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A comparative study of secular accounts of the apocalypse in four contemporary novels:
– Kurt Vonnegut's *Galapagos*, *The Road* by Cormac McCarthy – Nicolas Dickner's
Tarmac, and *Les larmes de saint Laurent* by Dominique Fortier.

Une étude comparative de la représentation séculaire de l'apocalypse dans quatre romans
contemporains: - *Galapagos* de Kurt Vonnegut et *The Road* de Cormac McCarthy -
Tarmac Nicolas Dickner et *Les larmes de saint Laurent* par Dominique Fortier.

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Une étude comparative de la représentation séculaire de l'apocalypse dans quatre romans contemporains: - *Galapagos* de Kurt Vonnegut et *The Road* de Cormac McCarthy - *Tarmac* Nicolas Dickner et *Les larmes de saint Laurent* par Dominique Fortier.

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Abstract

This thesis is a comparative analysis of the apocalypse as a theme in four novels, two American and two Quebecois. Originally a biblical myth, apocalyptic tales are comprised of three narrative aspects defined Bertrand Gervais as Crisis, Time, Meaning / Sense. The four novels are analyzed individually according to these three elements. The American novels correspond to the more traditional pattern of the myth in which the world faces mass destruction followed by the survival of of the chosen-ones who will experience redemption. Contrarily, the two others demonstrate the conceptualization and representation of the traditional myth of the apocalypse towards a modern analogy of transformation of individuals within a profane world; one in which the mythical becomes farcical.

Key words: Apocalypse, crisis, time, meaning, sense, destruction, collective, individual, intertextuality.

Résumé

Cette étude porte sur l'analyse comparée du thème de l'apocalypse dans quatre romans, deux Américains et deux Québécois. Mythe biblique à l'origine, le récit de l'Apocalypse comporte trois éléments narratifs bien définis par Bertrand Gervais soient la Crise, le Temps et le Sens. Les quatre romans sont envisagés, l'un à la suite de l'autre, en fonction de ces trois éléments. Il en ressort que deux d'entre eux correspondent au schéma plus traditionnel du mythe avec sa destruction massive du monde suivi du choix d'élus qui auront la chance de connaître la rédemption. Les deux autres, par contre, démontrent l'évolution du mythe traditionnel de l'Apocalypse vers une analogie moderne de la transformation des individus dans un monde profane, où le mythique devient même risible.

Mots-clés : Apocalypse, crise, temps, sens, destruction, collectif, individuel, intertextualité.

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INTRODUCTION

The basic elements of the apocalyptic narrative include a transformative catastrophe and subsequent revelation of ultimate truth. But apocalypse frequently blurs the boundary between art and life, a tendency that provokes a consideration of the broader social and historical context.

Marlené Goldman, *Rewriting Apocalypse in Canadian Fiction*, 2005.

A myriad of interesting things happens when the Apocalypse becomes a subject of interest. The first steps in research reveal that traditionally it is not only a unique and definitive moment when a world reaches its end and is destroyed by the hand of the Devil, but a complete and voluminous literary genre. For centuries authors from around the world have written a multitude of texts telling diverse tales of the end of the world¹. Contrary to the meaning that popular belief has given to the apocalypse, it contains an important narrative aspect that merits being analyzed and understood as a storyline of

¹ For this thesis, research has been done in both English and French. Some sources have been translated and are available in both languages. The language that most appropriately advances the ideas and arguments in this thesis has been selected and inserted throughout this essay. “Les textes du genre apocalyptique apparaissent en temps de crise au sein de communautés persécutées à cause de leur foi. On en trouve tant dans l’Ancien que dans le Nouveau Testament. Ces livres prétendent apporter sous mode de révélation, une connaissance secrète des événements qui sont en train de se dérouler. Leurs auteurs jettent un regard sur l’histoire en englobant d’un seul mouvement le passé, le présent et l’avenir. [...] Les épreuves du temps présent jouent le rôle de catalyseur pour dévoiler ce plan dont la réalisation est imminente.” Yves Guillemette: http://www.interbible.org/interBible/ecritures/mots/2002/mots_020125.htm.

events, situated in time and space, of the end of the/a world. It is therefore legitimate to consider it as a genre, solely in its literary sense, and not from a theological perspective.

