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After the fall: The post-apocalyptic frontier in The Road and 28 Days Later

Jeffrey J. Lavigne
University of Nevada, Las Vegas

AFTER THE FALL: THE POST-APOCALYTPIC FRONTIER

IN *THE ROAD* AND *28 DAYS LATER*

by

Jeffrey James Lavigne

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David Henry, Committee Chair

Tara McManus, Committee Member

Jacob Thompson, Committee Member

John Irsfeld, Graduate Faculty Representative

Ronald Smith, Ph. D., Vice President for Research and Graduate Studies
and Dean of the Graduate College

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ABSTRACT

**After the Fall: The Post-Apocalyptic Frontier
in *The Road* and *28 Days Later***

by

Jeffrey James Lavigne

Dr. David Henry, Examination Committee Chair
Professor of Communication Studies
University of Nevada, Las Vegas

Previous scholars have identified three scenes of the American frontier myth: the sea, the
west, and space. This evolution of frontiers reflected key changes in the expression of
America's cultural identity. While Janice Hocker Rushing called space "the final
frontier," the prominent place in contemporary society held by zombies and other
minions of the occult hint at the emergence of yet another scene of the American mythos:
the post apocalypse. In contrast to previous frontiers, which are defined geographically,
the post-apocalypse is much broader, for in the wake of a global cataclysm, everywhere is
a potential frontier. This decentralization of mythic scene reflects a crisis in
consciousness within contemporary American society. Pentadic and mythic analysis of
two films, *The Road* and *28 Days Later*, illuminates the salient dimensions of the post-
apocalyptic frontier and provides workable solutions to this crisis.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Some might consider a night out at the theater or watching a film in the comfort of their home an escape from the problems that beset them on a daily basis. The familiar narratives provide a welcome respite from the litany of economic, social, and personal challenges of modern life. While film, theater, and related types of media are certainly enjoyable, their function is much more important than simply to provide an escape from modern woes; for some, these narratives influence the way they interpret reality.

Currently, the fiendish minions of the occult dominate the cultural space of the American cinema: zombies, cannibals, and radioactive monsters parade in a steady stream across the silver screen as moviegoers watch with rapt attention.[1] It would be relatively easy, and perhaps tempting, to overlook the deeper importance of these films due to what is often taken as the unrefined nature of their content. Doing so would be a mistake, however. As Walter Fisher reminds us, "[all] symbols are created and communicated ultimately as stories meant to give order to human experience and induce others to dwell in them to establish ways of living in common, in communities in which there is sanction for the story that constitutes one's life."[2] In this sense, some films and other forms of ostensibly entertaining discourse may play a crucial role in understanding the symbolic communication that renders shared human experience intelligible.

Upon initial viewing, for example, science fiction and horror films may seem like little more than escapist farce, pitting human characters in desperate struggles against the monolithic and perverted forces of evil. Considered against the backdrop of recent research, however, these films may also function as meaningful rhetorical experiences.

Specifically, many contemporary scholars note the value of mythic criticism in revealing various insights into the temperament and disposition of modern culture. For example, Janice Hocker Rushing, a scholar whose contributions to rhetorical criticism are as numerous as they are valuable, found many such films to be meaningful in surprising ways.[3] Broadly, a mythic approach to criticism, outlined in detail later in this chapter, makes use of the latent archetypal meanings found in myths—recurring stories that thrive ubiquitously throughout different periods of time and geographic locations—in order to illuminate varied human behaviors. Although archetypes and their corresponding meanings are limitless, scholars find the hero archetype to be of primary mythic import, due to its pervasive presence in ancient and contemporary narratives.[4] The frontier myth is the primary site of the hero archetype. As Rushing writes, "Whether fixed upon Columbus sailing the ocean blue or Buffalo Bill conquering the Wild, Wild West, the American imagination remains fascinated by new and unknown places."[5] In "Evolution of 'The New Frontier' in *Alien* and *Aliens*: Patriarchal Co-optation of the Feminine Archetype," Rushing traced the progression of the American frontier through three stages: the sea, the west, and outer space, using films to exemplify the structure of each. Her analysis revealed that although the scene of the frontier myth changed, archetypal portrayals of masculine and feminine did not, which boded ill for the development of American society.[6]

While some may consider space to be "the final frontier" of the American mythos, the emergence of new frontiers is perhaps inevitable. Myths and the archetypes that constitute them "are not static," Rushing explains. They are instead, "dynamic processes under constant revision."[7] Likewise, documenting the evolution of myth is an ongoing

task. In keeping with Rushing's original contention that mythic analysis of film may illuminate salient aspects of contemporary culture, this thesis takes a mythic approach to the analysis of John Hillcoat's *The Road* (2009) and Danny Boyle's *28 Days Later* (2003). Guiding objectives are the illumination of an important shift in portrayals of masculine and feminine archetypes in a fourth frontier of the American mythos and discussion of the implications of this shift for modern society. It is important to note that the films discussed in this thesis are not considered independently, but as smaller parts of a larger mythic whole. I contend that *The Road* represents an earlier stage in the emergence of the fourth frontier while *28 Days Later* expresses a more developed mythic iteration. Together, these films form a complete narrative that highlights important changes in mythic representations of masculine and feminine archetypes. *The Road*, produced six years after *28 Days Later*, portrays an earlier stage in the evolution of the frontier myth. This is because myths do not evolve in chronological time according to their date of production. Rather, they develop in what Janice Hocker Rushing and Thomas S. Frentz call "mythic time"; that is, in order from most basic to most advanced expressions of the archetypes that constitute them.[8]

The Road depicts two unnamed protagonists, a father and son, struggling to survive in the wake of an unspecified, global cataclysm. They are traveling southward from their home in the mountains to the coast, hoping that it will be warmer and more hospitable than their current location. Along the way, the pair experiences several hardships including starvation, lack of shelter, and the constant threat of cannibalism. Although the father succeeds in safely shepherding his son to the southern coast, he is disappointed to discover that it is just as cold and inhospitable as their former residence.

This film demonstrates an early stage in the evolution of the frontier myth, where the masculine, ego-driven hero is placed in an inhospitable scene in which he cannot survive and ultimately dies. The film ends in a bittersweet blend of loss and redemption as the father expires and the boy finds new benevolent caretakers. Though certainly mournful, the death of the father is necessary in order for the next stage of the hero's mythic journey to take place.

The mythic "action" of *28 Days Later* picks up where *The Road* leaves off. The film follows Jim, a bicycle courier who awakens from a coma in a hospital 28 days after the spread of an insidious infection. Soon after he wakes, Jim is chased by humanoid creatures who clearly intend harm. He is then rescued by Selena, a strong, albeit pessimistic, survivalist. This point in the narrative bears shocking similarities to *The Road* in that both films depict helpless individuals whose survival depends on the protection of a strong, masculine character. Puzzled at what to do next, Jim and Selena befriend a father and daughter, forming a tenuous alliance for the sake of survival. The four then travel from the city of London to Manchester in order to investigate the possibility of a cure to the infection. During their journey, the group experiences many dangers, but they also begin to coalesce as a family unit. The formation of such strong bonds alters the structure of the film by shifting the narrative focus from survival to cooperation and kinship. "I was wrong," admits Selena in a moment of reverie, "Surviving is not as good as it gets." In this regard, the protagonists have transcended the inhospitable scene through shared human affinity. This depiction represents an important shift in the mythic portrayals of hero archetypes, the implications of which are discussed in Chapter Four.

Chapter One outlines the intellectual landscape of current rhetorical criticism in order to establish a context for the coming analysis. It then provides and an orientation to rhetorical criticism that highlights the importance of myth in understanding human consciousness. Next, the critical approach that aids in making manifest the latent meanings of *The Road* and *28 Days Later* is outlined. This chapter concludes with a preview of the analysis to come.

Intellectual Landscape

Before an analysis of a rhetorical experience can be undertaken, the critic must take care to document the salient trends in research in order to provide a context for that analysis. In the following paragraphs, a brief overview of the tradition of rhetorical criticism is given. Next, recent literature related to the analysis of non-discursive rhetoric is outlined. Finally, the critical paradigms from which these studies were borne are discussed.

The Rhetorical Tradition

Some of the earliest theorists and practitioners of rhetoric were primarily concerned with accounting for the specific choices made by speakers in public discourse. For instance, Aristotle, one of the first and most influential rhetoricians of ancient Greece, conceived of rhetoric as the "the faculty of observing in any given case the available means of persuasion."[9] Correspondingly, the first critics of rhetoric were also concerned with this practice. In 1925, Herbert Wichelns, considered by many to be the father of modern rhetorical criticism, wrote an influential essay entitled "The Literary Criticism of Oratory," in which he called for some literary critics to also become critics

of public discourse.[10] According to Wichelns, scholars could productively analyze public speeches using a comprehensive inventory of factors (e.g., the invention of arguments) outlined in Aristotle's *Rhetoric* to illuminate the choices made in public addresses.[11] Although Wichelns' essay succeeded in highlighting the need for the study of rhetoric— as evidenced by the large number of essays written in response to his call— it also narrowed the scope of rhetorical criticism, drawing distinct boundaries around rhetoric and poetics (aesthetics). He wrote, "poetry is always free to fulfill its own law, but the writer of rhetorical discourse is, in a sense, perpetually in bondage to the occasion and the audience; and in that fact, we find the line of cleavage between rhetoric and poetic."[12] In accordance with Wichelns' seminal essay, scholars of public address maintained clear distinctions between rhetoric and poetics well into the 1960's, until a new generation of scholars began to question his assumptions about the nature of public discourse.[13]

Contrary to Wichelns' narrow conceptualization of rhetoric, other scholars, such as Wayne Booth and Kenneth Burke, suggested that the jurisdiction of rhetorical critics ought to be much broader. They claimed, according to Martin Medhurst and Thomas Benson, that "all symbolic behavior is inherently rhetorical insofar as it is designed to communicate, and that the rhetorical critic's job is to understand the communicative potential of symbolic forms."[14] Booth argued that literary fiction was inherently rhetorical, writing, "the author cannot choose whether or not to use rhetorical heightening. His (sic) only choice is of the kind of rhetoric he will use."[15] Similarly, Burke "[saw] the author as a rhetorician who selects and 'weights' certain portions of the poetic structure to invite a particular interpretation by the reader. [He was] interested in the 'forms' an author employed to arouse in the reader certain expectations."[16] From this

perspective, "all human action is rhetorical," and thus, the subfield of rhetorical criticism should be extended to include all forms symbolic communication.[17]

Increasingly, scholars note the value of analyzing non-discursive forms of communication; recent research has shown films, television, and print images to be meaningful rhetorical experiences. The analysis of rhetorical experiences often perceived to be outside the disciplinary traditions of oral speech and linear prose falls into five categories. First, critics have used films, television shows, and print images as case studies to illuminate rhetorical theory. Broadly, these analyses explain how and why non-discursive rhetorical experiences reveal aspects of theory that are not addressed by the analysis of discourse or linear prose. For example, Kathi L. Groenendyk's analysis of Per*suasion* revealed that visual depictions of nature and the picturesque—the aesthetic qualities of scene—contributed to its emotional persuasiveness.[18] According to Groenendyk, Roger Miller's adaptation of *Persuasion* did not give the audience enough explicit information for them to make judgments about the characters in the film. This deficiency was overcome by associating certain characters with the picturesque—something that viewers naturally appreciate—and inviting them to import their appreciation of these aesthetic qualities to view those characters favorably.[19] In this regard, scenes of the picturesque in cinema serve an enthymematic function in which audiences are invited to fill in gaps in the development of characters with their knowledge of scene and the picturesque.[20] In another essay, Cara A. Finnegan revealed methodological insights into the study of visual rhetoric by exploring the relationship between art and documentary. In her analysis of *U.S. Camera*—"a yearly compendium of the best in American photography"—Finnegan documented the history of the publication,

which was caught in a "balancing act" between aesthetics and information.[21] She explained that the editor of *U.S Camera* was keenly aware of the necessity for the publication's objectivity in order for it to remain a going concern. This led him to emphasize its documentary purposes over aesthetics, thus preventing its content from being labeled "mere photographs."[22] Finnegan concluded her essay by accounting for how these institutional constraints provided a more nuanced analysis of the visual images found within *U.S. Camera*.[23] In both of these examples, the analysis of non-discursive rhetorical experiences led to insights that illuminated aspects of rhetorical theory that could not have been revealed through the analysis of linear prose and public discourse alone.

A second category of non-discursive rhetorical criticism attends to how film, television shows, and print images contain messages that deviate from oppressive social institutions and cultural norms, providing a voice to marginalized portions of the population. An essay written by Julie Kalil Schutten, for example, illustrates how the film *Practical Magic* articulated the identity of the neo-paganism movement in the absence of other, more legitimate avenues of discourse.[24] According to Schutten, negative patriarchal and Christian representations portraying witches as morally and sexually deviant pervade western culture.[25] The identities presented in *Practical Magic*, however, combated these stereotypes, providing vital role models for the Neo Pagan movement.[26] In this regard, the film offered a voice and an identity to an otherwise marginalized group. Likewise, Victoria E. Sanchez and Mary E. Stuckey's analysis of *The Indian in the Cupboard* demonstrated how the film countered hegemonic codes of race through its historically accurate and racially sensitive portrayal of the Native American LittleBear.[27]

Traditional Western narratives depicted Native Americans as evil and savage or ignorant and helpless. According to authors, *The Indian in the Cupboard*, on the other hand, accurately represented the robust and formidable cultural heritage of the Native American.[28] The examples in this paragraph demonstrate the ability of film to challenge stereotypical portrayals of margenalized groups. In this regard, the analysis of film revealed a new outlet for the deconstruction of oppressive prejudices.

Third, the analysis of some rhetorical experiences exposed how film, television shows, and print images may reify oppressive social institutions and cultural norms. Brian L. Ott's and Eric Aoki's analysis of *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, for example, demonstrated how utopian portrayals of the future exclude minority groups by failing to give them adequate representation in the narrative.[29] According to the authors, the television series presents a utopian vision of the future that almost entirely excludes homosexuals. Thus, the series implicitly suggests that heteronormative constructions of sexuality are ideal, which may have negative societal implications for those who deviate from those norms. In addition, Michele L. Hammers' analysis of *Ally McBeal* demonstrated how portrayals of women who seize power through the use of sex are harmful for feminist interests.[30] According to the authors, many feminist discourses espouse reclamation of the female body from objectifying norms.[31] The resulting liberation, however, is easily co-opted by mediated portrayals of unsure and neurotic women, such as the television character Ally McBeal, and may then become margenalizing.[32] While the examples in the preceding paragraph demonstrated the emancipatory potential of non-discursive rhetoric, the examples in this paragraph

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demonstrate that the opposite is also true: films may reify oppressive norms by stereotyping their portrayals of marginalized groups.

Fourth, scholars considered how films, television shows, and print images function as agents of persuasion, investigating the ways that they shape public perception, opinion, and memory. For example, Cori E. Dauber's analysis of visual images of American casualties and POWs in contemporary international conflicts demonstrated how images influenced public perceptions of U.S. peacekeeping missions. He argued that negative public reactions to images of casualties from foreign conflicts such as the Battle of the Black Sea in Mogadishu led to a "zero casualty" policy for American foreign affairs, thus demonstrating the profound impact that visual images may have on public policy.[33] Theresa Bergman's analysis of Mt. Rushmore's orientation films further demonstrated the ways in which non-discursive rhetorical experiences may influence public perception and memory by illustrating how each of the three orientation films constructed and reflected different values and interpretations of the historic landmark. According to Bergman, the first orientation film was intended to invoke nationalism, while the second and third films were intended to invoke patriotism and progressivist U.S history respectively.[34] Bergman argued that the mutability of these films suggests that public memory is not static, but instead is a dynamic process of negotiation and renegotiation with prevailing narratives.[35] The examples in this section demonstrate the persuasive potential of images to move publics to challenge foreign policy and even to alter their collective memory of historical events.

Finally, critics have read non-traditional rhetorical experiences mythically in order to discuss important implications for individuals and society. For example, Leroy

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G. Dorsey's analysis of *The X-Files* revealed the emergence of "the contemporary

conspiracy myth," which deviated from traditional portrayals of protagonists as "good

guys" and antagonists as "bad guys." Instead, the film portrayed each in terms of the

trickster archetype, a mythic portrayal that shows the protagonist acting selfishly or the

antagonist acting in the best interests of humanity.[36] Dorsey argued that the emergence of

the conspiracy myth evidences the moral complexity of contemporary culture.[37]

Similarly, Scott R. Stroud's analysis of *The Matrix* marked the inception of the

technological hero-quest, in which an ontologically separate hero must destroy

community in order to save it.[38] According to Stroud, the mythic symbolism of the

Matrix highlights the need for modern culture to be "rescued" from the ever-increasing

pervasiveness of technology.[39] *The Matrix's* hero-quest is potentially problematic,

however, because the hero is ontological separate from those he helps, which illuminates

the modern trend toward isolation.[40] The examples in this paragraph demonstrate how

reading non-discursive rhetoric mythically reveals important insights about the

temperament of contemporary culture. In reading films as important rhetorical

experiences, these authors shed light on how publics can cope with the challenges of

modern life.

 The categories discussed in the preceding paragraphs are not exhaustive and some

studies are sure to fall outside their purview. They are, however, representative of the

broad critical themes related to the analysis of non-discursive rhetoric in the last decade.

Research, though, does not occur in a vacuum; its nature is often the product of the

critical paradigm under which it is conducted. In the following section, the critical

paradigms under which these studies were conducted are discussed in order to further contextualize the analytical project to follow.

<div align="center">Critical Paradigms</div>

The early study of rhetoric and rhetorical criticism sought to explain the specific choices made by rhetors in the invention and delivery of their speeches.[41] This type of analysis was grounded in the critical paradigm of modernism, which sought to uncover objective, inherent meanings behind reality and human existence.[42] Modern authors, such as Renè Descartes, were characterized by their belief that objective truth could be accessed through logical and rational inquiry.[43] Descartes' famous cogito, "I think therefore I am," reflects this commitment. In *Discourse on Method*, Descartes concluded that doubting his existence was in itself proof of his existence, but this proof was not accessible to the senses, as he later demonstrated in his *Wax Argument*.[44] Thus, Descartes rejected perception and insisted that knowledge was only accessible through deductive reasoning.[45] As a critical paradigm, modernism began in the Enlightenment of the eighteenth century and held sway until the early part of the twentieth century. By the mid-twentieth century, however, the rational and systematic nature of the atrocities perpetrated during the first and second world wars, led scholars to question the objective meanings assumed to exist behind material reality and the use of reason to access such meaning.[46] As a result, a new critical paradigm that sought to lay bare the illusions of the modern era took root.

Postmodernism emerged as a preeminent paradigm of though in the mid-twentieth century in response to the perceived shortcomings of the modern era.[47] As Janice Hocker Rushing and Thomas S. Frentz note in their book *Projecting the Shadow: The Cyborg*

Hero in American Cinema, the denigration of all that is not rational by modern era fostered "agonizing rifts in the social body, the physical environment, and the individual."[48] The defining characteristic of this paradigm is fragmentation.[49] We no longer live in an age of production, but of reproduction, where there is no longer any originals from which copies are made, but only, as Baudrillard puts it, the "hyperreal" where everything is simulated from models bearing no resemblance to that which they reproduce.[50] This state of affairs led to what some scholars call the "postmodern condition" in which the individual is decentered—"dispersed into the margins with no ego, no historically coherent sense of self at the nucleus"—the end result of which is the abandonment of any sense of community.[51]

Some scholars are vexed by the "perpetually gloomy" attitude affected by proponents of the paradigm.[52] As Annette Kuhn points out, most critical commentary on the "postmodern condition is pessimistic, even apocalyptic."[53] More exasperating is their failure to proscribe a remedy to the condition. According to Rushing and Frentz, postmodernity cannot address the problems which it highlights so readily because its writers implicitly endorse many of the presuppositions that gave rise to the condition in the first place.[54] Further writers' insistence that the objective conditions of reality leave "no memory, no unmediated experience, no depth, no transcendence, [and] no psyche" intensifies the fragmentation of the individual by overemphasizing the reality of the external over the internal.[55] Thus, while postmodern critiques were devastating to modernism, they did little to alleviate, and in fact intensified, the feelings of malaise wrought upon society.

In *Projecting the Shadow,* Rushing and Frentz introduced transmodernism as a

critical paradigm in response to the inescapable and depressing self-determinism of the

postmodern condition. Transmodernism is influenced by the depth-psychology of C. G.

