purpose does Toby have? Toby does remember her friends, but has she given them proper burial rites? The answer, at least through her reaction to the Pigoons, suggest that she has not. Burial not only serves as a way in which the deceased are remembered, it also allows the living to move on with their own lives.

The Pigeons, by engaging in the human act of the funeral, serve as a reminder to Toby that she has not moved on from the past.

When Toby does leave behind the rooftop spa and to her surprise encounters other people, she is finally able to afford to the departed the rite of burial. This scene occurs when Toby, after meeting up with the character Ren, is forced to kill her old boss Blanco. In the past Blanco was an abusive man who Toby crossed paths with and threatened to even kill her. When she does eventually encounter Blanco, Toby ends up administering a poison called the Death Angels mainly as a form of mercy killing, as his injuries are too severe for any medical help. After she is done with the act Toby says, "May his Spirit go in peace....Such as it is, the fuck-pig" (382). Toby ends up performing what Derrida claims is the importance of the survivor in remembering the dead: "The dead one is both everywhere and nowhere....in the mournful survivor who can only let himself be invaded by a dead one who has no longer any place of his or her outside....this is both the greatest fidelity and the utmost betrayal, the best way of keeping the other while getting rid of her or him" (169). Even though it is brief, Toby does end up saying a prayer of sorts thereby recognizing the need to say something to those who have departed.

Finally, the issue of burial and memory is played out in *The Road*. Right from the beginning the narrative establishes that, "The gray shape of city vanished in the night's onset like an apparition and he lit the little lamp and set it back out of the wind" (9). The opening of the novel describes the conditions of the new world and compares the city of mankind to that of an apparition or as an image of death because the city of man is vanishing. There is a final death of the city, and because the city is the place of law and order, it is the place best reflective of human civilization. As a result of the breakdown of society, the laws of humankind are now dead just like the city itself. Right from the start, the primacy of death is established.

In addition to the city of man vanishing, the greyness of the world comes as result of the increased amount of ash that now liters the world: "The ashes of the late world carried on the bleak and temporal winds to and from in the void....The city was mostly burned. No sign of life....everything



covered with ash and dust” (12). The idea of the ash and dust being so prevalent suggest that nothing is buried in the world but rather instead things are cremated and reduced to ashes. As a result of this cremation, there exists little to no grave site to visit in order to remember the dead. In other words, the function of the graveyard as being the space in which the living can visit with the dead no longer exists. The comment on temporal winds also invokes the passing of time and connects to the idea that time itself is dying out. Therefore, the memories of the past world have been reduced to ashes. This ubiquitous ash covers everything, symbolizing the primacy that this inexorable death now has in the world.

Throughout their journey, the father and son encounter death in various forms. In one instance, they come across a truck whose contents include mummified bodies: “The mummified dead are everywhere. The flesh cloven along the bones, the ligaments dried to tug and taut as wires. Shriveled and drawn like latter day bogfolk, their faces of boiled sheeting, the yellowed palings of their death” (24). The mummified dead are not kept in a proper tomb or at a gravesite. Furthermore, there is no one to honor the dead and to perform the last rites or conduct any proper form of a funeral. Thus, the encounter with the mummified dead serves as a reminder to the father that death is prevalent in this world and that he and his son cannot hide from it.

The father passes away at the end of his story, and before dying he instructs his son to find others. No sooner does he pass away, then another man comes across the son. After having an exchange with each other the son suspects that he can trust this other man. Before leaving, however, the son mentions to the other man that, “we cant just leave him here” (285). The other man wants to get going, but the son remains adamant that his father’s body not be left out in the open. He says, “I dont want people to see him” (285). The man argues some more which prompts the son to ask, “Could we cover him with one of the blankets?” (285). Although the other man wants to get going, the son does not want to leave his father’s body out in the open for fear that the body could become food for cannibals. The son wants to give his father as close to a proper burial as he can. In other words, there is still that importance of burying the dead, even if burying here amounts to nothing more than just laying a blanket over someone.

The other man does consent to letting the son pay his last respects to his father. The son does so and says to his father, "I'll talk to you every day....And I won't forget. No matter what" (286). Although brief, the son is able to give his father a proper goodbye. Furthermore, his comments on not forgetting his father are a way in which the boy can claim his humanity because memory is a uniquely human characteristic. In the end, the son is able to keep alive his father's memories -- it is he who performs the act of burial. Derrida argues for the responsibility that the survivor has in remembering the deceased: "I can then, I must then only carry the other in me, and address myself to him or her in me, promise her or him in me to carry her or him in me...Where there is no longer any world between them for them, at the end of the world that every death is" (169-170). If the father had killed his son, there would be no one to bury the father when he eventually died, and ironically the father's body would have been eaten by cannibals as a result of having no one to bury him. The father not only guarantees the survival of the human race by telling his son to find others and form that connection that is fundamental to what it means to be human, he also enables his own funeral to happen because the son can fulfill that role of burial. Since the son finds others, he is no longer the last man like his father was. The father's solitude no longer exists for the son once he comes across the group of other people.

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