The apocalyptic genre first appeared in its textual form around two centuries before Jesus Christ in the writings of Jewish prophets who announced the coming of a new world following a moment of crisis. Various other anonymous texts, such as the flood or deluge myth, tell of the quasi-annihilation of civilization. From their early beginnings, the modes of the apocalyptic narrative have been twofold; functioning at times as a *revelation* and at others as a *prophesy*. Geneviève Baril defines the apocalyptic as: “*une nouvelle forme d'intervention qui implique la révélation de la fin d'un monde (et le dévoilement de la caducité des biens terrestres) pour instaurer une autre histoire, un monde à venir qu'il faut découvrir*” (Baril, 1999, p. 2). In fact, it's the prophet, a critical character of the apocalypse, whose role is to provide a vision that will lead to the establishment of a new world. At the core of this transformation, however, there is a moment of crisis, of the destruction of an ancient world, represented by some form of catastrophe. Geneviève Baril summarizes this dynamic, which she refers to as the “*conjoncture de l'achèvement et de l'avènement*” (Baril, 1999, p. 4). In tracing the genre back to its origins, it is clear that the moment of crisis finds its origins in the fear and devastation caused by natural disaster or difficult social situations, which is still the case today. These hoary texts most commonly end with some descriptions of tranquility and harmony that arrives after the crisis is over. They also include a multitude of symbols that evoke the passage toward a new world.

Literary versions of apocalypse are transmitted from the Jewish tradition into Catholic and Protestant traditions via the New Testament. The Book of Revelation, more

commonly referred to as the Apocalypse, is probably the most well-known and studied apocalyptic text throughout the modern Occidental world. Written by Saint John of Patmos somewhere between 68 to 95 years after the birth of Jesus Christ, the book concludes the New Testament. In this canonic text, the Apostle John shares his visions of an angel who reveals God's plan for the Second Coming and final Judgment Day to him. John begins by addressing the seven churches of Asia, telling them to remain faithful to God who would eventually come to offer salvation to his believers. To test their devotion, and to signal his arrival, God sends forth seven seals to be opened by the "lamb" or second Christ. The first four seals predict the arrival of the four Horsemen of the Apocalypse who will spark war, death, famine, and plague. The fifth seal calls for patience from the cries of Christian martyrs awaiting their salvation, and the sixth seal causes destruction to the physical world preceding the arrival of Judgment Day. This is considered as the first resurrection. As the great earthquakes destroy approximately one third of both the Earth and mankind, two visions reiterate God's promise of divine refuge for his devote followers during the period of judgment and the promise of eternal salvation. As the seventh and final seal is broken, a brief moment of silence ensues and God's disciples, both living and dead, would "[...] reign with Christ a thousand years" (King James Version, Rev. 20.4) during which time the Beast is chained. At the end of the ensuing millennium, Satan will be freed to return to gather his disciples and the line between good and evil would be clear.

This traditional version of the Apocalypse serves as a platform or reference upon which the intertextuality of the majority of subsequent apocalyptic texts is based. The literary dimension within John de Patmos' version of the Apocalypse reveals itself

through use of powerful images and symbols that were representative of the harsh reality of the times. According to Northrop Frye, “[...] these are the repressed images of a persecuted people coming to the surface, and they are its consciousness of what is occurring” (Frye and Macpherson, 2004, p. 225). Through the use of images and symbols, the apocalyptic genre expresses, on a literary level, the diverse fears within a society at any given point or time in history. It appears as though apocalyptic imagery unveils three major kinds of fear: firstly, the individual’s fear of death; next a social or collective fear of mass-destruction by war; and finally the fear of complete annihilation caused by natural catastrophe. In addition, these terrors can appear in various combinations, as is often the case in more contemporary apocryphal texts.

This visual and symbolic dimension has provoked a multitude of interpretations and adaptations of the apocalyptic theme. It is for this reason that this literary model or matrix has endured and remains so prevalent in the modern world². While the religious component has been diminishing over time, it has been replaced by secular and historical apocalyptic texts with concrete and recognizable links to socio-political historical situations. Although the realism of these texts often provides less creative symbols and imagery than its sacred predecessors, it remains equally significant.

During the twentieth century, two major and destructive global threats occurred: in the 1950’s, fears of nuclear annihilation swept across the planet; and more recently the risks of world-wide ecological catastrophes and overpopulation continue to rekindle the menacing potential of the world’s end. In his chapter *Un monde en sursis*, Lucien Boia comments on social concerns in response to the Cold War: “*On s’est brusquement*

² Lucien Boia’s book, *La fin du monde. Une histoire sans fin*, has assembled a collection of the apocalyptic writings from the Old Testament to the beginning of the twenty-first century and described the different socio-cultural contexts in which they occurred.