Jung, as well as the transpersonal psychology of Ken Wilbur and Houston Smith.[56] This

paradigm begins with a foundation of the psyche from which all else emanates: the

collective unconscious, consisting of instincts and their corollaries, the archetypes, which

may be understood as basic patterns of instinctual behavior.[57] Jung and other like minded

scholars argued that these instinctual behaviors are inherited by all individuals through

symbolic repetition.[58] Directly above the collective unconscious, is the personal

unconscious, which may be understood as an accumulation of drives originating in the

collective unconscious that have yet to be fully realized.[59] Jung posited that every

individual unconsciously strides towards individuation, or maturity, and that this journey

is communicated primarily through the hero myth.[60] Thus, analysis of hero myths enables

scholars to track the individual's and humanity's progress toward that end. It is this

function of myth that makes it a useful tool for rhetorical criticism. It will be discussed in

detail in the following section.

Frontier Myths

In a seminal article entitled "Mythic Evolution of 'The New Frontier' in Mass

Mediated Rhetoric," Rushing discussed the evolution of the American frontier myth in

terms of its implications for understanding the American psyche. Rushing defined a

frontier as "a place that at first seems infinite and unknown, but eventually becomes

confining and familiar."[61] Thus, the scene of the frontier changes periodically to reflect

advances in technology that render previous frontier tame and docile.

According to Rushing, the sea was the first scene for cultural stories of the American frontier myth. These narratives depicted stalwart heroes, battling the irrational denizens of nature (e.g., giant squids) or the forces of nature itself.[62] As Rushing argues in "Evolution of 'The New Frontier' in *Alien* and *Aliens:* Patriarchal Co-Optation of the Feminine Archetype," mythic portrayals of nature and extensions of nature may be understood metaphorically as female. Traditionally, the feminine appeared in myth as a combination of the Mother, Virgin, and Mistress archetypes enacted through archaic goddesses, such as the Mesopotamian goddess Ishtar.[63] The archaic Goddess was both "chaste and promiscuous, nurturing and bloodthirsty."[64] Ancient ceremonies honoring the feminine involved the symbolic expression of a wide range of human potentialities.[65] Dionysian cults, for example, acted as sanctioned arenas for the expression of both human desire and aggression—"the impulse to destroy form so that it may be reconstituted, to kill the old in order for the new to arise."[66] The archetypal feminine is "associated with the experience of nature as a whole, of life and death as interrelated processes in the Great Round."[67] The realm of the Goddess was the earth as a whole, and because she "was associated with the moon, she was often linked to the sea (both the moon and the womb run the same fluctuating cycle of oceanic tides)."[68] Thus, nature in the sea-frontier symbolically represented the archetypal feminine—wild, unpredictable, and free; seductive, but unable to be possessed."[69]

In the modern era, the ego-driven hero emerged as the arch opponent of the archetypal feminine. The central function of the hero archetype is to achieve ego-consciousness by separating from the unconscious as an evil to be overcome.[70] To the

ego-heroic impulse, the wild, irrational aspects of nature cease to be nurturing and comfortable and instead become stifling and devouring—"the horrible dragon monster who must be slain so that the hero may be free."[71] In the myth of Perseus, for instance, the severing of Medusa's head served as a mythological example of the ego-driven hero's quest to divide himself from the earthly plane by slaying the archaic goddess.[72] When Perseus completed this quest and returned with her head, his prizes included the achievements of rational thought, but at the price of marginalizing the uncontrollable aspects of the feminine to the periphery.[73] This example illustrates the primary archetypal tension symbolically enacted within the sea-frontier: the rational, ego-driven hero struggling to conquer the wild, unpredictable, and irrational feminine so that his consciousness may fully emerge from the depths of the unconscious.

As the sea became more familiar due to the development of better technology and improved trade routes, the "monsters of the deep" crawled ashore to dwell in the "dark forests, bleak prairies, and burning deserts of the new American frontier: the west."[74] Although the western frontier marked a change in the scenic dimensions of the myth, little changed in the archetypal portrayals of the masculine and feminine. It is true that, in depictions of the western frontier, the savagery of nature takes a human shape in the form of the Native American Indian or outlaw, but these individuals are little more than extensions of nature; they are still wild, untamed, and beyond reason or comprehension.[75] Additionally, and like the sea-frontier before it, the forces of nature are still the arch opponent of the western frontier hero.[76] Many western frontier myths depict ego-driven heroes as strangers to the culture that they fight to liberate; they ride into town to find an impotent citizenry powerlessly beset by some evil.[77] This separateness from the

population at large draws attention to the heroes' individualism, which is the primary means by which they fight the forces of evil.[78] Western frontier myths commonly end with ego-driven heroes riding off into the sunset, presumably to the next town in need of their assistence.[79] Thus, the hero's sacrifice—and every hero must sacrifice something— is its alienation from the very people it has fought to liberate.[80]

In the late 1960's, public interest in the American west as a site for the frontier myth again began to wane in response to advances in technology and exploration. America's great "space race" with Russia, which resulted in satellites orbiting the earth and men walking on the moon, demonstrated to Americans the viability of outer space as a new repository for their collective imagination. The scene of space differed from the previous frontiers in narrative structure, but not in portrayals of masculine and feminine archetypes. Space, for instance, is markedly different from land in its infinitude, but it is still commonly portrayed as an inhospitable scene to be conquered or mastered. In "Mythic Evolution of 'The New Frontier' in Mass Mediated Rhetoric," Rushing identified the evolutionary stages of the space-frontier myth. The first narratives to take place in this new frontier were simply relocations of classic western narratives set in space.[81] The movie *Outland*, for example, portrayed an egoic hero who "rode in from nowhere" to fight against an evil corporation on the behalf of the beleaguered and cowardly townspeople of a small mining colony.[82] Other narratives display more advanced forms of the frontier narrative in which technology is highlighted as a crucial component of the scene itself. Rushing contends that the film *Bladerunner* depicts the consequences of uncontrolled technological development on the viability of rugged individualism as a way to cope with the infinitude of space.[83] Some have lauded the space

frontier as emancipatory because of these changes in narrative structure. Ari Kopivaara of

Ms. magazine, for instance, proclaimed that the portrayal of the female hero Ripley in the

films *Alien* and *Aliens* provide a role model for all humans.[84] While such interpretations

portend well for the American culture, archetypal analysis of these films suggests that no

real change has occurred in the symbolic struggle between masculinity and femininity.

Although Ripley is indeed a female, she conquers the evil aliens (which in this case may

be understood as a devouring extension of the archetypal feminine), but only after

adapting the behaviors of the traditionally masculine ego-driven hero.[85] Thus, although

the space frontier shows the nascent signs of archetypal evolution, it does not fully

actualize the ego-hero's mythic journey.

<p align="center">The Post-Apocalyptic Frontier</p>

In recent years, America's cultural space has been inundated by a flood of movies

depicting life after a global (or perceived to be global) catastrophe. These films, which

include several major Hollywood productions, such as *Doomsday, The Resident Evil*

pentology, *The Matrix* trilogy, *The Quiet Earth, The Mad Max* trilogy, *The post Man, 28*

Days later, 28 Weeks Later, The Road, Terminator 3: Salvation, The Book of Eli, Zombie

Land, The Dawn of the Dead, I am Legend, The Crazies, and *Legion*, as well as countless

independent, lower-budget films, have enjoyed much box office success, if not critical

acclaim. While it is tempting to write these films off as pure spectacle, non-substantive

iterations of American sensationalism, it is unwise to do so. Indeed, ever since humanity

developed the capacity to destroy itself with the atom bomb, Americans have been

fascinated with the end of world. This fascination is apparent in the popular film

productions discussed above, as well as in numerous rhetorical experiences.[86] Analysis of

the archetypes that constitute these texts reveals the emergence of yet another scene of the American mythos: the post-apocalyptic frontier.[87] Post-apocalyptic narratives depict characters struggling to survive in the wake of a global catastrophe. In such a world, the normal laws, rules, and conventions of society no longer apply because there are no governing bodies to enforce them. Due to the deterioration of the systems of meaning that render a place familiar and "knowable," individuals in post-apocalyptic narratives find themselves in a scene of perpetual wilderness and unpredictability. For example, consider the popular 2007 film *I am Legend*. Most of the action in this film takes place in the very epicenter of civilization: New York City. Notwithstanding the familiarity of this scene, the viewer is made immediately aware that this city is not what it once was, as made apparent by the abundant and consuming vegetation and wild animals stampeding down the decrepit streets. Viewers cannot help but to feel a sense of alienation or distance from that which once was, the decaying skyscrapers serving as a stark reminder of the fleeting imprint of humanity on the increasingly "wild" landscape. There is also an element of unpredictable danger, for something evil is lurking in the darkness, something beyond reason that will not rest until the last vestiges of humanity are eliminated. Thus, although the narrative is taking place at the geographic coordinates that once corresponded to New York City, the city itself no longer exists. All that remains is the wild, unpredictable, and natural setting germane to the frontier. Therefore, in the post-apocalyptic world, everywhere is a potential frontier: unknown, potentially dangerous, and utterly alien.

This frontier in American cinema significantly differs from its predecessors, and thus merits scholarly attention. In order to highlight the emergence of this frontier, and to discuss its implications for American culture, this thesis examines two films typical of

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post-apocalyptic narratives: John Hillcoat's *The Road* and Danny Boyle's *28 Days Later*. The shifting of frontiers does not occur suddenly. Rather, "the transition progresses gradually, as elements of the old scene are initially grafted onto the new mythic imagination."[88] Thus, the first of these two films represents a transitional phase in the evolution of the American frontier myth in which elements from the previous space frontier become embedded in the emerging post-apocalyptic frontier. The latter of represents a more advanced iteration of the post-apocalyptic frontier.

At this point, it is appropriate to explain why films in general, and post-apocalyptic narratives specifically, constitute myths. Scholars' opinions about what constitutes myth vary greatly. Michael Osborn, for example, argued for a broad application of mythic criticism, claiming that it is important for critics to have at their disposal a method that can address certain effervescent aspects of rhetorical experiences that extend beyond the texts themselves.[89] Robert C. Rowland, on the other hand, argued that experiences constitute myths if and only if their audiences believe that those narrative are real.[90] In addition, Rowland listed five additional criteria: [1] the story must symbolically address the problems facing society, [2] the characters must be heroic in that they solve the problems represented in the story, [3] the story must be ahistorical in that it addresses universal human concerns rather than immediate exigencies, [4] the story must occur outside the normal world and in a place of symbolic primacy, [5] the story must communicate using archetypal language, such as fire or water. [91]

While Rowland's criteria for what constitutes a myth may be more stringent than Osborn's, both scholars seem to agree tacitly that myths should illuminate something about the human condition that extends beyond immediate historical circumstances and

into the realm of fundamental human behavior and understanding. In this regard, mythic criticism is appropriate when the experience at hand addresses universal human concerns that transcend the societal exigencies specific to a particular culture. It is true that, at times, post-apocalyptic narratives comment on the immediate concerns of society, such as the uncontrollable proliferation of technology and its consequences. But to assume that this is the only lesson to be learned from such narratives would be myopic. Osborn is quick to point out that Rushing and other critics find many science fiction films to be of mythic import.[92] Thus, reading post-apocalyptic narratives mythically is appropriate. With an outline of myth's importance in understanding the American psyche in place, discussion turns to the critical approach that guides the analysis of archetypal meanings in the post-apocalyptic frontier.

Critical Approach

In large part, the critical methods used by scholars to illuminate texts depend on their assumptions regarding the function or purpose of critical rhetorical studies. In order for the evolution of myth in public discourse to be meaningful in relation to social consciousness, a perspective is needed "which treats consciousness itself as evolving teleologically, and rhetoric as contributing to the movement of consciousness toward or away from that *telos,* or ultimate purpose."[93] According to Thomas Farrell, this conception may be traced all the way back to the rhetoricians of ancient Greece. Farrell's interpretation of Aristotle, for example, treats the purpose of rhetoric as "the movement of humanity toward its *telos* of moral excellence through the formation of public character in those with the potential for moral action.[94] Following Farrell's interpretation,

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Thomas Frentz's article, published in the following year, likewise treated the function of rhetoric as guiding humanity toward or away from its ultimate purpose, but rejected Aristotle's notion that reason was humanity's optimal end.[95] Rather, he held that humanity's *telos* is "the conscious awareness of interdependence among all phenomena."[96] Thus, while burgeoning ego-consciousness seeks to differentiate itself from the environment, its ultimate goal is to reunify with it. It is important to note that a teleological approach to criticism does not presume humanity to be moving inexorably towards an ideal future. Rather, it suggests merely that the awareness of the interdependence of phenomena is humanity's ideal state and that certain narratives reveal more developed visions of this *telos* than others.

If the function of rhetoric is to guide humanity toward or away from this awareness of interconnectedness as some scholars claim, then a critical method that can track the progress (or lack of progress) toward this end is necessary. Frentz argued that the concept of rhetorical narration may be useful in rendering intelligible humanity's mythic journey toward reunification.[97] In order to understand the concept of rhetorical narration, it is necessary to distinguish between two conceptions of time: linear time and teleological time. Linear time unfolds objectively and in sequential order (i.e., yesterday occurred before today). Teleological time relates to how close (or far) a narrative carries humanity toward (or away) from its ultimate purpose, or *telos*.[98] Narratives that are closer to humanity's *telos* may be considered more advanced than those that are further away from it.[99] In this regard, teleological time takes precedence over linear time in the critic's construction of a larger narrative from seemingly discrete rhetorical experiences.[100] Although *The Road* is more advanced than *28 Days Later* in linear time, it represents a

less advanced iteration of the post-apocalyptic frontier in the American mythos. With the distinction between linear time and teleological time in mind, a rhetorical narration may be understood as "an interdependent set of discourses in teleological time, which maps the movement of social consciousness toward or away from the *telos* of unity.[101]

Michael Osborn's concept of rhetorical depiction further elucidates how seemingly disparate texts may be understood as interrelated components of a larger whole. According to Osborn, the principle of eloquence, which is concerned with the clear expression of ideas and concepts from speakers to their audiences, is an integral component of human communication.[102] Eloquence was originally conceptualized as semantic in nature; that is, its design was concerned with how well speakers could use words to express ideas and concepts to their audiences.[103] In recent years, however, "contemporary rhetoric seems to be dominated by strategic pictures, verbal or nonverbal visualizations that linger in the collective memory of audiences."[104] Osborn explains that these less explicit rhetorical experiences are perpetually meaningful in that their messages may not be fully conscious or actualized, yet they are still influential to audiences.[105] For example, the full import of a newspaper's circulation of an incendiary image may not be felt for some time, but it may still have immediate effects upon its audience. Rhetorical depiction, then, does not arise from a single rhetorical experience, but from a controlled gestalt with a cumulative impact.[106] The "master rhetorician" builds a depiction that lends "substance and authenticity to an image, using stylistic techniques that provide its sense of living presence."[107] Thus, as with rhetorical narration, depictions treat rhetorical experiences as dynamic entities, looking beyond singular, discrete experiences and into the interconnected meanings among them.

While rhetorical narration and rhetorical depiction seem to be useful for plotting the changes in the meanings of mythic discourse, they do not account for how those myths change structurally—that is, how changes in one element may affect the mythic whole.[108] In order to account for these changes in her analysis of the space frontier in American cinema, Rushing turned to Kenneth Burke's dramatistic pentad. The pentad treats rhetorical experiences as narrative dramas that unfold in relation to five major questions: "what was done (act), when or where it was done (scene), who did it (agent), how he (sic) did it (agency), and why (purpose)?"[109] Kenneth Burke suggested that the answers to these questions were most meaningful when they are considered in relation to one another, thus ten different ratios are made possible by placing any two terms together.[110] Bernard L. Brock's essay on the dramatistic approach to criticism further elucidates this concept. He writes, "a person's vocabulary reveals the set that dominates thinking and speaking. Some people for example, will ask *what* and then *who* [(i.e., act-agent)], others *who* and then *what* [(i.e., agent-act)]."[111] Critics may trace any these ratios throughout a given discourse, but one will term will control, or typify the discourse.[112] Brock explains that Burke's dramatistic pentad operates like the fingers of a human hand, "which are distinct from each other and posses their own individuality; yet, at the same time, they merge into a unity at the palm of the hand. With this simultaneous division and unity, one can leap from one term to another or one can move slowly from one to another through the palm."[113] This description illustrates the unity and division of human motivation. On the one hand, all five elements are necessary for symbolic communication, but on the other, one of these elements will dominate the discourse.[114]

According to Rushing, cultural myths "may be profitably conceived of pentadically: a hero (agent) accomplishes a series of tasks (act), using some means of aid (agency), within a place in time (scene), generally for the benefit of culture (purpose)."[115] For example, the harsh western frontier demands a hero (agent), who fights to conquer the land and its denizens (act), with the aid of horses, guns and force (agencies), usually with the intent of expanding national boarders (purpose).[116] Because the frontier eventually ceases to be a frontier, scene is placed in a dialectical tension with agent/agency; when it appears infinite, scene remains dominant and awe-inspiring, but as its finitude becomes apparent the agent/ agency begins to be featured.[117]

In keeping with Rushing's original critical framework, this project combines *The Road and 28 Days Later* into a larger narrative and investigates that gestalt using Burke's dramatistic pentad in order to illuminate yet another stage in the evolution of the American frontier myth. In the American West, Rushing explains, the hero "prepares himself (sic) by perfecting his ego—through power of will, he demonstrates no emotion, and through practice with weapons, he readies himself for the fight.[118] Agency in control now (reason and tools perfected), he is up to the challenge. Agency, then, dominates the hero himself, his surroundings, his enemies, and his acts."[119] Thus, the western frontier may be understood pendatically as a tension between scene and agency. As the scene of the American frontier shifted to space, technology began to play a crucial role in the narrative structure of the myth.[120] "When technology as an extension of rational human agency expands uncontrollably, it metamorphoses into scene."[121] And as scene dramatistically "is the container" for "the thing contained," the antithetical anomaly is created of what was once agency now containing the agent."[122] Thus, scene-agent is the

dominant ratio of the space frontier. The post-apocalyptic frontier reveals yet another

shift in the dominant dramatistic ratio. As the global catastrophe turns the very land in

which heroes dwell into an inhospitable wasteland, pitting them against forces against

which they cannot conquer, the heroes, their acts, their implements, and their enemies

become dominated by purpose. The goal (or purpose) of survival supersedes all other

dramatistic elements: the heroes do not conquer, but instead flee, they have limited means

which are not used to achieve victory, but rather as feeble attempts to temporarily stave

off utter consumption by the scene.

In addition to revealing the dramatistic implications of the post-apocalypse,

analysis of *The Road* and *28 Days Later* also reflects important changes in the archetypal

portrayals of the American frontier myth. Joseph Campbell's conception of the

monomyth further illuminates the salient dimensions of the post-apocalyptic frontier. As

mentioned previously, the change in mythic scene places the ego-driven hero in a setting

in which it cannot survive. Thus, the hero archetype must embark on a mythic journey on

which it learns new attitudes and behaviors in order to better cope with the scene. As

Rushing stated in "Evolution of the 'New Frontier' in *Alien* and *Aliens*: Patriarchal

Co-Optation of the Archetypal Feminine, "the new myth for humankind needs to be a

quest, rather than a conquest; its purpose, to search, rather than to search and destroy.[123]

In *The Hero with a Thousand Faces,* Campbell succinctly outlines this quest. He

describes the progression of the hero in three stages: departure, initiation, and return.[124]

The first of these stages designates a "call to adventure –[signifying] that destiny has

summoned the hero and transferred his (sic) spiritual center of gravity from within the

pale of his society to a zone unknown."[125] The initiation stage refers to a period in which

the hero "moves in a dream landscape of curiously fluid, ambiguous forms, where he must survive a succession of trials" in order to undergo a necessary transformation.[126] Along the way, the hero learns the skills and abilities that will aid him it in his quest. Once the quest, which culminates in a "supreme ordeal," is completed, the hero then returns to his people with the ability to bestow boons upon them.[127] The three stages of the hero archetype illuminate the mythic development of the hero archetype throughout *The Road* and *28 Days Later*, the implications of which are discussed in Chapter Four.

Recall the essays related to the analysis of film outlined earlier. Although these articles considered a wide range of rhetorical experiences, each answered three questions fundamental for conducting valuable criticism. How are the films we enjoy more than mere entertainment? In what ways does the analysis of film enrich scholars' collective understanding of human communication? Why are these insights important to rhetorical critics and/ or the public at large? This project seeks to answer each of these questions. In the following chapters, *The Road* and *28 Days Later* are placed in teleological time to demonstrate the emergence of the post-apocalyptic frontier of the American mythos. Chapter Two reads *The Road* as a transitional phase in the evolution of the frontier myth in which the ego-driven, masculine hero is placed in a scene in which he cannot survive, thus signaling the next stage in the hero's journey. Chapter Three reads *28 Days Later* as a more advanced and fully realized vision of the post-apocalyptic frontier. The implications, limitations, and heuristic potentialities of this project are discussed in Chapter Four.

Notes

[1] Lev Grossman, "Zombies are the New Vampires" *Time Magazine* (9 April 2009). Accessed on 10/2/2010 from http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1890384,00.html.

[2] Walter Fisher, "Narration as a Human Communication Paradigm: The Case of Public Moral Argument," in *Readings in Rhetorical Criticism, 3rd edition,* edited by Carl R. Burgchardt (State College: Strata Publishing, Inc., 2005), 246.

[3] Michael Osborn, "In Defense of Broad Mythic Criticism—A Reply to Rowland," *Communication Studies 41,* no. 2 (1990), 125.

[4] Janice Hocker Rushing, "Mythic Evolution of 'The New Frontier' in Mass Mediated Rhetoric," *Critical Studies in Mass Communication 3*, no. 3 (1986): 265.

[5] Rushing, "Mythic Evolution," 265.

[6] Janice Hocker Rushing, "Evolution of 'The New Frontier' in *Alien* and *Aliens*: Patriarchal Co-optation of the Feminine Archetype," *The Quarterly Journal of Speech 75* no. 1 (1989): 1-24.

[7] Rushing, "Mythic Evolution," 266.

[8] Janice Hocker Rushing and Thomas S. Frentz, *Projecting the Shadow: The Cyborg Hero in American Film* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1995), 5.

[9] Aristotle, *The Rhetoric* translated by W. Rhys Roberts (Columbus, OH: The Ohio State University Press), 24.

[10] Herbert Wichelns, "The Literary Criticism of Oratory," in *Readings in Rhetorical Criticism, 3rd edition,* edited by Carl R. Burgchardt (State College: Strata Publishing, Inc., 2005), 3.

[11] Wichelns, "Literary Criticism of Oratory," 3-5.

[12] Wichelns, "The Literary Criticism of Oratry," in *Rhetorical Dimensions in Media: A Critical Casebook*, edited by Martin J. Medhurst and Thomas W. Benson (Dubuque, IA: Kendall/Hunt Publishing Company, 1991), xii.

[13] Martin J. Medhurst and Thomas W. Benson, "Introduction," in *Rhetorical Dimensions in Media: A Critical Casebook*, edited by Martin J. Medhurst and Thomas W. Benson (Dubuque, IA: Kendall/Hunt Publishing Company, 1991), xii.

[14] Medhurst and Benson, "Introduction," xvi.

[15] Wayne C. Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961): 116.

[16] Medhurst and Benson, "Introduction," xvii.

[17] Medhurst and Benson, "Introduction," xvii.

[18] Kathi L. Groenendyk, "The Importance of Vision: *Persuasion* and the Picturesque," *The Quarterly Journal of Speech* 30, no. 1 (2000): 9-28.

[19] Groenendyk, "*Persuasion* and the Picturesque," 12.

[20] Groenendyk, "*Persuasion* and the Picturesque," 12.

[21] Cara A. Finnegan, "Documentary as Art in *U.S. Camera*," *Rhetoric Society Quarterly 31*, no. 2 (2001): 63.

[22] Finnegan, "*U.S. Camera,*" 31.

[23] Finnegan, "*U.S. Camera,*" 63.

[24] Julie Kalil Schutten, "Invoking *Practical Magic*: New Social Movements, Hidden Populations, and the Public Screen," *Western Journal of Communication 70*, no. 4 (2006): 352.

[25] Schutten, "*Pracical Magic*," 352.

[26] Schutten, "*Pracical Magic*," 352.

[27] Victoria E. Sanchez and Mary E. Stuckey, "Coming of Age as a Cultural? Emancipatory and Hegemonic Readings of *The Indian in the Cupboard*," *Western Journal of Communication 64*, no. 1 (2000): 78.

[28] Sanchez and Stuckey, "*The Indian in the Cupboard,*" 78.

[29] Brian L. Ott and Eric Aoki "Popular Imagination and Identity Politics: Reading the Future in *StarTrek: The Next Generation*," *Western Journal of Communication* 65, no. 4 (2001): 410.

[30] Michele L. Hammers "Cautionary Tales of Liberation and Female Professionalism: The Case Against *Ally* McBeal," *Western Journal of Communication 69*, no. 2 (2005): 167.

[31] Hammers, "*Ally McBeal*," 180.

[32] Hammers, "*Ally McBeal*," 180.

[33] Cori E Dauber "The Shots Seen 'Round the World': The Impact of the Images of Mogadishu on American Military Operation," *Rhetoric and Public Affairs 4,* no. 4 (2001): 653.

[34] Bergman, "Mt. Rushmore," 92-102.

[35] Bergman, "Mt. Rushmore," 105.

[36] Leroy G. Dorsey "Rereading *The X-files*: The Trickster in Contemporary Conspiracy Myth," *Western Journal of Communication 66* no. 4 (2002): 463-464.

[37] Dorsey, "*The X-Files," 464.*

[38] Scott R. Stroud, "Technology as Mythic narrative: *The Matrix* as Technological Hero-Quest," *Western Journal of Communication* 54, no. 4 (2001): 416.

[39] Stroud, "*The Matrix*," 416.

[40] Stroud, "*The Matrix*," 416.

[41] Stroud, "*The Matrix*," 416.

[42] Louis E. Loeb, *From Descartes to Hume: Continental Metaphysics and the Development of Modern Philosophy* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1981): 1-382.

[43] Rene Descartes, *Discourse on Method* translated by Laurence J. Lafleur (New York: Liberal Arts Press, 1960), iv.

[44] Descartes, *Discourse on Method,* iv.

[45] Descartes, *Discourse on Method,* iv.

[46] Loeb, *From Descartes to Hume*, 1-382.

[47] Rushing and Frentz, *Projecting the Shadow,*13.

[48] Rushing and Frentz, *Projecting the Shadow,*13.

[49] Rushing and Frentz, *Projecting the Shadow,*13.

[50] Rushing and Frentz, *Projecting the Shadow*, 17.

[51] Rushing and Frentz, *Projecting the Shadow*, 16.

[52] Rushing and Frentz, *Projecting the Shadow*, 20.

[53] Annette Kuhn in Rushing and Frentz, *Projecting the Shadow,* 20.

[54] Rushing and Frentz, *Projecting the Shadow,* 23.

[55] Rushing and Frentz, *Projecting the Shadow,* 24.

[56] Rushing and Frentz, *Projecting the Shadow,* 31.

[57] Rushing and Frentz, *Projecting the Shadow,* 31.

[58] Rushing and Frentz, *Projecting the Shadow,* 34.

[59] Rushing and Frentz, *Projecting the Shadow,* 36.

[60] Rushing and Frentz, *Projecting the Shadow,* 36.

[61] Rushing, "Evolution of the New Frontier," 272.

[62] Rushing, "Evolution of the New Frontier," 272.

[63] Rushing, "Evolution of the New Frontier," 3. Although the word archaic has negative connotations, it was used here in order to preserve Rushing's original phrasing.

[64] Rushing, "Evolution of the New Frontier," 3.

[65] Rushing, "Evolution of the New Frontier," 4.

[66] Rushing, "Evolution of the New Frontier,"4.

[67] Rushing, "Evolution of the New Frontier," 3.

[68] Rushing, "Evolution of the New Frontier," 4.

[69] Rushing, "Evolution of the New Frontier," 4.

[70] Rushing, "Mythic Evolution," 283.

[71] Rushing, "Evolution of the New Frontier," 5.

[72] Rushing, "Evolution of the New Frontier," 5.

[73] Rushing, "Evolution of the New Frontier," 5.

[74] Rushing, "Mythic Evolution,"266.

[75] Rushing, "Mythic Evolution," 272.

[76] Rushing, "Mythic Evolution," 272.

[77] Rushing, "Mythic Evolution," 272.

[78] Rushing, "Mythic Evolution," 272.

[79] Rushing, "Mythic Evolution," 272.

[80] Rushing, "Mythic Evolution," 272.

[81] Rushing, "Mythic Evolution," 273.

[82]Rushing, "Mythic Evolution," 273. The term egoic is not in common vernacular usage. Rather, it is a term used among depth psychologists to describe things that relate to the ego as a psychological construct. Alternative terms such as egotistical or ego-centric refer to ego as a sense of pride.

[83] Rushing, "Mythic Evolution," 275.

[84] Ari Kopivaara, "To See or Not to See: Roll Over Rambo," *Ms.*, 8 September 1986, 14.

[85] Rushing, "Evolution of the New Frontier," 15-22.

[86] For more information on the rhetoric of the apocalypse, see Paul Boyer, *By the Bombs Early Light* (North Carolina: The University of North Carolina Press, 1994); and "A Dramatistic Theory of Apocalyptic Rhetoric," *Quarterly Journal of Speech 79*, no. 4 (1993): 385-426.

[87] The post-apocalyptic frontier is not a widely accepted term among rhetorical scholars. Rather, it is a term used by the author to describe a setting of widespread devastation and destitution.

[88] Rushing, "Mythic Evolution," 266.

[89] Michael Osborn, "In Defense of Broad Mythic Criticism—A Reply to Rowland," *Communication Studies 41,* no. 2 (1990): 121-127.

[90] Rowland's article generated several critical responses. To learn more about discussions of what constitutes a myth, see Rowland's original article. Also, see Michael Osborn, "In Defense of Broad Mythic Criticism—A Reply to Rowland," *Communication Studies 41,* no. 2 (1990): 121-127; Martha Solomon, "Responding to Rowland's Myth in Defense of Pluralism—A Reply to Rowland," *Communication Studies 41,* no. 2 (1990): 117-120; and Janice Hocker Rushing, "On Saving Mythic Criticism: A Reply to Rowland," *Communication Studies 41,* no. 2 (1990): 136-149.

[91] Robert C. Rowland, "On Mythic Criticism," *Communication Studies 41,* no. 2 (1990): *105*-106.

[92] Osborn, "Broad Mythic Criticism," 125.

[93] Rushing, "Mythic Evolution," 267.

[94] Rushing, "Mythic Evolution," 268.

[95] Rushing, "Mythic Evolution," 268.

[96] Rushing, "Mythic Evolution," 269.

[97] Rushing, "Mythic Evolution," 269.

[98] Rushing, "Mythic Evolution," 268-269.

[99] Rushing, "Mythic Evolution," 269.

[100] Rushing, "Mythic Evolution," 269.

[101] Rushing, "Mythic Evolution," 268.

[102] Michael Osborn, "Rhetorical Depiction," in Herbert W. Simons and Aram A. Aghazarian, *Form, Genre, and the Study of Political Discourse* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1986): 80.

[103] Osborn, "Rhetorical Depiction," 80.

[104] Osborn, "Rhetorical Depiction," 80.

[105] Osborn, "Rhetorical Depiction," 80.

[106] Osborn, "Rhetorical Depiction," 80.

[107] Osborn, "Rhetorical Depiction," 80.

[108] Rushing, "Mythic Evolution," 269.

[109] Kenneth Burke in Rushing, "Mythic Evolution," 268.

[110] Burke in Rushing, "Mythic Evolution," 268.

[111] Bernard L. Brock, "Rhetorical Criticism: A Burkeian Approach Revisited," in *Methods of Rhetorical Criticism: A Twentieth Century Perspective*, edited by Bernard L. Brock, Robert L. Scott, and James W. Chesbro (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1980), 188.

[112]Brock, "A Burkeian Approach," 188.

[113] Brock, "A Burkeian Approach," 190.

[114] Brock, "A Burkeian Approach," 190.

[115] Rushing, "Mythic Evolution," 270.

[116] Rushing, "Mythic Evolution," 270.

[117] Rushing, "Mythic Evolution," 270.

[118] Rushing, "Mythic Evolution," 272.

[119] Rushing, "Mythic Evolution," 272.
[120] Rushing, "Mythic Evolution," 274.

[121] Rushing, "Mythic Evolution," 274.

[122] Rushing, "Mythic Evolution," 274.

[123] Rushing, Rushing, "Evolution of the New Frontier," 5.

[124] Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1949): 23.

[125] Campbell, *Hero with a Thousand Faces,* 581.

[126] Campbell, *Hero with a Thousand Faces,* 97.

[127] Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces,* 23-25.

CHAPTER TWO

THE HERO'S DEMISE

In "Mythic Evolution of 'The New Frontier' in Mass Mediated Rhetoric," Janice Hocker Rushing documented a shift in the scene of the American mythos from the west to space. Three questions guided her analysis: "How does the scenic change from range to space affect the entire narrative structure of the myth? What is the nature of the transition itself, and how is it accomplished? And, perhaps most important, how does the evolving mythic structure shape, and how is it shaped by, the development of our public character?"[1] To answer these questions, she considered both the deep and surface structures of *Outland, Blade Runner,* and *The Right Stuff*. She found that comparing them revealed important insights into the identity of our culture. Specifically, she claimed that the shift in scene from the west to space revealed a dramatistic inconsistency which reflected a crisis in contemporary consciousness. This was only later resolved by the changing structure of the American frontier myth. She concluded her essay by explaining the importance of the continual analysis of myth in order to track the current temperament of culture as it progresses on its journey toward its *telos* of unity.

While Rushing's work ended with documenting space as the "final frontier" of the American mythos, the critic's work in this arena will never be complete. Myths and the archetypes that constitute them "are not static," Rushing explains. They are instead, "dynamic processes under constant revision."[2] Chapter one listed several films that suggested the emergence of yet another frontier of the American mythos: a scene of devastation and destitution in the wake of a global catastrophe. As with the previous shifts in the American frontier, the transition to the post-apocalypse reveals important

changes in the structure of the frontier myth. In keeping with Rushing's work, analysis of the nature of these changes—that is, what changed structurally and how—provides important insights into the temperament and disposition of our culture.

Chapter One outlined a critical method which treated *The Road* and *28 Days Later* as interconnected components of a larger narrative in order to illuminate the salient dimensions of the post-apocalyptic frontier. The emergence of the post-apocalypse as a new frontier of the American mythos is highlighted by an analysis of John Hillcoat's 2009 production, *The Road*, which demonstrates a significant change in the structure of the myth. I contend that *The Road* represents a transitional phase in the American frontier myth in which the old values of the space frontier blend with the "surface trappings" of the new post-apocalyptic frontier.[3] This transformation of frontiers illuminates a shift in dramatistic representations from scene-agent to scene-purpose. This change corresponds to the broader trends in American critical studies, which reflect a fragmentation of subjective identity—what Janice Hocker Rushing and Thomas S. Frentz call the "postmodern condition."[4] The dramatistic shift to scene-purpose in the post-apocalyptic frontier illuminates this condition and provides American culture with a narrative outlet with which to peruse alternative solutions to the challenges of contemporary life. Because *The Road* is a hybrid of new and old frontiers, it simultaneously expresses both scene-agent and scene-purpose ratios. These competing dramatistic trajectories frame the primary tension of the film and highlight the challenges germane to the post-apocalyptic frontier. In this chapter, I discuss *The Road* in terms of its mythic portrayal of the American frontier as well as the implications of that portrayal for the American psyche. First, a brief orientation to the film is necessary.

The Road depicts two unnamed protagonists, a father and his son, struggling to survive in the wake of an unspecified, global cataclysm. The pair is traveling southward from their home in the mountains to the coast, hoping that it will be warmer and more hospitable than their current location. Along the way, the man and his son experience several hardships including starvation, lack of shelter, and the constant threat of cannibalism. Although the father succeeds in safely shepherding his son to the southern coast, he is disappointed to discover that it is just as cold and inhospitable as their former residence. Depressed and in utter despair, the pair continues "down the road" until the father can no longer move due to his failing health. In short time, the father expires, leaving the boy to face alone the dangers of the inhospitable world. Just as the boy's fate seems to be sealed, salvation comes for him as he is adopted into a new family of benevolent caretakers.

Although "visually stunning," and "hauntingly bleak," John Hillcoat's production of *The Road* flopped at the box office, due in large part to the difficulty in adapting it from the prose of Cormac McCarthy's Pulitzer Prize winning novel.[5] Roger Ebert, one of America's preeminent film critics, expressed this sentiment in his review of the film. "How could the director and writer, John Hillcoat and Joe Penhall, have summoned the strength of McCarthy's writing?" he asked. "I have no idea. Perhaps McCarthy, like Faulkner, is all but unfilmable."[6] Peter Travers of *The Rolling Stone* similarly acknowledged the difficulty of adapting *The Road* to film, claiming that "no mere film can match the biblical ferocity of McCarthy's prose."[7] In addition to failing to capture the poeticism of McCarthy's novel, *The Road* may have also flopped because it was simply too bleak, too depressing, and too relevant to succeed in a society whose economic

outlook was as bleak as the post-apocalyptic world in which the film was set. Tony

Macklin, a former professor of film and literature at the University of Dayton, advanced

this opinion in his review of the film when he claimed that "[*The Road*] was a miserable

movie. It's misery, misery, misery. It's misery for The Man, The Boy, and the

audience."[8] From these and similar reviews, it is apparent that this film was likely

destined for failure at the box office due to its inability to capture the haunting prose of

the novel on which it was based and its striking resemblance to the bleak outlook of

modern life.

Notwithstanding these negative reviews, critics lauded the faithfulness of

Hillcoat's adaptation of McCarthy's tale. In addition to criticizing the film's inability to

capture McCarthy's poetic prose, Ebert also pointed out that Hillcoat's adaptation was

"evocative" and did not make the error of vulgarizing the narrative "as [happened] to

Richard Matheson's novel in the 2007 version of *I Am Legend.*"[9] A. O. Scott of *The New*

York Times likewise wrote that, "the most arresting aspect of *The Road* is just how fully

the filmmakers have realized this bleak, blighted landscape of a modern society reduced

to savagery . . . . Mr. Penhall's script follows the novel as faithfully as a hunting dog."[10]

Due to the filmmakers' fidelity to the original novel, *The Road* may be considered an

accurate visual representation of an award-winning novel, rather than a sensationalized

and shallow media perversion intended for mass consumption and high profit margins at

the expense of the narrative's integrity. Rhetorical critics in general and critics of non-

linear discourse in particular must make arguments as to why a given experience merits

analysis. In this case, *The Road* is much more than a gruesome film intended to elicit a

cheap thrill from the audience; it is a serious and faithful recreation of a literary masterpiece whose merits are beyond question.

The Post-Apocalyptic Scene: Surface and Deep Structures

In "Mythic Evolution of 'The New Frontier' in Mass Mediated Rhetoric," Rushing claimed that the analysis of a particular myth first requires an understanding of its surface structures.[11] Surface structures refer to the specific dramatic elements within a given text. These include what happened (act), who did it (agent), where it was done (scene), how it was done (agency), and why (purpose)? These five questions comprise Kenneth Burke's dramatistic pentad and their answers yield significant insights into the text to which they are applied. Understanding the surface structures of myths enables scholars to examine "how changes in one element may affect the mythic whole."[12] The dramatistic pentad is an optimal tool for parsing the surface structure of myths because it provides a method for investigating the relationship between and among the various elements. Burke suggested that these pentadic elements are most meaningful when they are considered in relation to one another, thus ten different ratios are made possible by placing any two terms together.[13] One of the five dramatistic elements will always typify a given discourse, with the other elements being discussed in relation to the dominant term.[14] Considerations for the surface structures of myths bridge the gap between universal human concerns and immediate circumstances. By considering the dominant ratio of a given discourse, scholars can understand how and why a particular myth exerts influence over culture.

The featured term of the American frontier myth has always been scene.[15] In the west, for example, the scene called for a "rugged individualist (agent) who fought to conquer the land and its endemic inhabitants (act), using horses, guns, and force (agencies), for the expansion of the country (purpose)."[16] Each of the other dramatistic terms may be seen as a response to the scene. Thus, scene dominates frontier myths because it determines the appropriate acts, agents, agencies, and purposes that motivate the narrative.

The scene of *The Road* is identified through both the spoken words of the father and the vivid, albeit saturnine, imagery of the film itself. Although at first glance this scene appears familiar by virtue of the natural landscape and images of familial intimacy displayed in its opening moments, it is soon revealed to be a wasteland with all the trappings of a genuine frontier. The film begins with the father awakening on a rainy night in a desolate landscape. A brief montage of ruined cities and harsh, inclement weather provides the viewer with the salient dimensions of the scene. "Each day is more gray than the one before. It's cold and getting colder. Trying to survive in a world that's dying. No animals survive, all crops are long gone. Soon all the trees in the world will fall."[17] Here, the father establishes the inhospitality of his surroundings. Due to the increasingly cold weather and lack of readily available foodstuffs, the land provides little if any protection to the protagonists and leads to lifetime of hardship and struggle. The father's tone of fatalism in discussing the scene communicates its philosophical nature. In *A Grammar of Motives*, Kenneth Burke writes that scene corresponds to a philosophy of materialism; that is, it refers to "all the facts of the universe as sufficiently explained by the assumption of body and matter, conceived as extended, impenetrable, eternally

existent, and susceptible of movement or change in relative position."[18] The materiality of the scene, then, dominates the other pentadic elements and frames them in its terms. Like the previous frontiers before it, *The Road* is dominated by scene because all of the other pentadic terms arise in response to it. The father, for example, emerges as an agent in direct response to the frontier created by the apocalypse. Likewise, the acts of the father, which range from selfless caretaking to homicide, also arise in response to the scene. Moreover, the father's firearm, which may be considered his primary means of agency, has most of its value not in defense (it has only two bullets in it) but in suicide. This function of the weapon directly responds to the violence and danger of the scene. Due to the pervasiveness of cannibalism, the father vows to take his own life and the life of his son before they can succumb to such a gruesome fate. Finally the purpose, which the father explicitly states as survival, is clearly necessitated by the dangers of the frontier. In each case, the scene of the post-apocalyptic frontier directly influenced the expression of the dramatistic element. Thus, the scenic dominance of the frontier frames the remaining elements of the pentad in its own terms.