réveillés dans un monde dangereux où les périls ne surgissaient pas isolément, mais tous en même temps, additionnant leurs effets. Déséquilibres économiques, sociaux et démographiques; confrontation Ouest-Est; confrontation Nord-Sud; pollution industrielle et radioactive; famines; guerres et menaces de guerre. Tout se tient” (Boia, 1999, p. 219). Much of today’s literature continues to reflect this alarming preoccupation with the end of the world but, since the advent of nuclear power, total destruction has been attributed to the whim of humankind rather than to the wrath of God. Bertrand Gervais adds that: *“La culture occidentale a fait de l’imaginaire de la fin un de ses motifs privilégiés. On en trouve l’écho dans les discours alarmistes de toutes sortes qui s’alimentent, au gré de l’actualité, de développements scientifiques inquiétants, de catastrophes médicales, écologiques et planétaires [...]”* (Gervais, 2009, p. 12). No longer judged and condemned by a vengeful God, humans are now responsible and to blame for their own eventual extinction. The symbolic imagery found in contemporary writings reflects a more modern perspective and bolsters apocalyptic representations through scientific, historical, and sociological references. Over time, the significance of some symbols has either been lost or modified and is sometimes replaced by contemporary symbols, images, or discourse. As certain symbols once provoked fears of the ancient apocalypse, the rhetoric of veritable disasters instills fear into today’s readers. Pascal Fobah examines the effects of written word on his audience:

Ainsi considérées, la menace et la peur participent à la construction de l’effet pathétique du discours, considéré comme les dispositions émotionnelles devant être celles du lecteur. En effet, tout le montage textuel est attaché à attirer l’attention des destinataires, à les persuader de la menace qui les guette et de la

peur qu'ils devraient en avoir. La peur et la menace relèvent, à un niveau énonciatif, de la dimension perlocutoire (effets produits sur le récepteur) du récit apocalyptique (Fobah, 2010, p. 6).

Even if they are indicative of more modern day crises, however, contemporary apocalyptic writings do not all provoke fear in the same way. But, they do tend to focus on the notion of *The End*. Bertrand Gervais states that “[...] *la fin doi[t] être conçue avant tout comme une pensée, une représentation*” (Gervais, 2009, p. 13). In fact, postmodernism, as defined by Jean-François Lyotard and a number of ensuing intellectuals³, is founded, in part, on the philosophical notion of “*fin*”; the end of traditional narratives (metanarratives) that, from a modernist perspective, followed a linear conception of time: beginning, climax (crisis), and end. In its literary context, however, the apocalyptic genre includes an “end” but emphasizes the moment of transition, a moment of destruction/devastation from which a new and uncertain world is born. Although precarious, this new world rejects the premises of its predecessor that had brought about its own demise. From a Postmodernist perspective, “ends” beget “beginnings”, especially those of the triumphant individuals who survive. Many modern fictions depict a world offering a subjective vision of time and space. These apocalyptic narratives speak of radical transformation through the death of an individual or an entire population; a final event that is no longer limited to linear time. The representation of either individual or collective transformation within Occidental contemporary apocalyptic narratives can differ between various North American cultures.

³ Lyotard, Jean-François: *La condition post-moderne. Rapport sur le savoir*. Paris: Éditions Minuit, « coll. Critique », 1979.

Two Cultures: Two Apocalyptic Visions

The objective of this thesis is to conduct a comparative analysis of variations on themes of the apocalypse in two American and two Quebecois novels. The American works include *Galapagos* (2006) by Kurt Vonnegut, an author well known for broaching end-of-the-world themes in a number of his writings, and Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*, also published in 2006. *The Road* was an instant success and made into a film that shares its title. *Galapagos* tells the story of humanity's destruction by social crisis and a strain of bacteria that destroys all women's gametes, rendering them infertile, except for a handful of females in a small group of people who haphazardly find themselves castaways on an island in the Galapagos archipelago, hence the novel's title. McCarthy's novel, *The Road*, depicts the journey of a man and his son in a world that has been destroyed by some unspecified cataclysm, which appears to be the result of a meteorite, or a nuclear war. The Quebecois novels are Nicolas Dickner's *Tarmac* (2009), that chronicles the biological transformation of an adolescent female into womanhood, which, considering the numerous parallels to the myth as incarnated into the references to nuclear explosion, can be interpreted as a personal apocalypse. Although the protagonist suffers no physical or material devastation in the novel, there are numerous references to atomic energy and to recent nuclear bombings which, together associate individual changes with the end of the world. Finally, Dominique Fortier's *Les larmes de saint Laurent* (2012) is loosely based on the life of Baptist Cyparis, who was considered to be the only survivor of the 1902 Mount Pelée eruption that killed more than 30,000 people on the Island of Martinique. From that moment on, Cyparis becomes a traveling circus freak condemned

to relive his experience on a daily basis by retelling his story and displaying the scars that permanently marked him.