From this inhospitable wasteland arise other dimensions of the post-apocalyptic scene. In the opening moments of the film, the father succinctly summarizes the challenges of living in the post-apocalypse. "The roads are peopled by refugees and gangs looking for fuel and food. Mostly I worry about food. Always food. Food and the cold and our shoes." Here, he describes the day-to-day activities for those who live in the wake of the apocalypse. In addition to the constant threat of starvation, the irrational denizens of nature also comprise the scene. In the frontier of the sea, these may have taken the form of giant squids or white whales. In the west, they were embodied by

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vicious outlaws and savage Indians, while aliens haunted the frontier of space. In each

frontier, the motives of these characters are unknowable and presumably evil. Although

they are characters, they more accurately represent aspects of the scene because their

motives are only intelligible when considered in relation to the arbitrary and capricious

forces of nature. They do not think or even feel. They simply do, and are thus part of the

material scene of the frontier. The irrational denizens of nature likewise comprise the

scene of The Road, this time in the form of cannibals. Although the cannibals are capable

of conscious thought, as the father learns through his several encounters with them, their

actions are still inextricably linked to the material conditions of the scene. Thus, in

addition to the adverse living conditions germane to a desolate landscape, the post-

apocalyptic frontier is comprised of other tangible dangers. In *The Road*, these dangers

take the form of individuals whose motives have been completely subsumed by the scene.

The historical context of the scene also informs the motives articulated in *The

Road*. "The clocks stopped at 1:17. There was a bright light and a series of low

concussions." This description is all that is provided by way of explanation for the global

cataclysm that left the world in such a high state of disrepair. The brief description is a

fitting addition to the overall scene of the post-apocalyptic frontier because it

communicates a lack of formal knowledge and near-superstitious fatalism. This is

reflected when the father and his son invite an old traveler named Eli to dinner. "I knew

this was coming," proclaimed Eli. "I saw the signs." Rather than citing specific reasons

for the cataclysm, such as nuclear war or the impact of a meteorite, Eli framed his

speculations in metaphysical terms. Thus, instead of reason and logic, the inhabitants of

the post-apocalyptic frontier rely on mysticism and superstition to negotiate the material conditions of their surroundings.

In addition to surface elements, the scene of the post-apocalypse is also comprised of deep structures that render its symbolic meanings intelligible. The Deep Structures of myths refer to their universal meanings that transcend particular circumstances and address fundamental human concerns. These structures are primarily communicated symbolically in the form of archetypes, or basic patterns of human behavior.[19] Understanding the deep structures of myths enables scholars to connect the shift in surface structures to the overall progression of humanity toward or away from its *telos* of unity. In addition to harsh weather, violent cannibals, and decimated landscapes, archetypal meanings also comprise the scene of *The Road*. According to Rushing, the conflict between masculine and feminine archetypes frames the primary tension of frontier myths.[20] The masculine archetype is usually portrayed through depictions of the ego-driven hero. This hero is rugged, individualistic and represents rationality and consciousness. The feminine archetype is usually symbolized by nature or extensions of nature. It is wild, unpredictable and represents unconsciousness and interconnectivity.[21] Previous frontiers are characterized by the masculine conquest of the feminine landscape (or its extensions). For example, the film *Aliens* portrays Ripley, a masculine hero, conquering a hive of aliens for the good of her beleaguered friends. In the post-apocalyptic frontier, however, no such conquest is possible. The father cannot conquer the scene because he cannot escape it. Unlike Ripley, who fled from the dangers of the aliens into the safety of space, the father and his son have nowhere to run. They, along with the dying land, move inexorably forward towards total annihilation. The father's

inability to cope with the demands of the post-apocalyptic frontier exposes a need for new methods of survival, as well as a new hero to implement them. As Rushing claimed in, "Evolution of 'The New Frontier' in *Alien* and *Aliens*: Patriarchal Co-optation of the Feminine Archetype," the ego-driven hero is only a fragment of the full hero archetype.[22] In order to predict the characteristics of the next stage in the evolution of the hero, an understanding of the full hero archetype is necessary.

The frontier myth can be seen as the predominant site of the hero archetype.[23] The agent of the previous frontiers may be understood as the ego-driven hero, whose "essential function is the development of his (sic) ego-consciousness—his awareness of his own strengths and weaknesses—in a manner that will equip him for the arduous tasks with which life confronts him."[24] As mentioned previously, the ego-driven hero is only one fragment of the complete hero archetype.[25] Joseph Campbell's monomyth most succinctly outlines its complete journey. He describes the progression of the hero in three stages: departure, initiation, and return.[26] The first of these stages designates a "call to adventure –[signifying] that destiny has summoned the hero and transferred his spiritual center of gravity from within the pale of his society to a zone unknown."[27] The initiation stage refers to a period in which the hero "moves in a dream landscape of curiously fluid, ambiguous forms, where he (sic) must survive a succession of trials."[28]Along the way, the hero learns the skills and abilities that will aid him in his quest. Once the quest, which culminates in a "supreme ordeal," is completed, the hero then returns to his people with the ability to bestow boons upon them.[29] In this light, the initiation and departure stages correspond to the mythic representations of ego-driven hero. In the western frontier, for example, heroes fight bravely against evil foes in the name of those who cannot fight for

themselves. The monomyth is incomplete, however, because the heroes do not (or cannot) partake in the peaceful scene they fought to create. Instead, they ride of into the sunset in search of the next town in need of their assistance. In order for the hero's journey to come to an end, the hero must learn how to live with those for whom he fights. But, this kind of integration is precisely what the ego-driven hero fights against. The task of the ego-driven hero is dialectical—"to achieve independence from unconsciousness and assert control over it; this battle is typically expressed as a triumphant struggle with the forces of evil variously portrayed as deep sea monsters, dragons, witches, or other personifications of the Great Mother."[30] Thus, it is with rugged individualism and ego-consciousness that the hero fights against the irrational forces of nature.

When these tactics are grafted onto the post-apocalyptic frontier, however, the results are disastrous. The father, although rugged and rational, bears little resemblance to his predecessors. Instead of acting with a cool air of certainty and bravado, he shows constant doubt. Unlike the heroes of old, who know full well that a happy ending surely awaits them at the completion of their task (usually the conquest of some formidable, albeit defeatable foe), the father must face the crippling uncertainty that the future holds for him. In a telling moment, the father betrays his fear that reaching the coast will do little to ensure his son's survival. "Every day is alive, but I am dying. I am trying to prepare him for when I'm gone." In this case, the father's doubt was indeed justified; his health precipitously declines the moment they reach the coast. Unlike previous frontiers, in which the ego-driven hero rides off into the sunset after a job well done, the ego-driven hero must remain in the scene which defeated him, if only to await his final failure. His only tactic for surviving the scene turned out to be folly, and now in failing health, he

waits to die. He does not die the death of a hero, however; rather, he fades ignominiously into obscurity, nothing but a burden to the child whom he has sworn to protect. When the ego-driven hero is placed in the post-apocalyptic scene, he cannot survive and ultimately dies. This death is mournful, explains Rushing, but also necessary for the next stage of the heroic myth to gain expression.[31]

In addition to accounting for masculine archetypal portrayals, understanding feminine archetypal portrayals is also necessary in order to understand fully the deep, scenic structures of *The Road*. The scene of the American frontier may be understood as archetypally feminine. Ancient accounts of nature appeared in myth as a combination of the Mother, Virgin, and Mistress archetypes enacted through archaic goddesses, such as the Mesopotamian goddess Ishtar.[32] The archaic Goddess was both "chaste and promiscuous, nurturing and bloodthirsty."[33] Ancient ceremonies honoring the feminine involved the symbolic expression of a wide range of human potentialities.[34] Dionysian cults, for example, acted as sanctioned arenas for the expression of both human desire and aggression—"the impulse to destroy form so that it may be reconstituted, to kill the old in order for the new to arise."[35] Thus, the archetypal feminine is "associated with the experience of nature as a whole, of life and death as interrelated processes in the Great Round."[36] More recent accounts of nature have likewise discussed it in terms of femininity. As early as the sixteenth century, explorers described "The New World" in terms of virginity and maternity.[37] For example, in 1728 ,William Byrd, the founder of Richmond, Virginia, discussed the Blue Ridge mountain range as, "Very much resembling a woman's breast," and a "Ledge that stretch't away to [New England] in the shape of a maiden's breast."[38] Byrd's virginal description of the land reveals insights

into the fundamental perceptions of the scene; his account of the virgin land implies that it is eagerly awaiting exploration and that such endeavors would be bountifully rewarded. These accounts of the feminine land have survived in modern culture, even long after the frontiers to which they pertained have been paved over and urbanized.

The post-apocalyptic frontier displayed in *The Road*, however, deviates considerably from these portrayals. The inhospitable wasteland that was once America may be understood as a perverted form of the archetypal feminine known as the devouring mother. Whereas the landscape is typically thought of as maternal insofar as it provides nourishment for those who dwell on it, the devouring mother is characterized by wrath, vengeance, and consumption.[39] Thus, the once verdant and bountiful lands of America have turned desolate and completely incapable of supporting life. As discussed previously, the decimated landscape is directly or indirectly responsible for all of the pain and suffering of its inhabitants: it is the problem to be conquered. Usually, the ego-driven hero would be responsible for finding a solution to save his brethren, but this time, that is impossible, because there is nothing to conquer but the world itself, a task that he is woefully ill-equipped to undertake. Here, a fundamental shift in the structure of the frontier myth is revealed. Whereas previous frontier myths portrayed the masculine conquest of the feminine forces of nature, the post-apocalyptic frontier of *The Road* depicts the devouring feminine's consumption of the masculine, ego-driven hero. This change in archetypal portrayals has profound implications for contemporary society. Broadly, it suggests that conquest is no longer a viable solution to the problems that beset modern society. These implications will be discussed in further detail in Chapter Four, but before they can be parsed fully, consideration must be given to the other structural

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components of *The Road*.

Dramatistic elements, one such component, are most useful when discussed in relation to one another. Thus, in order to explore fully the surface and deep structures of *The Road,* it is necessary to identify its dramatistic term of secondary importance. While scene clearly dominants this text, the secondary term is less clear because the father's role in the narrative is ambiguous. On one hand, he may be considered an agent due to his centrality in the film. In this light, the film creates mythic dissonance due to the father's inability to perform his task as hero/agent. On the other hand, the father may be considered a form of agency because he subordinates his existence to the survival of his son. From this perspective, the dissonance created by the father's failures is resolved and purpose ascends to the dramatistic fore. In the following section I discuss these dramatistic trajectories in terms of their implications for the American mythos.

<center>The Hero as Agent</center>

In its broadest sense, an agent may be described as the character performing an action or set of actions in a given discourse.[40] The father identifies himself as an agent early in the film, claiming, "All I know . . . [the] child is my ward." By declaring himself the guardian and protector of the child, the father assumes the mantle of the agent; he will decide what the pair should do and when they should do it. His role of agent is further solidified in a scene in which the pair has a run-in with a gang of cannibals. While hiding in the woods, the father and son observe a cannibal walking towards them. The cannibal relieves himself by a tree and is then confronted by the father. After a few tense moments, the cannibal tells the father, "You don't need to be such a hardass." He then

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offers the father and son some food. Suspicious, the father asks him what he and his companions are eating. "We eat whatever we can find," the cannibal replies ominously. He then grabs the boy and threatens to kill him if the father does not put down his weapon. The father shoots the cannibal in the head and he and his son narrowly escape the frightening situation. Here, the father's suspicion saved the pair. As it turns out, he indeed needed to be "a hardass" in order to ensure their survival.

This exchange raises a poignant question: if the father's acts are intended to ensure the survival of his son, then is the father's role as agent subordinated to the purpose of survival? If survival was portrayed as an innate or objective desire for all humankind, then this would indeed be the case. But, it is the father who decides upon the purpose of survival. In a flashback, the father addresses the concerns of his wife and defines their purpose. "They are going to rape me and your son, and kill you," predicts his wife regards to the growing threat of cannibalism. "We will survive this," the father says in an attempt to assuage her fears. "I don't want to just survive," she replies. In a later scene, she wanders off into the wilderness, presumably to die. Here, we see that survival is not inherently valued, but merely the purpose decided upon by the father. In another scene, his son expresses his disagreement with the purpose. "I wish I was with my mom," he claimed. "You mean you wish you were dead?" the father clarifies. "Yeah," responds the son. "You mustn't say that," the father reproaches. Here, for the second time, the agent imposes the purpose of survival on a character. This purpose, then, depends on the agent for its definition and realization.

A secondary goal is implicitly revealed through the relationship between the father and his firearm, his primary means of agency. Several times throughout the film,

the father alludes to the fact that he would rather take his son's and his own life rather than become the victim of cannibalism. In the most shocking scene of the film, the father and son enter what they think is an abandoned house in search of food. They are elated to find a padlocked cellar which they believe to contain much needed foodstuffs. The cellar contains a supply of food, but to their horror, that supply consists of human beings. At that moment, the inhabitants of the house return, causing the father and son to run to the upstairs bathroom where they await their inevitable discovery. As one of the cannibals ascends the stairs, the father points his firearm at the son and says, "I'm sorry." "Will I see you again?" asks his boy. The father never has time to answer because a commotion downstairs affords them enough time to narrowly escape. Here, the father expresses a secondary purpose: avoiding cannibalism. While this certainly seems like a reasonable goal, it also has significant symbolic meaning. The father's willingness to kill his own son in order to save him from a presumably worse fate demonstrates that purpose of survival is his own invention. He decides when to invoke it and when to terminate it. The boy is simply a passive observer. The father's ability to decide the pair's primary and secondary purposes suggests that he is the primary agent: he is responsible for acting throughout the narrative.

The father's role as agent is further illuminated when he is viewed mythically as the ego-driven hero. The ego-driven hero seeks to conquer or tame nature for those who are too weak to do so themselves. But, as the father's failure in *The Road* makes apparent, the post-apocalyptic scene is no place for him. Unlike the western or space frontiers, there is no resolution to the danger. The best he can hope for is to temporarily stave off utter consumption by the scene. The post-apocalypse is unsustainable for the

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ego-driven hero because it forces him to act in ways that are decidedly anti-heroic. For example, in a particularly gruesome scene, the pair witnesses a mother and daughter fleeing from a ravenous band of cannibals. The mother and daughter are quickly overrun, brutally beaten, and presumably raped and then eaten. According to Rushing, helping those who cannot help themselves is the primary charge of the hero.[41] The father cannot help them, however, because he knows all too well that to help them would be to ensure his and his son's deaths. There is no sense of the "untouchable" hero who surmounts incredible odds in order to save the day. Rather, there is only the crippling and depressing determinism of a world that, along with everything on it, is dying. The father's failure to act in defense of the mother and daughter signifies his failure to cope with the challenges of the post-apocalyptic scene.

According to Rushing, the shifting of frontiers does not occur suddenly. Rather, "the transition progresses gradually, as elements of the old scene are initially grafted onto the new mythic imagination."[42] Thus, early iterations of the post-apocalyptic frontier will be cinematic hybrids which may be most easily understood as a combination of "old values and new context."[43] *The Road* represents a transitional phase of the American frontier myth because it places the ego-driven hero of the previous frontiers into the new context of the post-apocalypse. When the western hero was placed in the context of space, Rushing argued that a disjunction occurred as a result of the background dramatistic elements moving out of alignment.[44] She claimed that this resulted in comic and grotesque effects that were only later resolved in more developed iterations of the space frontier. Similarly, the father's inability to perform his role as hero in *The Road* creates yet another disjunction in the background elements. This disjunction may be

resolved through an alternative interpretation of the ego-driven hero as a form agency

rather than agent. This alternative dramatistic trajectory is discussed in the following

paragraphs.

The Hero as Agency

While reflecting on the events which led to his shooting of the cannibal, the father

tries to soothe his son, telling him, "It's ok. I'll kill anyone who touches you, cuz (sic)

that's my job." Here, the father identifies himself as an instrument; his value is

inextricably linked to his capacity to carry out a specific task. Thus, from the point of

view of the son, the father is simply a means for his survival. The father, then, may be

considered a form of agency. From this perspective, many of the father's actions (or lack

of actions) are reconciled with the dissonance created by his failure to enact properly the

role of the ego-driven hero. He could not rescue the damsels in distress because that was

not his job. Thus, the post-apocalyptic scene turns the all powerful hero/ agent into a tool,

a means for completing a specific task.

The father-as-agency's demotion to the dramatistic background realigns the other

elements. To understand this alignment, however, the role of the son in the myth must be

accounted for. If myths simultaneously construct and reflect our identities, as numerous

scholars contend, then they must symbolically express our collective consciousness– as it

is or as it should be—within the myth itself. In *The Road*, the boy acts as a symbolic

referent for humanity. This is evidenced by his concern for the maintenance of morality

despite its apparent collapse. "We would never eat anybody would we ?" he asks after a

particularly graphic encounter with cannibals. "No," his father responds. "Cuz we're the

good guys . . . . And we carry the fire?" responds the child. The son's concern for

remaining the "good-guys" may be interpreted as plea for humanity's collective soul, a

message that seems hauntingly relevant to modern life. In a world where morality and

justice have all but disappeared, we must strive to find a moral center that prevents the

exploitation or oppression of others. The child was born after the apocalypse and had no

recollection of the world that preceded it; thus, he is pure. But this purity also comes with

a price. Because he does not know the ways of the world, he relies on his father, to ensure

his survival. This is problematic for two reasons. First, it implies that the son cannot rely

on himself for survival, which is dangerous because, as post-modern critics are quick to

point out, humanity's obsession with discovering objective truth often enables the

oppression of the weak by the powerful.[45] Second, the father is ill-equipped to cope with

the post-apocalypse. This is tantamount to a collapse in the meta-narrative contemporary

culture. The mythic hero is responsible for shepherding humanity towards its *telos* of

unity. His failure to do so in *The Road* suggests that, unless a more suitable hero is found,

our progress toward this end may stall out or even revert. The implications of the son's

reliance on his father-as-agency are also twofold. First, it highlights survival as the

primary function of the son. It is not the son's acts or agencies that require him to stay

alive. In fact, the son does not "do" anything throughout the entire film. Rather, he

simply is. To Eli, he is "The last angel," to his father, he is "God." In either case it is only

in his being that he has purpose. Second, the son's reliance on his father, as well as his

father's failure to ensure his safety, highlights a need for a new hero, one who is better

equipped to negotiate the challenges of the post-apocalyptic frontier.

While the ego-driven hero's methods may prove successful in addressing the problems presented by previous mythic frontiers, he cannot survive and ultimately fails in the post-apocalypse. This failure is made complete in the final scenes of the film. After narrowly escaping a gruesome fate several times, the pair finally makes it to the coast. Upon their arrival, the father tries to hide his disappointment as he discovers that the coast is just as desolate and lifeless as the inland. "I'm sorry it's not blue," he says, more to himself than his son. Reaching the coast was always the father's ultimate plan for survival. "Everything depends on reaching the coast." The failure of reaching the coast to solve the problems presented by the post-apocalypse marked the beginning of the father's fall. At this point, the transition form scene-agent in the space frontier to scene-purpose in the post-apocalyptic frontier is nearing completion. The father-as-agent is dying. He can no longer fight the fatalism that he himself invoked when describing the scene, and after he expires, all that remains is a helpless child who the viewer is made to believe must survive.

The ascension of purpose to the dramatistic fore is made clear in the final moments of the film. For the second half of the film, the father's health steadily deteriorates. He is constantly coughing, shivering, and showing symptoms of consumption (as evidenced by his coughing up of blood). Later, he suffers a wound in his leg during a conflict with two individuals near the coast. As he lies dying on the beach, he says to his son in a moment of regret, "I can't do it anymore. It's been a long time coming." "No," the son cries feebly, "Take me with you." To this, the father replied, "I thought I could but I can't." He is moments from death now. Just before he expires, he issues one final piece of advice: "You've got to keep going. You never know what might

be down the road." "Don't leave me," the boy desperately cries. "I'm sorry my boy. You have my whole heart." And with that the father dies, leaving his son alone to face the dangers of the post-apocalypse. Though lugubrious, the father's death is perhaps inevitable because he is only one part of the complete archetype of the hero. *The Road* represents the departure and initiation stages of Campbell's monomyth. In it, the father faces several struggles and learns what he believes to be the lessons he needs to ensure the survival of his son. But, the father could not return to bestow the fruit of his labor on his son. Instead, he died, unable to fulfill his destiny. In order for the monomyth to be complete, the hero must find a new way of solving problems, a way that allows him to partake in the reprieve for which fought so hard.

The son is confronted by a strange man shortly after the death of his father. The encounter begins as hostilely as the others that occurred throughout the film. The son seems to have assumed the mantle of his father's suspicion, pointing his father's firearm at the man. "Look kid, you can either trust me or shoot me." Eventually, the child lowers the weapon and the man invites him to come and live with him and his wife. "How do I know you're one of the good guys?" the child asks him. "You don't, you just have to take a shot," the man replies. "Look, even if you don't decide to come with me. You need to stay off of the road." Here, the child is presented with a choice. He can either heed the advice of his father, to travel down the road in search of what might be, or to trust the stranger and assimilate into his family. The son wisely chooses to follow the stranger. His choice to disregard his father's advice signifies the ultimate death of the hero, not only in physical, but also in mythic terms. The child is soon introduced to the stranger's wife, their two kids and their dog. The mother welcomes him to the family: "I'm so glad to see

you. We were following you. We were so worried about you but now we don't have to."

One might wonder why the family did not approach the father and son sooner, but the answer to this question is evident throughout the entire narrative. The mistrusting, cynical nature of the father would not let them get close. Unlike the son, who has no recollection of the world before, the father's perceptions are greatly influenced by his experiences before the apocalypse. He is unable to trust in the goodness of humanity. The son expresses his frustration with his father's cynicism in a scene in which the father forces the pair to flee the safety and comfort of a well-stocked bomb shelter,. "You always think something bad is gonna (sic) happen, but we found this place didn't we?" Thus, the family had to wait until the father— the ego-driven hero died— so that they could assimilate the child into their family.

The demise of the hero is not unique to the post-apocalyptic frontier. In the second half of the twentieth century, widespread and systematic atrocities, corruption in politics, and clashes between the old ideals of previous eras and the new realities of oppression and tyranny had many individuals questioning the objective meanings assumed to exist behind material reality and the use of reason to access such meaning.[46] The end result of this questioning is what Fedric Jameson calls "the 'death' of the subject, . . . the end of the bourgeois ego, [and] . . . in this sense of the unique and the personal."[47] In this regard, the death of the father in *The Road* is simply a mythic representation of the subjective death present in the broader contemporary critical trends. In this case, the father's failure represents the inability of the ego-driven hero to cope with the challenges of the post-apocalypse. The hero's primary means for problem-solving is conquest, the heroic knight slaying the dragon or the fearless gunslinger driving the evil gang out of

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town. This method is ineffective in the post-apocalypse, however, because the enemy is the scene itself. It is not just a small band of individuals that can be overcome through force of arms, it is everything—the entire planet. Even when presented with a sustainable solution in the form of a well-stocked bomb shelter, the father's mode of survival does not allow him to stay. He ends up running away not from a pack of ravenous cannibals, but from the very solution to the challenges that beset him and his son. The scene of the post-apocalypse is not something that can be conquered—it is not even something from which one can flee. There is no escape. Anyone striving to survive this frontier must find a way to live along side of the challenges it presents. Thus, a new type of hero is needed, one who can conquer the scene not by conquering it, but by transcending it.

Conclusion

According to Rushing, "a culture's definition of itself which dictates its moral vision and guides its choices is constructed from not one, but many of its popular productions."[48] Thus, the ability to discern the mythic significance of any one event depends on prior familiarity with many such events.[49] In this light, *The Road* must be placed in a context that extends beyond the discrete text itself and into the realm of basic human concerns. Chapter One outlined a critical method which held humanity to be evolving teleologically towards awareness of the interconnectedness among all things, and the analysis of myth to be the primary means for tracking its progress (or lack of progress) toward that end.[50] *The Road* demonstrates how the ego-driven hero is no longer capable of solving the problems of contemporary society. This is of primary importance to contemporary culture because it highlights a mythic dissonance that must be resolved

before it can continue its journey toward interconnectedness and harmony. This analysis does not, of course, suggest a wholesale shift – either in popular culture consumption habits or the nature of film and myth – by itself. In combination with additional data such as the litany of other films, television shows and cultural movements discussed in Chapter One, as well as the broader critical trends in American culture, however, it may be viewed productively as a representative example of a larger cultural shift, as is argued in Chapter Four.

Previous analysis of frontier myths demonstrated that a shift in scene from the west to space was accompanied by a concomitant shift in the deep and surface structures of those narratives. For example, the dominant ratio in the western frontier myth was scene-agency, while the dominant ratio in space was scene-agent. Similarly, the shift in scene from space to the post-apocalypse represents yet another structural shift in myth. *The Road* represents a transitional phase in the American frontier myth in which the old values of the space frontier blend with the "surface trappings" of the new post-apocalyptic frontier.[51] Specifically, this shift in frontiers illuminates a shift in dramatistic representations from scene-agent to scene-purpose. Because this film is a hybrid of new and old frontiers, the film simultaneously expresses both scene-agent and scene-purpose ratios. These competing dramatistic trajectories frame the primary tension of the film and highlight the challenges germane to the post-apocalyptic frontier. Mythically, the post-apocalyptic frontier highlights the need for a new type of hero to guide humanity on the next leg of its journey towards its *telos* of unity. Chapter Three introduces this new hero and discusses strategies for coping with the post-apocalyptic frontier.

Notes

[1] Janice Hocker Rushing, "Mythic Evolution of 'The New Frontier' in Mass Mediated Rhetoric," *Critical Studies in Mass Communication 3,* no. 3 (1986): 267.

[2] Rushing, "Mythic Evolution," 266.

[3] Rushing, "Mythic Evolution," 267.

[4] Janice Hocker Rushing and Thomas S. Frentz, *Projecting the Shadow: The Cyborg Hero in American Film* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1995),16.

[5] Andre Delamorte, "The Road Blue-Ray Review," 29 May 2010. Retrieved from http://collider.com/the-road-blu-ray-review/29513/ on 26 December 2010.

[6] Roger Ebert, "The Road," 24 November 2009. Retrieved from http://rogerebert.suntimes.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20091124/REVIEWS/911249990 on 21 December 2010.

[7] Peter Travers, "The Road," *The Rolling Stone* (25 November 2010). Retrieved from http://www.rollingstone.com/movies/reviews/the-road-20091125 on 26 December 2010.

[8] Tony Macklin, "The Road," Accessed from http://tonymacklin.net/content.php?cID=272on 29 January 2011.

[9] Roger Ebert, "The Road," 24 November 2009. Retrieved from http://rogerebert.suntimes.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20091124/REVIEWS/911249990 on 21 December 2010.

[10] A.O. Scott, "Father and Son Bond in Gloomy Aftermath of Disaster," *The New York Times* (25 November 2009). Retrieved from: http://movies.nytimes.com/2009/11/25/movies/25road.html on 23 December 2010.

[11] Rushing, "Mythic Evolution," 271.

[12] Rushing, "Mythic Evolution," 269.

[13] Rushing, "Mythic Evolution," 268.

[14] Bernard L. Brock, "Rhetorical Criticism: A Burkeian Approach Revisited," *Methods of Rhetorical Criticism: A Twentieth Century Perspective*, edited by Bernard L. Brock, Robert L. Scott, and James W. Chesbro (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1980),188.

[15] Rushing, "Mythic evolution," 270.

[16] Rushing, "Mythic evolution," 270.

[17] Joe Penhall, *The Road,* DVD, Directed by John Hillcoat, (Dimension Films: 5 November 2009). Quotations from the film based on the author's transcription.

[18] Charles Darwin in Kenneth Burke, *A Grammar of Motives,* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall: 1945), 131.

[19] Rushing and Frentz, *Projecting the Shadow*, 31.

[20] Rushing, "Evolution of the 'New Frontier'," 5-10.

[21] Rushing, "Evolution of the 'New Frontier'," 5-10.

[22] Janice Hocker Rushing, "Evolution of 'The New Frontier' in *Alien* and *Aliens*: Patriarchal Co-optation of the Feminine Archetype," *The Quarterly Journal of Speech 75* no. 1 (1989).

[23] Rushing, "Mythic Evolution," 271.

[24] Carl Gustav Jung, *Man and His Symbols* (New York City, NY: Dell Publishing, 1964), 101.

[25] Rushing, "Mythic Evolution," 281.

[26] Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1949), 23.

[27] Campbell, *Hero with a Thousand Faces,* 581.

[28] Campbell, *Hero with a Thousand Faces,* 97.

[29] Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces,* 23-25.

[30] Rushing, "Mythic Evolution," 271.

[31] Rushing, "Mythic Evolution," 281.

[32] Janice Hocker Rushing, "Evolution of 'The New Frontier' in *Alien* and *Aliens*: Patriarchal Co-optation of the Feminine Archetype," *The Quarterly Journal of Speech 75* no. 1 (1989): 3.

[33] Rushing, "Evolution of the 'New Frontier'," 3.

[34] Rushing, "Evolution of the 'New Frontier'," 4.

[35] Rushing, "Evolution of the 'New Frontier'," 4.

[36] Rushing, "Evolution of the 'New Frontier'," 3.

[37] Annette Kolodny, *The Lay of the Land* (North Carolina: The University of North Carolina Press, 1975): 1-138.

[38] Willaim Byrd in Kolodny, *The Lay of the Land*, 9.

[39] Rushing, "Evolution of the New Frontier," 5-10.

[40] Kenneth Burke, *A Grammar of Motives,* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall: 1945): 171-172.

[41] Rushing, "Mythic Evolution," 272.

[42] Rushing, "Mythic Evolution," 266.

[43] Rushing, "Mythic Evolution," 271.

[44] Rushing, "Mythic Evolution," 271.

[45] While the postmodern turn is a broad and nebulous movement within critical studies, several authors have discussed this concept. To learn more about the postmodern critique of objective truth, please view the following works: *Madness and Civilization* by Michel Foucault, *Capitalisme et Schizophrénie* by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, and *Gender Trouble* by Judith Butler.

[46] Louis E. Loeb, *From Descartes to Hume: Continental Metaphysics and the Development of Modern Philosophy* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1981): 1-382.

[47] Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1991), 10.

[48] Rushing, "Mythic Evolution," 268.

[49] Rushing, "Mythic Evolution," 268.

[50] Frentz in Rushing, "Mythic Evolution," 269.

[51] Rushing, "Mythic Evolution," 267.

CHAPTER THREE

THE REBIRTH OF THE HERO

Chapter Two's analysis of *The Road* illuminated a transitional phase in the American frontier myth in which the surface trappings of previous frontiers were grafted on to the new scene of the post-apocalypse. As Janice Hocker Rushing noted in "Mythic Evolution of 'The New Frontier' in Mass Mediated Rhetoric," each new scene of the American mythos is accompanied by a concomitant change in the surface structures of the myth.[1] In the west, the dominant dramatistic ratio was scene-agency. When the scene of the American mythos shifted to space, the dominant ratio became scene-agent. The transition to the post-apocalyptic frontier reveals yet another shift in surface structures, this time to scene-purpose. Deep structures also shift in response to changes in the surface structures of myths. In previous frontiers, the tension between archetypes was enacted through the masculine conquest of feminine nature. The post-apocalyptic frontier, however, depicts this tension as the feminine consumption of the masculine hero. Because they constitute our cultural identities, changes in the popular depictions of myths have important implications for understanding contemporary culture.[2]

In *The Road*, the transition to the post-apocalyptic scene is only partially realized. The surface structures of the film reflect a new orientation to the frontier. Instead of conquering nature and its denizens, as was the goal in previous frontiers, the protagonists in this film struggle merely to survive the inhospitable scene in which they dwell. The deep structures of the film, however, have not realigned with the new scene of the post-apocalypse as masculine and feminine archetypal representations remain similar to those of previous frontiers. Namely, *The Road* still depicts a masculine, ego-driven hero

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struggling to exert his will over the feminine and unconscious forces of nature. According to Rushing, this disjunction creates grotesque effects that are only later resolved in more developed versions of the myth.[3] In *The Road*, these grotesque effects took the form of the father's failure to ensure the safety of his son. His acts, agencies, and even his purpose have failed him. Instead of riding off into the sunset after a job well done, the ego-driven hero dies ignominiously on the beach. Thus, a new hero is needed, one who can better meet the challenges of the post-apocalyptic frontier.

In Chapter Three, an analysis of Danny Boyle's 2003 production of *28 Days Later* introduces and discusses this new hero. The analysis of Chapter Three unfolds much in the same way as Chapter Two insofar as theoretical constructs are concerned. In the following paragraphs, the surface and deep structures of the film are discussed in order to illuminate the salient dimensions of the post-apocalyptic frontier and to provide insights into how best to meet the challenges it presents. *The Road* represented the death of the ego-driven hero, due largely to his individualistic approach to problem solving. The father refused to trust or rely on anybody, and in so doing, kept his son away from the very solution he so ardently sought.

The hero introduced in *28 Days Later* is not an individual, though, but a community of individuals working together. Unlike the ego-driven hero, whose goal was conquest, the collective hero portrayed in *28 Days Later* defeats the post-apocalyptic frontier by transcending it. The formation of a community transforms the purpose of the post-apocalyptic frontier from mere survival, as we have seen in *The Road,* to enjoying life through shared connection. In the sections that follow, the collective hero is

introduced and expanded upon through a comparative analysis of *28 Days Later* and Chapter Two's analysis of *The Road*. But first, a brief orientation to the film is in order.

28 Days Later portrays Jim, a bicycle courier who awakens from a coma in a hospital twenty eight days after the spread of an insidious infection. Soon after he wakes, Jim is chased by ravenous humanoid creatures who clearly intend harm. Selena, a strong, albeit pessimistic, survivalist then rescues him. Puzzled at what to do next, Jim and Selena befriend Frank and Hannah, a father and daughter, forming a tenuous alliance for the sake of survival. The four then decide to travel from London to a Manchester in order to investigate the possibility of a cure to the infection. The group experiences many dangers during their journey, but they also begin to coalesce as a family unit. Upon their arrival in Manchester, they are dismayed to find the city in ruins. To make matters worse, Frank becomes infected and begins to turn on the others, but is shot by a group of camouflaged soldiers before he can do any harm. The soldiers escort the three remaining survivors to a compound which contains "the answer to infection." Jim learns that, although seemingly benevolent, their new caretakers plan to imprison and rape Hannah and Selena. After a dangerous confrontation and daring escape, the three flee to an isolated home in the mountains where they are eventually rescued.

28 Days Later opened to significant critical acclaim. Roger Ebert wrote, "[*28 Days Later*] is a tough, smart, ingenious movie that leads its characters into situations where everything depends on their (and our) understanding of human nature."[4] Further, William Arnold, a film critic for the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, wrote, "[Director Danny Boyle] gives us some truly harrowing sequences and a succession of images that stick in the mind like a bad dream."[5] Notwithstanding the film's positive critical reviews, it may

be tempting for some to write off this film as pure sensationalism and spectacle. Indeed, the many fast-paced, violent, and startling scenes lend credence to the perception that the film is more concerned with scaring the audience than with making a serious commentary on the human condition. Critics are quick to refute such claims, however, writing that, "*28 Days Later* aims to do more than make the audience jump in its seats."[6] According to Ebert, the film "begins as a great science fiction film and continues as an intriguing study of human nature." Blake French expressed a similar opinion in his review of the film. He wrote, "*28 Days Later* is also much more than a conventional zombie movie. Boyle takes full advantage of the genre, but still calls his own shots; it's not just about zombies, but also about survival of the fittest and the endurance of hope."[7] These and similar reviews suggest that while the film is indeed thrilling, it also addresses the basic concerns that pervade human existence. In this light, *28 Days Later* should not be considered another example of mindless American consumerism, but rather, a meaningful rhetorical experience.

<div align="center">Surface Structures</div>

As with the analysis of *The Road* in Chapter Two, examination of *28 Days Later* begins by exploring the film's scenic dimensions. This is because, as Rushing noted, "The featured term of the American frontier myth has always been scene."[8] The scene of this film is ostensibly quite similar to that of *The Road*. The characters of *28 Days Later*, though, adapt and employ an entirely different strategy for overcoming the post-apocalypse. This becomes most clearly visible by tracking the development of two of the film's main protagonists, Selena and Jim. The new hero revealed through an analysis of

their transformations throughout the film has important implications for American culture. These are briefly discussed later in this chapter and in more detail in Chapter Four.

Like *The Road*, the scene of *28 Days Later* is comprised of both visual images and the spoken words of the characters. It is established early in the film when Jim, a bicycle courier, wakes from a coma in a hospital. Startled by his sudden awakening, Jim calls out for help, but no one responds. He yells in vain a few more times and then decides to leave his room in search of help. Immediately, he realizes that something is wrong; the hospital is deserted and shows clear signs of a struggle. He leaves the hospital on foot and continues down the deserted streets of London in search of anyone who might be able to explain to him what happened. He is bewildered by what he sees; cars lie deserted in the middle of the road, the sidewalks are vacant, and the public bulletin boards are inundated with reports of missing persons. At this point, the viewer is already aware that the city of London is no more. While the ostensible signs of civilization are still visible, that which made the city civilized has vanished. From the opening sequence of the film, viewers are aware that an infection has decimated the world and its inhabitants. There are no more laws, rules, or social conventions. All that remains is a wild frontier: unpredictable, inhospitable, and utterly alien.

This collapse of society is highlighted when Jim comes across a large quantity of money lying on the ground. He greedily collects the money, but the viewer knows that this is futile; without a culture to give value to the currency, it is not even worth the paper on which it is printed. This is further expressed in a conversation between Jim and Mark. "My family and I went to this train station, hoping to buy our way onto a train. We had

all this cash, but cash was completely useless."[9] Wealth is a central component of society,

functioning as means of power for those who possess it.[10] But, as Charles Perrow, a

sociologist at the University of Pittsburgh, noted, currency is only meaningful insofar as

individuals and societies agree that it has value.[11] Gold, for example, is only accepted in

exchange for goods and services because a large number of individuals agree that it has

value. In *28 Days Later*, the widespread carnage has decimated society, leaving behind

no traces of the social contract necessary to support economic institutions. The absence of

this basic system of meaning symbolizes the decay of the modern way of life.

Jim soon learns this for himself, when he is chased from a church by a large group

of ravenous looking humans. He is rescued by two masked individuals, Selena and Mark,

who escort him to their hideout and explain what is happening. "It started out as rioting,

and, right away, you could tell that this was different. It wasn't on TV, it was on the

streets, it was coming through the windows. It was an infection, something in the blood.

There were reports of infection in New York and Paris. Then there weren't any reports

after that." In this passage, Selena explains the situation to Jim. The world as they know

it has ended. All that remains is a foreign land occupied by savage enemies. Reeling, Jim

attempts to find a solution to his circumstances. "What about the government?" he asks.

"There is no more government," reply his rescuers in unison. "Of course there's a

government," counters Jim. To the viewer, Jim's reply appears more as naïve denial than

a rational claim. Only gradually does Jim come to accept the current state of affairs: his

parents are dead, his friends are dead, society is dead; everybody and everything is dead.

Here, the salient characteristics of the scene are illuminated. The infection has decimated

the world. There are few survivors and they face the constant threat of attack by the daunting and tireless infected.

Thus, the scene of *28 Days Later* is remarkably similar the scene of *The Road*; both are characterized by decimation and destitution in the wake of a global catastrophe. This is expected, given that both films represent the post-apocalyptic frontier. The two films differ, however, on how their characters adapt (or fail to adapt) the post-apocalypse. *The Road* is a preliminary version of the frontier myth. Hence, its characters have only the skills and agencies of the previous frontier heroes at their disposal. This leads to the father's demise, as those skills and agencies are inadequate to meet the challenges of the post-apocalypse. *28 Days Later* represents a more developed vision of the myth. Its characters employ new tactics with which to combat the problems inherent to the scene.

To fully parse these tactics, consideration must be given to the deep structures of the film, as well as its surface structures. Some readers might wonder why *28 Days Later*, produced in 2003, represents a more advanced form of the frontier myth than does *The Road*, produced in 2009. This is because myths are most constructively conceived of in teleological time rather than linear time. In "The Rhetoric of Rocky: Part Two," for example, Janice Hocker Rushing and Thomas S. Frentz asserted that the advancement of a text does not depend on when it was constructed in linear time, but rather, by how close or far away it portrays humanity from its ultimate purpose of the awareness of the interconnectedness among all things.[12] Mythically, *28 Days Later* picks up where *The Road* leaves off, providing a solution to the problem presented in earlier versions of the myth. Thus, *28 Days Later* represents a more advanced iteration of the post-apocalyptic frontier.