Could there be different ways of understanding, approaching, and representing the Apocalypse between sundry cultures, especially those as similar as Canadian and American ones? According to Marlene Goldman, the answer could very well be affirmative: “Few critics have examined Canada’s relationship to the apocalyptic narrative, owing, perhaps, to the United States’ pre-eminent status as the apocalyptic nation – a view that dates back to the Puritan belief that the USA was to be ‘the City on the Hill’ a sacred place that would demonstrate Christ’s spirit on Earth and lead its adherents to Heaven” (Goldman, 2005, p. 5-6). In this American perspective of the Apocalypse⁴, the vast majority of mankind succumbs to the destruction. The notion of a collective or group Apocalypse is central to both of the American novels studied, *Galapagos* and *The Road* whereas in *Tarmac* and *Les larmes de saint Laurent* the apocalypse is represented on another level, a personal one. In this last novel, a volcanic eruption destroys an entire city and its inhabitants, but the incident is isolated and life continues, untouched throughout the rest of the world. The death of millions of human beings is the first criterion differentiating the American and Quebecois novels to be studied in this thesis. In fact, in these selected American examples of the Apocalypse, threat inevitably leads to destruction whereas in both Quebecois novels, threat simply looms over the characters’ heads never really happening, yet remaining a constant source

⁴ Clearly Protestantism represents the predominant religious vision in the United States of America and not that of every author who may have been raised in another religion. Lois Parkinson Zamora notes the presence and influence of the Protestant teachings as early as the American colonies: “For the Puritans in New-England in the 17th century, the literal interpretation of the Revelation located the site of the new heaven and earth in America. The earliest Puritan texts attest to constant attempts to unite apocalyptic theology and American history: the New World is directly associated with the culmination of history.” (Zamora, 1989, p. 8-9).

of imminent danger nonetheless. The American novels are filled with violent scenes that take place quite rapidly, but during which a large number of people are killed by the disaster. These types of incidents rarely occur in either of the two Canadian works of fiction. Instead, the characters have a personal and subjective vision of their own forthcoming demise, or an internal and personal fear of recent historical events. As a result, the American model of the end of the world can be perceived as an absolute and completely irreversible. Those who ascend into God's kingdom survive spiritually, but the world they had known disappears forever. In the two Quebecois novels, the apocalypse is predominately linked to historical events and to various symbols. The threat of destruction emanates from the fears of political, social and even ecological (natural disaster) events over which the characters have no control. These threats and events are much less destructive and ultimate in nature eventhough they influence or shape the destiny of the characters. Finally, since this ultimate ending never really occurs, it remains a phenomenon of the epoque in which the four novels were written. The American novels lean towards science fiction to depict their version of the post-Apocalyptic world. It is important to note that their versions of science fiction develop around a plausible scenario unlike other forms of science fiction in which characters and worlds are completely detached from reality. Marc Atallah explains the phenomenon of self-identification produced by this type of narration:

*Conjecturaux, vraisemblables, référentiels et optimisant l'immersion
fictionnelle : les récits de science-fiction semblent en définitive, posséder
l'ensemble des qualités requises pour que le lecteur – plongé dans leur univers*

– soit apte à se les approprier, à se laisser toucher par les péripéties qui s’y déroulent et à croire, finalement, à ce qui est raconté (Atallah, 2010, p. 7).

Since the American model tends to reconstruct a completely new world following the total destruction of its predecessor, the selected American novels rely on supernatural elements. Unlike their American counterparts, the Quebecois novels are based on a more subjective realism as they speak of plausible personal stories situated in a socio-historical context that is known or available to the reader. These works include symbolic elements that hint at the absurd or unbelievable, and are most often expressed through dream or fantasy, confirming the realistic integrity of the novel. The following table summarizes the major different characteristics in the American and Quebecois novels according to the ways in which they respectively portray the Apocalypse.

TABLE 1
NOTABLE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE AMERICAN AND QUEBECOIS NOVELS STUDIED

Apocalypse in the American novels	Apocalypse in the Quebecois novels
- Collective (large scale)	- Individual (small scale)
- Passive participation	- Active participation
- Mythical	- Historical
- Science-fictional	

In the context of this thesis, the four novels will be analyzed following a narrative sequence specifically related to apocalyptic writings as developed by Bertrand Gervais in his book *Imaginaire de la fin*. Gervais proposes three major steps in the dramatic

structure of eschatological themed novels: *temps*, *crise*, and *sens*. These three terms will be used throughout this text in their English equivalents: time, crisis, and meaning/sense.