As discussed in Chapter One, Joseph Campbell's concept of the monomyth effectively demonstrates the salient dimensions of this version of the frontier. According to Campbell, all heroic myths involve three stages: initiation, departure, and return.[13] Together, these three stages outline the overall progression of the complete hero archetype. Examination of *The Road* in Chapter Two illuminated the first two stages of this journey. Before the apocalypse, the father was just an ordinary man with ordinary concerns, but the calamity that decimated the world inducted him into a heroic role. Campbell designates such action "the call to adventure –[signifying] that destiny has summoned the hero and transferred his spiritual center of gravity from within the pale of his society to a zone unknown."[14] After being thus inducted, the father "moves in a dream landscape of curiously fluid, ambiguous forms, where he must survive a succession of trials."[15] In this regard, the ego-driven hero of *The Road* accurately reflects the first two stages of Campbell's monomyth. The expression of the archetype is incomplete, however, as the father did not survive his ordeal. The hero's final task is to return from the journey to "bestow boons upon his fellow man (sic)."[16] The father's failure was due to his inability to cope with the post-apocalyptic scene. Analysis of the archetypal dimensions of *28 Days Later* demonstrates the completion of the hero archetype, and thus alleviation of the tension caused by its previous failures.

<center>The Collective Hero</center>

If the ego-driven hero of the previous frontiers cannot cope with the new scene of the post-apocalypse, then a new hero who can better meet the challenges of the scene is needed. In order to reveal this hero, as well as comment on the implications of its

emergence, consideration for the deep structures of myth must be made. As mentioned in Chapter Two, the conflict between masculine and feminine archetypes frames the primary tension of frontier myths.[17] In every scene of the American mythos, masculine agents have been portrayed conquering the feminine scene or its denizens. In previous frontiers, these denizens took the form of giant squids or space aliens. In the post-apocalyptic frontier, they take on a particularly sinister caste in the form of infected individuals who have lost all powers of rationality and crave human flesh. Because the infected lack the agency of decision making or communication, they are most productively conceived of as part of the scene, the material conditions of the post-apocalypse.

Recall the connection between nature and femininity discussed in Chapter Two. Over the past five centuries, nature in America has been conceived of as a virgin waiting to be explored and later as a nurturing mother providing for her "children."[18] Analysis of *The Road* in Chapter Two revealed a deviation from this tradition in which the nurturing mother turned against her children. This shift is communicated through the archetype of the devouring mother, which is characterized by wrath and consumption. The trend continues in *28 Days Later* as the inhospitable landscape and wild enemies seek to consume all who remain alive. Thus, the decaying streets of London and Manchester, as well as the dangerous infected, may be viewed as portrayals of the devouring mother, a vengeful and perverted form of the archetypal feminine.

As with all frontier myths, *28 Days Later* also contains masculine archetypal portrayals. Selena represents the primary masculine archetype in the film, a theme which is discussed in detail in the next section. Analysis of *The Road* reveals that the ego-driven

hero is ill-suited to deal with the challenges of the post-apocalyptic scene. The same is true for Selena. Like the father in *The Road*, she is unable to exert her will over the feminine forces of nature. But unlike the father, whose purpose remained constant throughout the film, Selena's focus changes as the film progresses. This shift provides insights into the new hero called for in the conclusion of Chapter Two, and is critical to unlocking the key to coping with the post-apocalyptic frontier. In the following section, Selena's shift in mythic purpose is discussed in detail.

<div align="center">Selena's Journey</div>

Selena is the primary representation of the masculine archetype in the film. From the very beginning, she embodies all of the characteristics of the classic ego-driven hero. She is rugged, crass, and completely cynical. This is exemplified in an exchange with Jim after they meet Frank and Hannah. "I think they need us more than we need them. I think they're desperate." This cold evaluation of the loving father and daughter who took them in causes Jim some discomfort. "I think they're good people," he counters. "You should be more concerned with whether or not they are gonna (sic) slow you down. [Because if anyone slowed me down,] I'd leave them behind." Here Selena's personal values are clearly outlined. She cares about one thing: her own survival. Anything that gets in the way of that must be destroyed or left behind. At this point in the film, Selena exhibits the same individualistic orientation to life that led to the demise of the father in *The Road*. Like the father, Selena's perspective was presumably the product of the scene. There is no evidence to suggest, for instance, that she comported herself in this manner before the spread of the infection. Thus, its spread shifts her "spiritual center of gravity [from] within the pale of [her] society to a zone unknown."[19] In this regard, Selena undergoes

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her initiation into the role of the hero.

Selena's protection of Jim further establishes her as the ego-driven hero in the early parts of the film. Selena is there to protect Jim during his initial encounter with the infected. Further, she made the decisions for the group about where they should go, how they should get there, what they should do when they got there, and how long they should stay. Her role as Jim's protector is solidified in a scene in which Jim, Mark, and Selena travel to Jim's parents' house. It takes the group all day to arrive at the house on foot, and though her two companions wish to leave at night, Selena demands that they stay because it is safer. While resting, the group comes under attack from a few infected who were attracted by a light produced by Jim. During this attack, Jim sits bewildered on the floor as Selena and Mark fight off the infected. As the fighting ends, Selena takes charge and demands to know if either of her companions are bitten or otherwise contaminated. Jim is fine, but Mark is not. Selena does not even wait for Mark's reply. She simply walks over to him and hacks him to pieces with her machete. This scene is particularly jarring because Mark was a close companion of Selena. It is one thing to kill a mindless automaton that is trying to do you harm, but to kill savagely your close friend in the blink of an eye requires an orientation to life that allows for little other than concern for self. Selena elaborates on her position when she later explains her actions to Jim. "If someone gets infected, you got ten to twenty seconds to kill them. It might be your brother or sister or oldest friend. It makes no difference. And, just so you know where you stand, if it happens to you, I'll kill you in a heartbeat." Selena's willingness to kill her traveling companions illustrates how the ego-driven hero subordinates the bonds of friendship and family to the material conditions of the scene. This subordination is responsible for what

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Rushing and Frentz call the "postmodern condition," discussed in detail in the next chapter.

It is also important to note that, like the father in *The Road*, Selena defines her and her companions' purpose as survival. She explicitly states this purpose in a conversation with Jim. "Do you have a plan? . . . Will we find a cure? . . . Plans are pointless. Staying alive is as good as it gets." Analysis of *The Road* in Chapter Two demonstrated that the purpose of survival is necessitated by the post-apocalyptic scene, and that the ego-driven hero is woefully inadequate to ensure this purpose. If, like the father, Selena remained constant throughout the film, it is likely that she and her companions would be equally incapable of owning up to the task. But, Selena does change in significant ways throughout the film. These changes do not shift the purpose of the post-apocalyptic scene from survival to some completely different goal, but they do reveal a different strategy for achieving that purpose.

Selena's role as the ego-driven hero begins to fade when she and Jim meet Frank and Hannah about a third of the way through the film. The pair was initially attracted to an apartment that was lit by Christmas lights, a clear sign of non-infected life. They travel to the apartment and are greeted by Frank and Hannah. Initially, Selena was skeptical of her new companions. "[If you keep worrying about other people,] you're gonna wind up getting yourself killed." Here, Selena reminds the viewer that she is an individualist, who cares about nothing more than staying alive for another day. The next morning, the four individuals have a conversation about how to proceed. Their radio picks up a signal from Manchester proclaiming that the military blockade there has "the answer to infection." Frank notes, "It will take us four days to get there." Selena replies, "[us]?" Her

indignation at Frank's suggestion that four travel together is yet another sign of her individualistic perspective. On hearing this, Frank replies, "Maybe you're right. We do need you more than you need us, but I can't travel with just Hannah and I (sic). What if I get hurt? She'd be all alone. I can't risk it." At this point, the four companions are at an impasse. Frank wants all four of them to travel to Manchester together to investigate the cure, but Selena wants nothing to do with Frank, Hannah, or "the answer to infection." To Selena, traveling with Frank and Hannah does not make sense. Why should she reduce her own chances of survival in order to take care of individuals who have nothing to offer her in return? Frank knows this, but has little choice but to plead for her care. The deadlock is broken when Hannah speaks. "It isn't true what dad says, you need us just as much as we need you. We need each other." Though simple, these words are quite prophetic. It is true that Jim and Selena do not need Frank and Hannah for protection or survival. What, then, do they need from the father and daughter? This reveals a crucial clue to unveiling the new hero called for in Chapter Two. It is answered throughout the rest of the film.

What Frank and Hannah have to offer Jim and Selena is familial intimacy. The tone of the film begins to shift from the very moment the four depart the apartment in London. Up to this point, the tone of the film has been grim and at times terrifying. When the group departs London, however, the tone shifts as the characters begin to enjoy each others' company. Even Selena appears to lighten up, as she laughs and jokes with Jim, Hannah, and Frank. Apparently, they are no longer strangers to be viewed as burdens. Rather, they are companions who share more than a common goal and start to coalesce as a family. The group's departure from London also represents Selena's mythic departure

into "a zone unknown."[20] According to Campbell, once initiated, the hero "moves in a dream landscape of curiously fluid, ambiguous forms, where [she] must survive a succession of trials" in order to undergo a necessary transformation.[21] When she first meets Jim, Selena reflects the attitudes and behaviors of the ego-driven hero, but as analysis of *The Road* in Chapter Two demonstrated, these were insufficient to survive the scene. Thus, in order to learn new ways to cope with the post-apocalypse, she departs into an unknown landscape comprised not only of the surrounding physical wilderness, but also the wilderness of her inner own mythic space.

After narrowly escaping an encounter with the infected, the group stops at an abandoned grocery store. They excitedly wander about the store collecting whatever foodstuffs they desire, laughing and joking all the while. When their shopping spree has ended, they travel to a verdant field of green to repose and eat the precious food they have just procured. These scenes begin to shift the film's focus from the decimation of the post-apocalypse to the interpersonal relationships between and among Jim, Selena, Frank, and Hannah. While it is true that the scene has not changed—the infected still pose a tangible and deadly threat to the group— those threats seem much less immediate. Instead, the film focuses on the simple joys the four individuals experience as they strengthen their familial bonds. This is highlighted when Frank draws the group's attention to a stable of wild horses. "Look," remarks Hannah, "They're like a family. Do you think they're infected?" Frank replies, "No. I think they're just fine." This encounter with the horses is the first time that the concept of family is mentioned explicitly in the film and it represents a new strategy for coping with the post-apocalyptic scene. Like the family of horses, the group is "just fine"; they have each other, and together they have

transcended the material conditions of the post-apocalypse. Thus, the new hero called for in Chapter Two is revealed. It is not an individual—recall that the individualism is a primary characteristic of the ego-driven hero— but a collective. This collective hero does not seek to conquer the scene, to somehow exert its will over its surroundings, but to transcend the scene by drawing upon shared communal experience.

The collective hero is further exemplified in a subsequent scene in which Jim and Selena take a walk. "I know what you're thinking," states Selena. "You were thinking that you'll never hear another piece of original music, ever again. You'll never read a book that hasn't already been written or see a film that hasn't already been shot." These comments demonstrate a significant transitional phase for Selena. On their face, they indicate that she is still stuck in her pessimistic, ego-driven state, but when considered in concert with her tone (friendly and intimate) and body language (immediate and inviting), they more closely resemble vestiges of an old thought pattern, rather than indicators of her current one. Her transition continues throughout the conversation. "No, that's what you were thinking," replies Jim. She continues, "I was thinking I was wrong. All the death, all the shit, it doesn't really matter to Frank and Hannah, because . . . well, she's got a dad and he's got his daughter. So I was wrong when I said staying alive is as good as it gets." Jim answers, "Now that's what I was thinking." This exchange is important because it signifies Selena's, and to a lesser extent Jim's, shift from ego-driven individualism to part of a collective. In a moment of reverie she admits that her purpose, or perhaps more accurately, that her understanding of her purpose, was wrong. She begins to understand that survival is the best that the ego-driven hero can hope for, but that it is insufficient in and of itself. In order to thrive in the post-apocalyptic scene,

characters must find a way escape it, not physically, but emotionally. The formation of this family corresponds to the closing sequence of *The Road*, which concluded with the son being adopted into a new family of benevolent caretakers. Although this adoption appears to be auspicious, the film does not illustrate the benefits that this new family can provide the son. The family created in *28 Days Later* elaborates on this motif by providing a closer look at the dynamics of the family unit. In their shared familial experiences with Frank and Hannah, Selena and Jim have identified a better way to live, one that far exceeds survival. Further, they understand that the family with whom they travel, the collective hero, offers this solution.

Selena's adoption into the family unit crystallizes as the film progresses. In a conversation with Jim regarding Frank's death she exclaims, "I don't want her to cope. I want her to be okay." Here Selena reflects her concern about Hannah's well-being. This illustrates a fundamental shift in Selena's attitude. She no longer subscribes to the individualistic goals of the ego-driven hero. Rather, she is concerned not for herself, but for a person who cannot offer her any material benefit. This scene further reflects how the survivors' family unit is greater than the sum of the individuals who comprise it. Frank was integral member of the family for both pragmatic and sentimental reasons. On the one hand, he was a strong leader, capable of physically defending the group from the infected, as he demonstrated earlier in the film. On the other hand, he was a loving and compassionate man with whom the other members of the group bonded emotionally. For the ego-driven hero, Frank's loss would have been measured in terms of his physical absence. For the survivors, the loss is much more profound. Not only have they lost a part of their collective body, they have also lost a part of their collective soul. Without Frank

and surrounded by strangers, the three remaining survivors need each other now more than ever. In this sense, their communal bonds are strengthened.

With Hannah orphaned, Selena steps into the role of her guardian. This is revealed in a scene in which the soldiers attempt to make Selena and Hannah look "more presentable" by forcing them to change into ornate dresses. During the scene, the two attempt to resist their captors, but to no avail. In an attempt to gain a momentary reprieve, Selena rushes to one of her captors and kisses him. She then explains to him that they would be happy to change, but that the soldiers would have to wait outside. The soldiers agree, and temporarily leave the room. At first, Selena's reasons for taking this course of action are unclear. As soon as the soldiers leave the room, however, Selena rushes over to Hannah and instructs her to take a dose of valium so that she "won't care" about what is going to happen to her. The soldiers return, interrupting Selena's time with Hannah, but not before she takes the drug. Here, Selena demonstrates a level of care and concern typically reserved for one's biological parents. When she kissed the soldier, her motives were completely unselfish. She did not care about what happened to her; her only concern was for the well-being of an individual who, at the beginning of the film, she was willing to leave behind.

Selena's new role as Hannah's caretaker is tested in the next scene. The soldiers attempting to dress Hannah and Selena are interrupted by the sound of an alarm. Startled, the soldiers hurry off, leaving only two of their comrades behind to guard Selena and Hannah. Several hours later, the rest of the soldiers have not returned and strange noises are heard throughout the house. It is soon revealed that an infected is on the loose. A chaotic scene ensues in which captives and captors alike run throughout the house

panicked, trying to avoid consumption by the infected. In the chaos, one of the soldiers

grabs and escorts her to a bedroom, where he plans to hold her captive until he can steal

her away. Jim witnesses the pair from an outside window and attacks the soldier from

behind. The resulting struggle is quite savage, but ultimately Jim prevails. Selena is not

relieved, however, because she is unsure about whether Jim is infected. While the viewer

knows that Jim's health is intact, her concerns are warranted because he shows many of

the symptoms of infection: he had no shirt on, he was covered in dirt, he did not speak, he

moved with a sense of purpose and intensity, and he savagely killed another man with his

bare hands. As Jim approaches Selena, she brandishes her machete.

This is a crucial moment in the film. In fear for her life, Selena appears to revert

back to her role as the ego-driven hero; only through physical force can she hope to

conquer the irrational forces of nature, of whom she believes Jim to be a part. At this

point, the viewer becomes ominously aware of her claims earlier in the film. "If

[infection] happened to you, I'd kill you in a heartbeat." But, as Jim approaches, she does

not kill him without hesitation, as she did Mark earlier in the film. Instead, she hesitates

and discovers that he is, in fact, not infected. She breaks into tears and falls into Jim's

arms, marveling at the fact that he is alive. Jim, however, is not surprised, but rather,

expectant. "That was more than a heartbeat," he claims in an indulgent, yet knowing tone.

Just as the boy in *The Road* was challenged with the choice to leave with his new

caretaker or follow in the distrustful footsteps of his father, Jim's silent approach presents

a test for Selena, giving her the choice to revert back to her old behavior or to hold firm

to the familial bonds she built throughout the film. If she were to cut Jim down, she

would probably not have survived the ordeal, as there were still the soldiers and the

infected present in the house. Thus, her subordination of her individual need for survival to the collective of which she is a part proves a workable solution to the challenges presented by the post-apocalypse.

Selena's role in *28 Days Later* is not unlike Ripley's in *Alien* and *Aliens*, discussed in Chapter One. Both characters are strong females who ensured the safety of their companions through swift and decisive action. While some critics contend that such portrayals of women in cinema demonstrate significant advances in the feminist movement, other critics, such as Rushing, are not convinced. Although Ripley is indeed a female, she conquers the evil aliens, which in this case may be understood as a devouring extension of the archetypal feminine, but only after adapting the behaviors of the traditional ego-driven hero.[22] Ripley was a strong, independent woman who conquered the evil aliens through force and determination. Thus, *Alien* and *Aliens* fall short of realizing the next stage in humanity's mythic journey. Selena's transformation from an ego-driven individualist to part of a collective, though, signifies an entirely new way to cope with the challenges of feminine forces of nature. Her development throughout the film reveals important insights regarding the collective hero's strategies for transcending the post-apocalyptic frontier. But, as she develops, she becomes only one part of a collective. In order to fully understand this collective, analysis turns to another one of its members, Jim.

Jim's Journey

While Selena's transformation from ego-driven hero to part of a collective is certainly the most significant of the film, she is not the only character to undergo changes. Frank, the patriarchal figure, and Hannah, the childlike innocent, remain

remarkably constant throughout the film. Jim, however, undergoes three important

transformations throughout the film. In the film's opening moments, Jim resembles a

child; he is unaware of his surroundings and completely incapable of defending himself.

Instead, he relies on Selena to protect him and to tell him what to do. He admits as much

when he and Selena meet Frank and Hannah for the first time. "You think I don't get it,

but I do," he remarks, "I know I'd be dead if I didn't meet you." As the film progresses,

however, Jim becomes more self-reliant and decisive.

His first major transformation occurs when he, Selena, Frank, and Hannah stop

for gas after leaving the market. While Selena, Frank, and Hannah tend to the car, Jim

decides to enter the abandoned eatery. "Where are you going? We already have food,"

questions Selena. "Yeah, but we don't have cheeseburgers." With that, Jim enters the

diner. There he is attacked by an infected boy. While the infected boy seems to catch Jim

by surprise, his response to this attack is markedly different from his previous encounters

with the infected. Earlier, Jim was unable to defend himself, relying primarily on Selena

for protection. In this scene, however, he remains calm and collected, easily defending

himself. As the infected boy approaches him from behind, Jim deftly maneuvers out of

the way. He then stands with his foot on the chest of the young boy, studying him, before

finally bludgeoning him to death with a baseball bat. Jim's desire to enter the diner is

curious for a number of reasons. First, it is obvious that his stated reason for entering is

false, since hamburger meat would have expired long ago. Second, it was completely

unnecessary. He had virtually nothing to gain from entering it and everything to lose. His

entry into the diner is best explained as a desire to gain independence. Like young

animals learning their environment, Jim has grown restless of his passivity and

helplessness.

Recall that the central function of the hero archetype is to achieve ego-consciousness by separating from the unconscious as an evil to be overcome.[23] To the ego-heroic impulse the wild, irrational aspects of nature cease to be nurturing and comfortable and instead become stifling and devouring, "the horrible dragon monster who must be slain so that the hero may be free."[24] In this light, it is possible that Jim entered the diner simply because he wanted to exercise his own burgeoning ego-consciousness. Thus, the scene illustrates Jim's graduation from helpless child to self-sufficient man. This change in Jim's behavior is important, but problematic, because analysis of *The Road* in Chapter Two already demonstrated the inability of the ego-driven hero to cope with the post-apocalypse. In order for Jim to avoid the same fate that befell the father, he must move beyond pure ego-consciousness. This can be seen as Jim continues to develop throughout the film.

Jim's second transformation occurs when he is adopted into a larger collective. This becomes apparent during the middle segment of the film, when Jim, Selena, Hannah, and Frank begin to from strong familial bonds with one another. If the scenes of shared experience were not enough to convince the viewer of his adoption into this new family, Jim explicitly identifies himself as a one of its members when Frank soothes him as he wakes from a nightmare, replying "Thanks, Dad." Here, Jim identifies his own strengths as a component of a larger family unit, rather than as a means for ensuring the fulfillment of his own will. By doing so, he avoids dominating the group or his surroundings and his family continues to transcend the scene of the post-apocalypse. While Jim's adoption into his surrogate family illustrates a workable solution to

challenges presented by ego-consciousness, the group undergoes a dramatic change near the end of the film. This shift threatens to undermine the strong familial bonds built in the film's previous segment. In order to overcome this challenge and realize the full potential of the collective hero, Jim must undergo a final transformation.

This change occurs when a group of soldiers rescue Jim, Selena, and Hannah in Manchester. During this portion of the film, Frank becomes infected. Selena asks Jim to kill him before he turns on the group, but before Jim can act, a small group of soldiers shoot Frank and escort the three survivors to a remote compound. While certainly traumatic, Frank's death represents a significant change in the composition of the group. Until now, Frank played the role of the family's father. He decided the group should travel to Manchester to investigate the cure for infection and he provided the group with both physical and emotional security. Upon Frank's death, Jim assumes the position of father, a role that he is forced into as his rescuers assume him to be the collective's leader. While he may have been hesitant to take on this mantle, he seems to fit it into it quite naturally.

Jim's role as the family's protector is visible in a conversation with Major Henry West, the commander of the paramilitary soldiers. In this scene, Jim expresses vexation at the soldiers' sexual advances toward Selena and Hannah. "Look, we're grateful, we're very grateful, but if we're going to stay here . . . ," Jim begins, but is soon interrupted." I promised them women . . . . What can nine men do but what to die themselves? I promised them women because they mean a future," explains Major West. While the specific wording of the rest of Jim's message may be unclear, its meaning is not. Based on the events that transpired prior to their conversation, Jim was going to tell West that

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the conduct of the soldiers was unacceptable, and that any future transgressions would result in the groups' departure from the compound. It takes Jim a few moments to realize the implications of West's remarks, but when he finally does, he immediately runs to protect Selena and Hannah, who are already being molested by the soldiers. Woefully outnumbered and without any weapons, Jim is quickly knocked unconscious. This scene is significant for two reasons. First, as mentioned above, it demonstrates Jim's new role as the protector of Selena and Hannah. In turn, Jim's role as protector reveals a mythic regression of sorts in which his previous subordination to the group comes into contention. Although it was through the surrender of his ego-consciousness that he transcended the post-apocalypse, he immediately reclaimed it when he learned that Selena and Hannah were in danger. This approach proved futile, however, as he was desperately outnumbered by the soldiers. But, his failure is hardly surprising, for the post-apocalypse has already been shown to be a hostile environment for the ego-driven hero. In order for Jim to ensure the safety of his family, then, he must find new tactics for overcoming his enemies.

After his confrontation with the soldiers, Jim wakes to the crazed ramblings of Sergeant Farrell, another soldier who fought in defense of the survivors, but was overrun by his comrades. Farrell explains to Jim that the world is not decimated, but rather, that the infection is confined to the United Kingdom, which was quarantined from the rest of the world. Two soldiers then escort the pair of prisoners beyond the walls of the compound, where they are supposed to be executed. Jim narrowly escapes his fate during a commotion caused by Farrell's death, but the soldiers return to the compound and report both of them dead. Jim is not dead, though, and in an attempt to rescue Selena and

Hannah, he raises an alarm in the small town outside of the compound. The soldiers are immediately dispatched, but when they arrive they are attacked by a savage and brutal enemy: Jim. Though not infected, Jim bears little resemblance to the rational, ego-conscious hero that he once was. Instead, he attacks the soldiers with rage and abandon. In this scene, Jim embodies the very characteristics which separate humankind from the infected. At this point, it is important to recall that the infection was a product of rational, modern society. It was an act of science, not an act of nature, that decimated the earth. The savage cannibals, then, are both a product of and a response to the rationalism of the preceding era. Mythically, this represents Jim's conversion from masculine (rational) defender, to feminine (non-rational) attacker. Like the infected, he now represents the devouring mother, a ravenous and consuming representation of the unconscious. This final transformation provides Jim with new tactics with which to protect his family, as illustrated in the film's thrilling climax.

After attacking and killing the soldiers dispatched to apprehend him, Jim returns to the compound in search of Hannah and Selena. After fomenting chaos by releasing an infected soldier into the house, Jim begins a systematic search. Along the way, he kills Private Jones, the youngest and least culpable of all the soldiers. Some viewers may have expected Jim to spare Jones, due to his relative naïveté. No such mercy was possible, however, for the devouring mother lacks the capacity of judgment. She consumes all that she encounters, seeking to regain control over ego-consciousness.[25] This is further illuminated in the film's most graphic and disturbing scene. Jim finally finds Selena as she is dragged to a bedroom by one of the soldiers. He attacks the soldier from behind, savagely killing him by first smashing his head repeatedly into a brick wall and finally

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pressing his thumbs through the soldiers' eyeballs until he expires. The brutality

displayed in this scene is significant because it represents the devouring mother's

conquest of the last vestiges of the masculine archetype. While Selena represented the

dominant masculine archetype earlier in the film, Major West and his soldiers represent

the archetype in second half. The central function of the masculine hero, Rushing

contends, is to achieve ego-consciousness by separating from the unconscious feminine.[26]

To the ego-heroic impulse, the unconscious aspects of nature are nothing more than

challenges to be overcome through rational means. This is illustrated by West's

insistence that the infection was simply another instance of "people killing people,"

which according to the Major, had been happening since the dawn of time. The heroes of

previous frontiers indeed carried out this impulse. The masculine hero of *Outland*, as

discussed in Chapter One for example, leaves the space station after successfully

defending its inhabitants from evil, corporate oppressors.[27] In the post-apocalyptic

frontier, however, the soldiers and their weapons are no match for the raw power of

nature. Thus, as members of a collective whose needs supersede those of the individual,

Jim, Selena, and Hannah are the only characters who survive the carnage.

     28 Days Later began with the same mythic hero that has been seen in *The Road*.

Like the father, Selena began her journey as a rugged, individualist who faced a series of

trials in order to undergo an important transformation. In *The Road*, the father remained

unwilling to deviate from his ego-driven perspective and thus failed to undergo the

changes necessary to survive the post-apocalypse. Selena, on the other hand, learned to

subordinate herself to the well-being of the collective. In doing so, she and her "family"

learned a new tactic for surviving the scene: transcending it through the formation of

strong communal bonds. This lesson is valuable in itself, but in order for the hero archetype to be complete, the group must return to teach to society what it learned. The group's return, and thus, the completion of the hero archetype, is demonstrated in the closing sequence of the film.

After a daring escape from the military compound in which they were imprisoned, Jim, Selena, and Hannah retreat to a peaceful cottage in the mountains. The pervading tone of terror has passed. Hannah is free to wander about, and Jim and Selena are finally able to acknowledge the romance that has blossomed between them. An aerial view of the surrounding are amplifies the impression that the danger has passed, as the shot reveals the starvation of the last few infected. Jim, Hannah, and Selena have survived their ordeal. The aerial view originates from an airplane which spots the group, and in the closing moments of the film circles back, presumably to rescue them. Their escape reflects the completion of the hero archetype alluded to by Rushing in "Mythic Evolution of the 'New Frontier' in Mass Mediated Rhetoric," which has significant implications for understanding modern culture, but because they extend beyond the scope of this film, they will be discussed in the next chapter.

Conclusion

The collective hero of *28 Days Later* answered the call for a new hero made in Chapter Two. Rather than the protagonists attempting to exert their ego-driven wills over the unconscious forces of the feminine—an enterprise that ended calamitously for their predecessors in *The Road*—the cast of *28 Days Later* formed a collective that was together greater than the sum of its parts. The communal bonds shared by Jim, Selena,

Frank, and Hannah did not conquer the scene, but rather transcended it. The material conditions of the post-apocalypse remain constant throughout the film. Yet the group's experiences, and the experiences of each member, differ in several ways. At the beginning of the film, each character was a fragmented individual, striving futilely for a temporary reprieve from the infected. To each of these individuals, survival was indeed as "good as it gets." When Jim and Selena decide to throw in their lot with Frank and Hannah, however, these individuals learn, as Selena admitted earlier in the film, that survival is not as good as it gets. The collective formed by the once fragmented individuals becomes the new hero called for in Chapter Two. Unlike the ego-driven hero, they do not seek to conquer the unconquerable scene, and as a result, return to bestow boons upon humanity.

Analysis of *The Road* in Chapter Two illustrated the inability of the ego-driven hero to meet the challenges of the post apocalyptic frontier. The father's rugged, individualistic approach to problem solving in *The Road* did not protect him or his son from the all-consuming post-apocalyptic scene. Analysis of *28 Days Later*, in contrast, introduces a hero that was able to thrive in the post-apocalypse. Unlike the ego-driven hero, it is not an individual, but a collective of individuals who are together greater than the sum of their parts. The collective hero survives the post-apocalyptic scene not by conquering it, but by transcending it.

The division of *The Road* and *28 Days Later* into discrete analyses is somewhat artificial insofar as the overall vision of this thesis is concerned. Though important rhetorical artifacts in their own right, when viewed as a single narrative, *The Road* and *28 Days Later* represent a significant shift in the scene of the American mythos. This is not

to say that these two films demonstrate this shift in and of themselves. Rather, they are

simply two representations of a broader theme in the American frontier myth. In addition,

changes in archetypal representations within the myth also have significant implications

for American culture. In chapter four, the implications of the emergence of the post-

apocalyptic scene, and its concomitant shift in archetypal representations, are discussed

in detail.

Notes

[1] Janice Hocker Rushing, "Mythic Evolution of 'The New Frontier' in Mass Mediated Rhetoric," *Critical Studies in Mass Communication 3*, no. 3 (1986): 266.

[2] For more information regarding the relationship between myth, culture, and identity, see Michael Osborn and Douglas Ehninger, "The Metaphor in Public Address," *Speech Monographs,* 29 (1962): 223-34; Michael Osborn,"Archetypal Metaphor in Rhetoric: The Light-Dark Family," *Quarterly Journal of Speech,* 53 (1967): 115-26; and George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By,* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980).

[3] Rushing, "Mythic Evolution," 271.

[4] Roger Ebert, "28 Days Later," 27 June 2003. Retrieved from http://rogerebert.suntimes.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20030627/REVIEWS/306270301 on 8 January 2011.

[5] William Arnold, "A Warning on *28 Days Later*: It's Catchy," *The Seattle Post-Intelligencer* (27 June 2003). Retrieved from http://www.seattlepi.com/movies/128355_twentyeight27q.html on 8 January 2011.

[6] Margaret A. McGurk, "Horror Gets Smart in *28 Days Later*" *The Cincinnati Inquirer* (27 June 2003). Retrieved from http://cincinnati.com/freetime/movies/reviews/06272003_dayslater.html on 8 January 2011.

[7] Blake French, "28 Days Later," 26 June 2003. Retrieved from http://www.filmcritic.com/reviews/2003/28-days-later/ on 8 January 2011.

[8] Rushing, "Mythic evolution," 270.

[9] Alex Garland, *28 Days Later*, DVD, Directed by Danny Boyle, (DNA Films: 27 June 2003). Quotations from the film based on the author's transcription.

[10] Charels Perrow, *Organizing America; Wealth, Power and the Origins of Corporate Capitalism* (Princeton, NJ: University of Princeton Press, 2002), 1-3.

[11] Perrow, *Organizing America*, 22-25.

[12] Janice Hocker Rushing and Thomas S. Frentz, "The Rhetoric of Rocky: Part Two," *Western Journal of Speech Communication, 42*, 231-240.

[13] Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1949), 23.

[14] Campbell, *Hero with a Thousand Faces*, 581.

[15] Campbell, *Hero with a Thousand Faces*, 97.

[16] Campbell, *Hero with a Thousand Faces*, 23-25.

[17] Rushing, "Mythic Evolution," 5-10.

[18] Annette Kolodny, *The Lay of the Land* (North Carolina: The University of North Carolina Press, 1975): 1-138.

[19] Campbell, *Hero with a Thousand Faces*, 581.

[20] Campbell, *Hero with a Thousand Faces*, 581.

[21] Campbell, *Hero with a Thousand Faces*, 97.

[22] Janice Hocker Rushing, "Evolution of 'The New Frontier' in *Alien* and *Aliens*: Patriarchal Co-optation of the Feminine Archetype," *The Quarterly Journal of Speech 75* no. 1 (1989).

[23] Rushing, "Mythic Evolution," 283.

[24] Rushing, "Evolution of the New Frontier," 5.

[25] Rushing, "Evolution of the New Frontier," 3.

[26] Rushing, "Mythic Evolution," 283.

[27] Rushing, "Mythic Evolution," 273.

CHAPTER FOUR

CONCLUSION

The primary goal of this thesis was to highlight the emergence of the post-apocalyptic frontier through an analysis of *The Road* and *28 Days Later*. Chapter One provided a context for the project by outlining the broad trends in contemporary rhetorical criticism and then outlined the critical approach used in the following chapters. Analysis of *The Road* in Chapter Two revealed a pentadic shift in the American frontier myth from scene-agent to scene-purpose, which reflects the deemphasized role of individual action in contemporary society. In addition to a shift in surface structures of the myth, the deep structures also changed. Rather than portraying the ego-driven hero exerting its will over feminine representations of nature, this film depicted a devouring form of the archetypal feminine consuming the masculine hero. The scene's consumption of the ego-driven hero highlighted the need for a new hero, one who was better equipped to meet the challenges of the post-apocalypse. Analysis of *28 Days Later* in Chapter Three introduced this new hero. Rather than an individual, it is a group of individuals working together towards a common goal. Through shared bonds of intimacy, the collective hero transcended the post-apocalypse. While the implications of these analyses were briefly discussed in their respective chapters, they are more fully parsed in Chapter Four. But first, a brief summary of the ground covered in this thesis is provided in order to refocus the reader's attention to important concepts.

Contemporary rhetoricians employ a wide range of critical methods to illuminate texts, but this was not always the case. Most early critics were concerned with documenting and explaining the choices made by speakers in public discourse. These

scholars made use of a comprehensive inventory of factors outlined in Aristotle's *Rhetoric* to illuminate the choices made in public addresses and to provide insight into the nature of rhetoric in general.[1] While the study of public address is certainly an important aspect of rhetorical criticism, it is not the only area worthy of analysis. According to Kenneth Burke, "All human action is rhetorical," insofar as it is designed to communicate.[2] Thus, the subfield of rhetorical criticism should be extended to include all forms of symbolic communication.[3]

Increasingly, scholars note the value of analyzing non-linear forms of communication; recent research has shown films, television, and print images to be meaningful rhetorical experiences. Chapter One outlined five broad categories of non-linear discursive analysis. Among the most important of these categories is the mythic criticism of film, because, as Rushing explains, "we find purpose and guidance for our lives in accord with the stories told by the society in which we live."[4] A mythic approach to criticism makes use of the latent archetypal meanings found in myths—recurring stories that thrive ubiquitously throughout different periods of time and geographic locations—in order to illuminate varied human behaviors. Although archetypes and their corresponding meanings are limitless, scholars find the hero archetype to be of primary mythic import, due to its pervasive presence in ancient and contemporary narratives.[5] The frontier myth is the primary site of the hero archetype. As Rushing writes, "Whether fixed upon Columbus sailing the ocean blue or Buffalo Bill conquering the Wild, Wild West, the American imagination remains fascinated by new and unknown places."[6] In "Evolution of 'The New Frontier' in *Alien* and *Aliens*: Patriarchal Co-optation of the

Feminine Archetype," Rushing traced the progression of the American frontier through three stages: the sea, the west, and outer space.

To lay bare the meanings communicated through the shifting of frontiers, Rushing used Kenneth Burke's dramatistic pentad, which treats rhetorical experiences as narrative dramas that unfold in relation to five major questions: "what was done (act), when or where it was done(scene), who did it?(agent), how he (sic) did it (agency), and why (purpose)?"[7] According to Rushing, cultural myths "may be profitably conceived pentadically: a hero (agent) accomplishes a series of tasks (act), using some means of aid (agency), within a place in time (scene), generally for the benefit of culture (purpose)."[8] Her use of the pentad in the analysis of various films revealed that each shift in frontier was accompanied by a concomitant shift in dramatistic ratio. Rushing's work on the emergence of new frontiers in mass-mediated rhetoric built much of the foundation on which this thesis was built. A brief summary of her work provides a context for the current project.

According to Rushing, the original scene of the American mythos was the sea.[9] These narratives depicted stalwart heroes, battling the irrational denizens of nature (e.g., giant squids) or the forces of nature itself.[10] As the sea became more familiar due to the development of better technology and improved trade routes, the "monsters of the deep" crawled ashore to dwell in the "dark forests, bleak prairies, and burning deserts of the new American frontier: the west."[11] The shift in scene from the sea to the west signified the emergence of agency to the dramatistic fore. In the western frontier, the hero "prepares himself (sic) by perfecting his ego—through power of will, he demonstrates no emotion, and through practice with weapons, he readies himself for the fight.[12] Agency in

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control now (reason and tools perfected), he is up to the challenge. Agency, then, dominates the hero himself, his surroundings, his enemies, and his acts."[13] Thus, the western frontier may be understood pentadically as a tension between scene and agency.

In the late 1960's, public interest in the American West as a site for the frontier myth began to wane in response to advances in technology and exploration. America's great "space race" with Russia, which resulted in satellites orbiting the earth and men walking on the moon, demonstrated to Americans the viability of outer space as a new repository for their collective imagination. As the scene of the American frontier shifted to space, technology began to play a crucial role in the narrative structure of the myth.[14] Because technology expands uncontrollably in the space frontier, writes Rushing, it is no longer a means of agency for those who wield it. Instead it "metamorphoses into scene."[15] With agency enveloped by the scene, agent emerges as the dominant pentadic element.

While Rushing's work ended with documenting a scenic shift to space, the emergence of new frontiers of the American mythos is perhaps inevitable. Myths and the archetypes that constitute them "are not static," she explains. They are instead, "dynamic processes under constant revision."[16] Likewise, documenting the evolution of myth is an ongoing task. In recent years, America's cultural space has been inundated by a flood of films depicting life after a global (or perceived to be global) catastrophe. These films include several major Hollywood productions as well as countless independent, lower-budget films. Television shows, such as *The Walking Dead*, and other popular culture movements, such as the annual Las Vegas Zombie Walk, have also gained the attention of the American public. Analysis of the deep and surface structures that constitute these

texts reveals the emergence of yet another scene of the American mythos: the post-apocalyptic frontier. Post-apocalyptic narratives depict characters struggling to survive in the wake of a global catastrophe. In such a world, the normal laws, rules, and conventions of society no longer apply because there are no governing bodies to enforce them. Due to the deterioration of the systems of meaning that render a place familiar and "knowable," individuals in post-apocalyptic narratives find themselves in a scene of perpetual wilderness and unpredictability. The emergence of the post-apocalyptic frontier reveals yet another shift in dramatistic ratios. As a global catastrophe turns the very land in which the hero dwells into an inhospitable wasteland, pitting it against forces against which it cannot conquer, the hero, its acts, its implements, and its enemies become dominated by purpose. The goal, or purpose, of survival supersedes all other dramatistic elements. The heroes do not conquer, but instead flee. They have limited means which they use not to achieve victory, but to temporarily stave off utter consumption by the scene.

In addition to illuminating changes in the surface structure of frontier myths, Rushing also incorporated elements of depth-psychology—an approach she called transmodernism—to reveal changes in their deep structures. A transmodern approach to criticism begins with a foundation of the psyche from which all else emanates: the collective unconscious, consisting of instincts and their corollaries, the archetypes, which may be understood as basic patterns of instinctual behavior.[17] Nature in the American frontier symbolically represents the archetypal feminine—wild, unpredictable, and free; seductive, but unable to be possessed."[18] In the modern era, the masculine, ego-driven hero emerged as the opponent of the archetypal feminine. The central function of the hero archetype is to achieve ego-consciousness by separating from the unconscious as an evil

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to be overcome.[19] To the ego-heroic impulse, the wild, irrational aspects of nature cease to be nurturing and comfortable and instead become stifling and devouring. Tension in frontier myths, then, originates from the masculine, ego-driven hero's struggle to conquer the wild, unpredictable, and irrational feminine so that its consciousness may fully emerge from the depths of the unconscious.