First, the study of time offers an understanding of how the revelation functions. Frequently, the narrator already knows the entire story that s/he will be telling. Therefore, s/he can be considered as a type of prophet because of the knowledge possessed concerning events that have yet to come. The way in which time is organized in the narration makes the narrator an important character to study. In the four novels, the narrators are among the chosen few to survive the Apocalypse, although not entirely in the same way. Lois Parkison Zamora already noticed that the narrators in many ancient apocalyptic texts thought and behaved in a manner that was different from the mainstream beliefs of the time: “In both the canonic Hebrew apocalyptic texts [...] and the Christian apocalypses [...], the end of the world is described from the point of view of a narrator who is radically opposed to the existing spiritual and political practices” (Zamora, 1989, p.2). A close study of the narrator in my selected texts will unveil what s/he is opposing (a religious, political, or economical system, etc.), thus providing a means for comparing the novels. By determining the novels’ underlying social critique, the similarities and differences between the novels will become apparent. Quite often the narrator’s thoughts are revealed by the way in which s/he describes the events of the story. The study of time in the four novels shows that the narrator, by way of various narratological detours, possesses knowledge of the chronological order of events, providing him/her with the latitude to comment on events rather than simply experiencing them. Notably, apocalyptic narratives always include a projection into the future since the

plot is based on a projection in time, of a post-apocalyptic world that is often more important than the actual catastrophe itself.

Inevitably, the analysis of time in apocalyptic writings leads to the description of the aftermath of an unexplained crisis because that is the crucial moment that produces change within the novel. This thesis will analyze various modes, the steps in the evolution of the crisis that allows for a clearer understanding of the nature of the change. The Apocalypse is indicative of transformation, at least on a linguistic level and represents a metamorphosis of an imaginary world depicted from the start of the novel. The similarities between the different crises in the four novels are remarkable. First, the catalyst of the crisis is often identified but in the case of the *Road* it is merely implied. Whether catalyzed by bacteria, a meteorite, a nuclear attack, a deadly disease, the end of childhood, or a volcanic eruption, the crisis always specifies and triggers some kind of destruction to which the characters have to react and adapt. Throughout these various apocalyptic representations, some of the traditional elements from John of Patmos's prophecies of the Apocalypse are dismantled and reworked into the narrative. For example, there are numerous references or similarities to: the/a Beast, destruction by fire, Ancient biblical cities, the Horsemen of the Apocalypse, etc. In addition, each crisis consists of an unavoidable degradation of language, which parallels the destruction or devastation of the ancient world. In other words, as the world deteriorates, the language used to describe the destruction is interacting with it, and therefore, suffers the same fate.

Gervais' final step, meaning/sense, completes this comparative study of the apocalyptic theme in two American and two Quebecois novels. The sense can be found in the new signs of the transformed world. What became of the previous world? Essentially,

this is an analysis of the post-apocalyptic world. In the novels, *The Road* and *Les larmes de saint Laurent*, for example, the post-apocalyptic world is the setting of novel. The section dealing with sense is integral to this thesis and will provide insights into literary dream worlds that although not utopias, replace a criticized world. This thesis will investigate the ideas proposed by Marlene Goldman in this chapter's epigraph in attempts to understand the new world and the new truth that the characters hope to obtain. Finally, the collective end-of-the-world narratives, presented in the first two chapters of this thesis, contain very few references to specific historical references, whereas the individual apocalypses, in the two final chapters, are largely based on historical metanarratives to express their meaning. In this thesis, the novels will be paired by their cultural affiliations – first, the two American, followed by the two Quebecois – and they will be addressed individually. During the analyses, however, comparisons will be clearly drawn between all four of the novels creating multiple associations between the works. This will result in a better understanding of the similarities and differences between the novels.

Conclusion

Lucien Boia has studied a large number of end-of-the-world writings throughout history, thus allowing him, in the introduction of his book *La fin du monde. Une histoire sans fin*, to say in a tongue-and-cheek manner, that “*La fin du monde a déjà eu lieu. Plusieurs fins du monde se sont même succédé et d'autres suivront. L'humanité ne fait que se traîner – piteusement – d'une fin du monde à l'autre*” (Boia, 1999, p. 11). Surprisingly, one might dismiss apocalyptic themes as ancient, no longer of concern in

the rational, contemporary world. In modern times, however, scientific and rational advancements have unveiled new threats and reasons to fear the Earth's destruction. Ancient beliefs have been resurrected by Modernism, and even more so, by the Post-Modern perspective that embraces the philosophical notion of "end"⁵.

Beyond any interest aroused by the threat of a real apocalypse, end-of-the-world novels reveal something more profound than just the fear of death. In fact, behind each apocalypse and its symbolic rhetoric of threat, fear, and destruction, lies some criticism of the dominant socio-cultural system that is inherently calling out for radical change. From this point of view, this comparative analysis of two American and two Quebecois novels becomes particularly interesting and unique for several reasons: first, each narrator has a specific situation to denounce, secondly, the different way in which each novel represents change. In addition, intertextuality remains an integral aspect of this essay because all the novels refer to ancient versions of apocalypses that are recycled, modified, and reused.

Any apocalypse is a call for change. What device for transformation do the novels represent? The answer to this question varies greatly among the novels and each proposes a vastly different vision of the world. The American novels tend to focus on a period of mass-destruction followed by a physical metamorphosis of the world, whereas the Quebecois novels focus less on the destruction and more on the transformation itself. Despite a less radical approach, the message in Quebecois literature is no less profound. This thesis will attempt to lift the veil and reveal a few of the variations on the literary theme of the apocalypse in North America.

⁵ Refer to the section on Post-Modernism and the comments regarding "fin" on page 12.

CHAPTER 1

Kurt Vonnegut *Galapagos*

Human beings had much bigger brains back then than they do today, and so they could be beguiled by mysteries.

Kurt Vonnegut, *Galapagos*

The Galapagos Islands, a volcanic archipelago, are located in the Pacific Ocean, west of South America and approximately 600 miles from the equator. In and of itself, the archipelago is a remarkable natural phenomenon. Perched on a geological “hot spot”⁶, at the convergent boundary of colliding tectonic plates, the Islands were forged from the cooling of hot magma. Over the course of a few million years, each island has become the site of unmatched biological diversity, then, drifting slowly towards the east, the archipelago devitalizes and erodes until below sea level⁷. From a certain perspective, the Galapagos could be considered to be *living* islands. However, although they are geologically alive, paradoxically the 48 islands and surrounding reefs are essentially inhospitable to mankind. The Spanish explorers who first set foot on the Islands

⁶ In geological terms, a hot spot is where hot magma melts through a tectonic plate forming a volcanic feature.

⁷ “But, because the crustal plate is in constant motion, the island will eventually move off of the hot spot, thereby making room for a second volcanic island. And a third, and a fourth.... Thus are archipelagos like the Galapagos formed. Islands farthest from the hot spot are older and more eroded while the islands near or on the hot spots are younger and steeper.” <http://people.rit.edu/rhrsbi/GalapagosPages/Vulcanism2.html>

described them as frightening and unworthy of colonization. Furthermore, archeological evidence shows that no indigenous peoples have ever inhabited the Islands. Today, there are, however, about 25,000 people living on four of the islands, while the others remain populated by a diverse collection of plant and animal species known for being unique and well adapted to their harsh environment: the giant Galapagos turtles, who are the namesake of the archipelago; the marine and land iguanas, as well as various birds such as the frigate, the albatross, and the blue footed boobies. Biologist Charles Darwin is frequently credited for making the Islands famous with the publication of his essay, *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection, or the Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life*. Published in 1859, Darwin's radical theories on evolution completely stunned and revolutionized mankind's thinking and perception of evolution.

The Galapagos Islands also lend their name to the eponymous Kurt Vonnegut novel published in 1985, in which mankind experiences a quasi-apocalypse through spectacular metamorphosis. True to his ironic style, bordering on cynicism, Vonnegut sets his story on these living, inhospitable islands where the end of the world and the beginning of a new one intersect. *Galapagos* can be divided into two major sections: the first part entitled "The thing was" includes 38 chapters, while the second part "The thing became", is comprised of 14 chapters. Approximately three quarters of the narrative is thus devoted to the end of the world or, at least, to the end of humanity as it had been known up to that moment. Such a narrative, however, is itself, an aporia because a human narrator would be unable to speak of the end of a humanity to which he, himself, belonged. This significant narrative problem is resolved in *Galapagos* by the use of a phantom or ghost-narrator, Leon Kilgore Trout, who having lived one million years at the

beginning of the novel, is able to recount all the events that lead to mankind's destruction and subsequent lengthy transformation. This narrative strategy includes a narrator from outside the existing fundamental limits of time and space to describe a biological evolution, based on a rational and scientific understanding of the theory of evolution. But, Vonnegut's use of science fiction is juxtaposed with a dialectic. This is why Vonnegut's representation of the Apocalypse, or end of the world, in this novel, must be coupled with eternity, in both its narration and its vision of mankind's evolution.