The pattern of masculine archetypes conquering feminine representations of nature runs like a thread through the frontiers of the sea, the west, and space. In the post-apocalyptic frontier, however, this tension becomes inverted. The once powerful ego-driven hero no longer conquers nature and its extensions. Rather, it seeks only to survive for another day. Thus, the post-apocalypse places it in a scene in which it cannot survive and ultimately dies. Though mournful, this death is necessary, contends Rushing, because the ego-driven hero represents only one fragment of the complete archetype of the hero.[20] If the ego-driven hero alone is incapable of surviving the post-apocalypse, then a new hero who is better equipped to meet its challenges is needed. The new hero demanded by the post-apocalypse evolves gradually throughout *The Road* and *28 Days Later*. In the following section, the complete journey of the hero archetype is outlined and discussed.

<center>The Hero's Journey</center>

In order for the hero archetype to survive in the post-apocalypse, it must embark on a mythic journey on which it learns new attitudes and behaviors. As Rushing stated in "Evolution of the 'New Frontier' in *Alien* and *Aliens*: Patriarchal Co-Optation of the Archetypal Feminine," the new myth for humankind needs to be a quest, rather than a conquest; its purpose, to search, rather than to search and destroy.[21] Joseph Campbell's

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monomyth most succinctly outlines this quest. He describes the progression of the hero in three stages: departure, initiation, and return.[22] The first of these stages designates a "call to adventure–[signifying] that destiny has summoned the hero and transferred his (sic) spiritual center of gravity from within the pale of his society to a zone unknown."[23] The initiation stage refers to a period in which the hero "moves in a dream landscape of curiously fluid, ambiguous forms, where he (sic) must survive a succession of trials" in order to undergo a necessary transformation.[24] Along the way, the hero learns the skills and abilities that will aid him in his quest. Once the quest, which culminates in a "supreme ordeal," is completed, the hero then returns to his people with the ability to bestow boons upon them.[25] The archetype of the hero begins its mythic journey in *The Road* and completes it in *28 Days Later*.

Though important rhetorical artifacts in their own right, the true impact of *The Road* and *28 Days Later* cannot be measured until they are placed side-by-side as smaller components of a single narrative. Recall Thomas S. Frentz's discussion of rhetorical narrations discussed in Chapter One. According to Frentz, critics may combine seemingly disparate texts into a larger narrative by placing them in teleological time according to how far or close they portray humanity on its journey towards its *telos*, or ultimate purpose of unity.[26] Thus, although it was produced six years before *The Road*, *28 Days Later* represents a more advanced form of the myth. In the following paragraphs, the hero's journey is discussed as it unfolds throughout the larger narrative comprised of both *The Road* and *28 Days Later*.

The Road represents a transitional phase in the evolution of the frontier myth in which the old values of the space frontier are placed in the new context of the post-

apocalypse. According to Rushing, the shifting of frontiers does not occur suddenly. Rather, "the transition progresses gradually, as elements of the old scene are initially grafted onto the new mythic imagination."[27] *The Road* depicts the familiar ego-driven hero of previous frontiers in a struggle against the wild and unpredictable forces of nature. Unlike previous frontiers, however, the ego-driven hero does not fare well in the new scene of the post-apocalypse, as analysis of *The Road* in Chapter Two has shown.

When the western hero was placed in the context of space, Rushing argued that a disjunction occurred as a result of the background dramatistic elements moving out of alignment.[28] She claimed that this resulted in comic and grotesque effects that were only later resolved in more developed iterations of the space frontier. A similar disjunction occurs in *The Road* as a result of the father's failure to enact the role of the ego-driven hero. Instead of coming to the rescue of the beleaguered mother and daughter, for example, the father is forced to watch from the tree line while cannibals beat and then presumably rape and eat them. In this scene, there is no sense of the untouchable hero who surmounts incredible odds in order to save the day. In contrast to the western or space frontiers, which present defeatable foes, the post-apocalypse cannot be conquered. The best the father can hope for is to "continue down the road" in search of a temporary reprieve from the dying earth. The post-apocalyptic scene, then, is unsustainable for the ego-driven hero because it forces him to act in ways that are decidedly anti-heroic.

The disjunction presented by this heroic failure may be resolved through an alternative interpretation of father's role in the film. The father may also be considered a form of agency through which the life of his child is preserved. For the son, his father is simply a means for survival. From this perspective, many of the father's actions (or lack

of actions) are reconciled with the dissonance created by his failure to enact properly the role of the ego-driven hero. He could not rescue the damsels in distress because that was not his job. His job, as he explicitly defines it, is merely to ensure the safety of his son. Thus, the post-apocalyptic scene turns the all powerful hero/ agent into a tool, a means for completing a specific task.

The relegation of the father-as-agency to the dramatistic periphery realigns the other background elements and places a new structural focus on purpose. The space frontier placed primary emphasis on agent, which highlighted the ability of problem solving through rational, individualistic means. In the post-apocalyptic frontier, however, the triumph of reason over the unconscious forces of nature is not possible. There is nothing that the agent can do in order to permanently resolve the challenges presented by scene. Instead, agents respond to post-apocalypse in a strictly reactive fashion: they run from cannibals or zombies and migrate in response to inhospitable climates. These behaviors are not the carefully calculated actions of rational agents, but rather, the reflexive acts of animals trying to stay alive. In this sense, agents in the post-apocalyptic frontier are subordinated to their purpose of staying alive.

The purpose of survival dominated the action of *The Road.* This is made clear early in the film when the father explicitly states that nothing else matters (including his own life) but the safety of his son. But the father's methods for ensuring this purpose were ineffective, and at times, counterproductive. Instead of protecting him from dangerous foes, the father forces his son to leave the only place that has afforded him any comfort at all. Instead of riding off into the sunset after shepherding his son to safety, the father dies ignominiously on the beach, fully aware that his son will in all likelihood

perish. When his father dies, the boy is presented with a choice. He can either heed the advice of his father to travel down the road in search of what might be, or trust the stranger and assimilate into his family. The son wisely chooses to follow the stranger. The boy's decision to disregard his father's advice signifies the ultimate death of the ego-driven hero, not only in physical, but also in mythic terms. *The Road* represents the departure and initiation stages of Campbell's monomyth. In it, the father faces several struggles and learns what he believes to be the lessons he needs to ensure the survival of his son. But, the father could not bestow the fruit of his labor on his son. Instead, he died, unable to fulfill his destiny. In order for the monomyth to be complete, the hero must find a new way of solving problems, a way that allows it to partake in the reprieve for which it fought so hard.

In addition to the ascension of purpose to the dramatistic fore, analysis of *The Road* reveals a fundamental shift in the deep structures of the frontier myth. While the archetypal characters remain the same in *The Road* as they do in earlier versions of the myth, the tensions enacted between those characters deviates significantly from established patterns. Frontier myths set in the west and space typically portray a masculine, ego-driven hero conquering the feminine, non-rational forces of nature through rational means. In the post-apocalyptic frontier, however, no such victory is possible, because there is nothing to conquer but the world itself, a task that the ego-driven hero is woefully ill-equipped to undertake. Instead, the all-consuming forces of nature wreak havoc upon the hero, whose only recourse is to flee for temporary safety. This change in archetypal portrayals has profound implications for contemporary society, which are discussed in the following section. The scene of the post-apocalypse is not

something that can be conquered—it is not even something from which one can fully retreat. There is no escape. Anyone striving to survive this frontier must find a way to live along side of the challenges it presents. Thus, a new type of hero is needed, one who can cope with the post-apocalypse not by conquering it, but by transcending it.

Chapter Three reads *28 Days Later* as a more developed vision of the post-apocalyptic frontier. Mythically, the film begins in a fashion similar to *The Road*, with fragmented ego-driven heroes attempting to exert their personal wills over the scene. By the end of the film, however, these individuals coalesce into a family unit that is together greater than the sum of its parts. This family represents the new hero called for in Chapter Two. It is not an individual, but a community of individuals working together. Unlike the ego-driven hero, whose goal was conquest, the collective hero portrayed in *28 Days Later* defeats the post-apocalyptic frontier by transcending it. The formation of a community transforms the purpose of the post-apocalyptic frontier from mere survival to enjoying life through shared connection. The progression of the hero archetype from ego-driven hero to collective hero is illuminated through an analysis of the film's main protagonists.

As mentioned in Chapter Three, Selena is the primary representation of the masculine archetype in the film. From the very beginning, she is rugged, crass, and completely cynical— all of the characteristics of the classic ego-driven hero. This perspective was presumably the product of the scene. Thus, the spread of the infection initiates her into the role of the hero, shifting her "spiritual center of gravity [from] within the pale of [her] society to a zone unknown."[29] This is problematic, because, as analysis of *The Road* in Chapter has shown, the ego-driven hero is ill-equipped to meet the demands of the post-apocalypse. If, like the father, Selena remained constant throughout

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the film, it is likely that she and her companions would be equally incapable of owning

up to the task. But, she does change in significant ways throughout the film.

Selena's role as the ego-driven hero begins to fade when she and Jim meet Frank

and Hannah about a third of the way through the film. Initially, Selena scoffed at the idea

of traveling with the father and daughter, but eventually, she came to understand that the

group needed each other. Frank and Hannah did not offer food, shelter, or other

pragmatic resources, but rather, a chance for familial intimacy. When the group departs

from London, the tone of the film shifts from bleak and terrifying to jovial and light-

hearted as the four begin to coalesce as a family unit. In their shared experiences, the

once fragmented individuals find something better than survival: a sense if community.

Thus, the new hero called for in Chapter Two is revealed. It is not an individual—recall

that the individualism is a primary characteristic of the ego-driven hero— but a

collective. This collective hero does not seek to conquer the scene, to somehow exert its

will over its surroundings, but to transcend the scene by drawing upon shared communal

experience. These bonds are only strengthened as the film progresses, as evidenced by

Selena's selfless protection of Hannah in the second half of the film. Her willingness to

subordinate her own sense of self represents her mythic departure into "a zone

unknown."[30] According to Campbell, once initiated, the hero "moves in a dream

landscape of curiously fluid, ambiguous forms, where [she] must survive a succession of

trials" in order to undergo a necessary transformation.[31] Analysis of *The Road* in Chapter

Two revealed the methods of the ego-driven hero to be insufficient to survive the scene.

Thus, in order to learn new ways to cope with the post-apocalypse, Selena transforms

herself into one member of a larger collective.

While Selena's transformation from ego-driven hero to part of a collective is certainly the most significant of the film, she is not the only character to undergo changes. Jim also undergoes three important changes throughout the film. Although the collective hero has found a more workable solution to the challenges presented by the post-apocalypse, the hero's journey is not complete until it can return to share this solution with society. Only after Jim's mythic shift is the hero archetype complete. His first transformation occurs when he grows from a helpless infant into a self-sufficient agent. In the beginning of the film, Jim resembled a child. He did not understand the material conditions in which he lived and was completely dependent on others for protection. He becomes more self-sufficient as the film progresses, signifying the emergence of his own burgeoning ego consciousness. He demonstrates this in the scene where he insists on searching for hamburgers, despite the apparent futility of the endeavor. This change in Jim's behavior is important, but problematic, because the analysis of *The Road* in Chapter Two already demonstrated the inability of the ego-driven hero to cope with the post-apocalypse. In order for Jim to avoid the same fate that befell the father, he must move beyond pure ego-consciousness. This can be seen as Jim continues to develop throughout the film.

Jim's second transformation occurs when he is adopted into a larger collective. Although Jim's adventure in the diner revealed an increase in his personal efficacy, he did not allow this development to interfere with his interpersonal relationships with Selena, Frank, and Hannah. Instead of attempting to exert his will over the group, Jim becomes a part of an adoptive family, as he demonstrates when he calls Frank "Dad." The importance of this familial identification cannot be understated. If, like the heroes of

previous frontiers, Jim took this opportunity to lead his fellows to safety through his own

rational means, the group may not have survived. While Jim's adoption into his surrogate

family illustrates a workable solution to challenges presented by pure ego-consciousness,

the group undergoes a dramatic change when Frank becomes infected. This shift

threatens the strong familial bonds built in the film's previous segment. In order to

overcome this challenge and realize the full potential of the collective hero, Jim

undergoes a final transformation.

Jim's adoption into the family is tested in the closing moments of the film when

his family is rescued by a group of soldiers in Manchester. Jim learns that, although

seemingly benevolent, their new caretakers plan to imprison and rape Hannah and Selena.

Whereas heroes of previous frontiers would attempt to rescue Selena and Hannah through

calculated actions and rational means of agency, such as firearms or other technical skills,

Jim rescues them by becoming part of the scene. This becomes clear when he kills a

soldier so savagely that Selena is unsure about whether or not he is infected. Jim's

behaviors illustrate the final subordination of his ego-consciousness. After a daring

escape from the military compound in Jim, Selena, and Hannah retreat to a peaceful

cottage in the mountains, where they are eventually rescued and presumably returned to

civilization. The group's return illustrates the completion of Campbell's monomyth. The

film begins with fragmented individuals initiated into a heroic role in response to the

infection. Once initiated, those individuals "moved in a dream landscape of curiously

fluid, ambiguous forms, where [they] survived a succession of trials" in order to undergo

a necessary transformation.[32] Through their shared experiences, Selena, Jim, Frank, and

Hannah cease to be individuals and instead become members of a collective: allowing

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each member of the group to transcend the dangers of post-apocalypse. After undergoing a necessary transformation, the collective hero returns to share with society the lessons it has learned. But, what are these lessons, and more importantly, how can they be applied to contemporary society? These questions are answered in the following section.

The Gift[33]

If "we find purpose and guidance for our lives in accord with the stories told by the society in which we live," as Rushing contends, then the analysis of these stories should provide insight into how to best meet the challenges presented by that society. The previous section revealed a dramatistic shift from scene-agent in the space frontier to scene-purpose in the post apocalypse. In addition, mythic analysis of *The Road* and *28 Days Later* also exposes an inversion of archetypal portrayals in which the feminine forces of nature wreak havoc on the masculine, ego-driven hero. While these findings make a significant contribution to scholars' understanding of the American frontier myths, analysis of *The Road* and *28 Days Later* also illuminates a solution to a pervasive problem in contemporary society. In addition, the project provides scholars with several fertile areas of new research. In this section the societal implications and heuristic value of this thesis are discussed.

As Janice Hocker Rushing and Thomas S. Frentz note in their book *Projecting the Shadow: The Cyborg Hero in American Cinema,* the denigration of all that is not rational by modern era fostered "agonizing rifts in the social body, the physical environment, and the individual."[34] The defining characteristic of this paradigm is fragmentation.[35] We no longer live in an age of production, but of reproduction, where there is no longer any

originals from which copies are made, but only, as Baudrillard puts it, the "hyperreal" where everything is simulated from models bearing no resemblance to that which they reproduce.[36] This state of affairs led to what some scholars call the "postmodern condition" in which the individual is decentered—"dispersed into the margins with no ego, no historically coherent sense of self at the nucleus"—the end result of which is the abandonment of any sense of community.[37]

The Road and 28 Days Later were chosen for analysis in this thesis because, together, they demonstrate the most productive solution to the challenges discussed by postmodern critics. As mentioned previously, the emergence of the post-apocalypse corresponds to a crisis in consciousness caused by the fragmentation of individuals in contemporary society. The death of the father in The Road demonstrates a cultural inability to alleviate this crisis through ego-driven means. It is unlikely, for example, that the systems of meaning and control currently in place in contemporary culture will diminish in any significant fashion. Thus, like characters in The Road and 28 Days Later, individuals must learn to live alongside them. The collective formed by Selena, Jim, Frank, and Hannah in 28 Days Later represents a new way solution to the fragmentation of society. In this sense, the group, as Doug McAdam, professor of Sociology at Stanford University, writes "had discovered a powerful sociological truth: the most satisfying selves we will ever know are those that attach to communities and purposes outside of ourselves."[38] Through the formation of strong communal bonds, individuals can transcend the crippling decentralization that renders modern life problematic.

Of course, The Road and 28 Days Later do not constitute the only possible post-apocalyptic narrative. If The Crazies or Dawn of the Dead were used instead, for

instance, it is possible that one would arrive at an entirely different mythic interpretation. Further, while the dramatistic ratio of scene purpose dominates the mythic action of *The Road* and *28 Days* Later, it remains uncertain whether this ratio prevails throughout the genre, as I have claimed, or whether it is unique to the texts discussed here. Future scholars, then, may productively study other post-apocalyptic films in order to reveal alternative mythic insights and to more fully parse the structural elements of the post-apocalyptic frontier.

It is important to note that the mythic journey presented in these films represents a beginning and not an end. Neither the death of the ego-driven hero in *The Road* nor the emergence of the collective hero in *28 Days Later* suggests that the problems germane to contemporary life have been somehow resolved. Rather, analysis of these films shows only how to meet those challenges in a sustainable and productive way. While the post-apocalypse currently dominates the American imagination, it, like the previous frontiers, will eventually fall from prominence.[39] Future scholars, then, must keep a vigilant watch on cultural trends within America in order to discover new frontiers of the American mythos.

Rushing's work with the American mythos ended with her exposition of the space frontier, due to her death in 2004. The spirit of her project, however, lives on within the pages of this thesis, as well as in the cultural space in which society articulates its collective identity. If Rushing were still alive, it would be she who revealed the emergence of the post-apocalyptic frontier and discussed it implications for contemporary culture. Of course, that is not to say that my analysis is in any way comparable to the level of depth and insight that she could have provided, for her knowledge and

experience in the field of rhetorical criticism far exceeds my own. Thus, while Janice

Hocker Rushing played an immeasurably integral role in any insights revealed by this

thesis, its shortcomings are solely my own.

Notes

[1] Herbert Wichelns, "The Literary Criticism of Oratory," in *Readings in Rhetorical Criticism, 3rd edition,* edited by Carl R. Burgchardt (State College: Strata Publishing, Inc., 2005), 3-5.

[2] Martin J. Medhurst and Thomas W. Benson, "Introduction," in *Rhetorical Dimensions in Media: A Critical Casebook*, edited by Martin J. Medhurst and Thomas W. Benson (Dubuque, IA: Kendall/Hunt Publishing Company, 1991), xii.

[3] Medhurst and Benson, "Introduction," xvii.

[4] Janice Hocker Rushing, "Mythic Evolution of 'The New Frontier' in Mass Mediated Rhetoric," *Critical Studies in Mass Communication 3*, no. 3 (1986): 265.

[5] Rushing, "Mythic Evolution," 265.

[6] Rushing, "Mythic Evolution," 265.

[7] Rushing, "Mythic Evolution," 268.

[8] Rushing, "Mythic Evolution," 270.

[9] Janice Hocker Rushing, "Evolution of 'The New Frontier' in *Alien* and *Aliens*: Patriarchal Co-optation of the Feminine Archetype," *The Quarterly Journal of Speech 75* no. 1 (1989): 1-24.

[10] Rushing, "Mythic Evolution," 272.

[11] Rushing, "Mythic Evolution,"266.

[12] Rushing, "Mythic Evolution," 272.

[13] Rushing, "Mythic Evolution," 272.

[14] Rushing, "Mythic Evolution," 274.

[15] Rushing, "Mythic Evolution," 274.

[16] Rushing, "Mythic Evolution," 266.

[17] Rushing and Frentz, *Projecting the Shadow,* 31.

[18] Rushing, "Evolution of the New Frontier," 4.

[19] Rushing, "Mythic Evolution," 283.

[20] Rushing, "Mythic Evolution," 281.

[21] Rushing, "Evolution of the New Frontier," 21,

[22] Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1949), 23.

[23] Campbell, *Hero with a Thousand Faces,* 581.

[24] Campbell, *Hero with a Thousand Faces,* 97.

[25] Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces,* 23-25.

[26] Rushing, "Mythic Evolution," 268.

[27] Rushing, "Mythic Evolution," 266.

[28] Rushing, "Mythic Evolution," 271.

[29] Campbell, *Hero with a Thousand Faces*, 581.

[30] Campbell, *Hero with a Thousand Faces*, 581.

[31] Campbell, *Hero with a Thousand Faces*, 97.

[32] Campbell, *Hero with a Thousand Faces*, 97.

[33] The term gift is often used in depth psychology to refer to a new revelation or insight achieved through working with archetypes, especially in dreams.

[34] Rushing and Frentz, *Projecting the Shadow,*13.

[35] Rushing and Frentz, *Projecting the Shadow,*13.

[36] Rushing and Frentz, *Projecting the Shadow*, 17.

[37] Rushing and Frentz, *Projecting the Shadow*, 16.

[38] Doug McAdam, *Freedom Summer* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988): 183.

[39] Rushing, "Mythic Evolution," 264-296.

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VITA

Graduate College
University of Nevada, Las Vegas

Jeffrey James Lavigne

Degrees:
    Bachelor of Arts, Communication Studies, 2009
    University of Nevada, Las Vegas

Thesis Title:
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Thesis Examination Committee:
    Chairperson, David Henry, Ph. D.
    Committee Member, Tara McManus, Ph. D.
    Committee Member, Jacob Thompson, Ph. D.
    Graduate Faculty Representative, John Irsfeld, Ph. D.