So what is the story of this Vonnegut novel? It narrates the strange fate of a handful of people (Mary Hepburn, Captain von Kleist, Hisuko Hirogushi, Selena MacIntosh, their daughter Akiko, and six Kanka-Bonos girls) who, after a series of haphazard events that lead to the extinction of the rest of mankind, find themselves exiled to Santa Rosalia, an uninhabited island on the Galapagos archipelago. Over the course of a million years, there is a slow demise of humanity through a biological mutation that transforms human beings into a seal-like creature⁸. Unlike other of Vonnegut's apocalyptic novels, such as *Cat's Cradle*⁹, in which all life is destroyed in only a few days by the dispersion of a dangerously radioactive substance, *Galapagos* does not have a single, violent Apocalypse. Instead, after a quick crisis in which many are killed, the Apocalypse occurs in two steps. First the survivors of the war are unable to reproduce and thus die off over a period of a human lifespan. Second, the handful that survives and reproduces loses its humanity by way of a scientific detour, biological mutation, over the

⁸ It is interesting to note that even the phantom narrator, Leon Trout, has a name that is a combination of both animal, Leon or lion, and fish, trout, much like the future offspring of mankind nearly one million years later.

⁹ *Cat's Cradle* has some similarities with *Galapagos*, such as the departure of the characters to a remote and poor Island in South America where communication with the local population is difficult and apocalyptic events occur. In *Galapagos* the events take place on the island of Santa Rosalia, whereas in *Cat's Cradle* they take place on the island of San Lorenzo.

course of the next one million years. In contrast to more traditional versions of the Apocalypse, *Galapagos* does not portray a devastated and hostile, desert environment void of all forms of life. Robert T. Tally Jr. describes this very specific type of Apocalypse: “[...] unlike Vonnegut’s other apocalyptic novels, *Galapagos* embraces the post human world with a sense of hope and futurity that one normally associates with a utopian promise. With *Galapagos*, Vonnegut offers another apocalypse in his oeuvre, but here it is an apocalypse in the optative mood” (Tally, 2011, p. 114). The optative dimension in *Galapagos* is apparent in the description of post-apocalyptic survival. Yes, humanity, as we know it, dies off within a lifetime and, eventually the few offspring of the survivors evolve into something radically different. It is important to mention that the Apocalypse can occur without being definitive, hence its narrative interest. As Frank Kermode states, “Apocalypse can be disconfirmed without being discredited. This is part of its extraordinary resilience” (Kermode, 1966, p. 8). In his conception of humanity, Vonnegut plays on temporal resilience by stretching time in his novel to its extreme limits.

Although this novel spans a million years, it is not without limitations. As we have seen, the Apocalypse is above all a revelation; the temporal organization of the narrative in *Galapagos* is merely a strategy to defy time and to prophesy the future of humanity. Once the issue of temporal organization has been established, the apocalyptic crisis occurs, shedding light on the philosophical sense or understanding of the causes and consequences of mankind’s annihilation.

Life Eternal for Ghosts

From *Galapagos*'s opening: "The thing was: One million years ago, back in 1986 AD [...]" (Vonnegut, 1985, p. 3), the reader is immediately thrust into a future beyond the reach of his imagination and then returned by a flashback to the year 1986, considered a distant past by a narrator who appears in the first few paragraphs to be omniscient. But logically, who could make such a giant leap in narrative time? By the end of the first chapter, this homodiegetic character, who appears in the form of a first person singular "I", is both the narrator and protagonist of the story. How could a character have survived a period of a million years and then return to tell the tale? The answer lies in the personal history of the narrator, Leon Trout, the son of the character Kilgore Trout, a writer of science fiction who appears in other Vonnegut novels¹⁰. Throughout *Galapagos* the reader discovers that Leon Trout was in the Navy during the Vietnam War, and after having witnessed the atrocities of the conflict, found himself in Sweden where he was beheaded while working as a welder on the construction of the cruise ship *Bahia de Darwin*. Rather than entering the "blue tunnel into the Afterlife" Trout, motivated by curiosity, chooses to remain on earth as a decapitated ghost and to observe the evolution of humanity over the next million years.¹¹ It is precisely from this perspective that the story is told. Although he should have been confined to an internal focus – through which

¹⁰ The name of this character is a deliberate and transparent allusion to the great science fiction writer Theodore Sturgeon, hence the pun between Trout and Sturgeon. He appears in several of Vonnegut's novels as a writer of science fiction that has no audience. He plays a variety of roles: in *Slaughterhouse 5*, for example, he is only a minor character despite his influence on Billy Pilgrim, the novel's protagonist. On the other hand, his character plays a more pivotal role in both *Breakfast of Champions*, and *Timequake*

¹¹ It is interesting to learn that Vonnegut was himself unsure of how to resolve such a technical, narrative challenge. "The technical problem of how to make a story last a million years. Who's going to observe it [point-of-view], because the reader is going to insist upon knowing who the hell is watching this? As an atheist I couldn't have God watch. So technically, it looked hopeless for a long time. The problems were enormous as to how hell to get away with this". <http://www.hanknuwer.com/vonnegut.html>.

he speaks of his life prior to his death - the narrator-character Leon Trout becomes omniscient due to his status as a ghost. He, therefore, knows all the thoughts and feelings of the other characters without ever being seen by them. The narrator makes no mystery of his existence or origins, but waits until the end of the story to fully disclose his situation in a conversation with his father who wants him to join the world of the Afterlife:

I had chosen to be a ghost because the job carried with it, as a fringe benefit, license to read minds, to learn the truth of people's pasts, to see through walls, to be in many places all at once, to learn in depth how this or that situation had come to be structured as it was, and to have access to all human knowledge (Vonnegut, 1985, p. 155).

Leon Trout later adds that: "I have written these words in air - with the tip of the index finger of my left hand, which is also air" (Vonnegut, 1985, p. 181). The narrator is totally free from the physical limitations of time and space, while still possessing a past and a personality. Vonnegut's clever technique, in the form of this completely dematerialized, omniscient character-narrator works on two levels in the novel. As Robert T. Tally Jr. points out, Vonnegut was able to "[...] combine the fantastic with the familiar in interesting ways" (Tally, 2011, P. 116). The narrator in *Galapagos* also holds a second function, most significantly in terms of the apocalyptic narrative: his ability to reveal future events. "The flashbacks and the foreshadowing - as he moves between his story and his history - determine the novel's structure and his narrative style establishes its tone" (Ferguson, 1999, p. 235).

Following this model, Trout's *present* is in the year 1,001,986 from which he goes back in time one million years to 1986 to tell his story in a fairly linear order, starting just prior to the *Bahia de Darwin's* departure cruise to the Galapagos Archipelago. Shortly thereafter, the reader is transported into the story's future by way of another of the narrator's technical artifices, that of placing an asterisk before the names of certain characters for a particular reason: "The two with the stars by their names would be dead before the sun went down. This convention of starring certain names will continue throughout my story, incidentally, alerting readers to the fact that some characters will shortly face the ultimate Darwinian test of strength and wiliness" (Vonnegut, 1985, p. 13). This approach reveals an important aspect of the characters' future, their impending deaths. In addition, the narrator frequently makes what might be referred to as *projections* by foretelling future events that he has been aware of since the beginning of the story. In the narratological terms of Gérard Genette, these various projections might be referred to as prolepses -- "*manoeuvre narrative consistant à raconter d'avance un événement ultérieur*" (Genette, 1969, p. 82). However, this term does not completely comply here since they are located within a larger analepsis, "*évocation après coup d'événements antérieurs*" (Genette, 1969, p. 82). A prolepsis, as defined by Genette, must not have been lived at the time in which it is told. It should appear as pure narrative anticipation. In this case, since the story of upcoming events is located in an analepsis, the narrator knows they happened, and therefore, does not really prophesize. It only gives this impression because at that time, his phantom identity is unbeknownst to the reader. Therefore, Leon Trout is a false prophet.

These projections occur at several pivotal moments for both the characters and story's plot line. For example, Leon Trout frequently uses this technique in his narration to herald a series of important events. First, he announces the sinking of the boat: "The *Bahia de Darwin* was doomed, but not ready to put a star by her name." (Vonnegut, 1985, p. 14), next he vaticinates the death of certain characters: "It was, as Mary Hepburn would say on her eighty-first birthday, two weeks before a shark ate her..." (Vonnegut, 1985, p. 24), and again when "Siegfried von Kleist would survive the sunset, but three hours after that he would be drowned by a tidal wave" (Vonnegut, 1985, p. 31). The narrator speaks not only of the act itself, but of the impact that Mary's future actions would cause: "She would in fact live for thirty more years. She would, moreover, employ certain vital material on the planet in such a way as to make her, without question, the most important experimenter in the history of the human race" (Vonnegut, 1985, p. 29). The reader eventually learns by projections that Mary Hepburn and Captain von Kleist form a couple; that due to a genetic mutation, the skin of Akiko, the daughter of Hisuko, will be covered with a thin fur coat; and finally, he understands the biological mutation suffered by humanity through this description of the species' new morphology:

Their arms have become flippers in which the hand bones are almost entirely imprisoned and immobilized. Each flipper is studded with five purely ornamental nubbins, attractive to members of the opposite sex at mating time. These are in fact the tips of four suppressed fingers and a thumb. Those parts of people's brains, which used to control their hands, moreover, simply don't exist anymore, and human skulls are now much more streamlined on that account.

The more streamlined the skull, the more successful the fisher person
(Vonnegut, 1985, p. 88).

Thus, over the linear narrative of the pre-departure of *Bahia de Darwin*, the occurrence of economic and political turmoil, a popular rebellion, the biological destruction of the vast majority of human beings and the transformation of a small human colony on the island of Santa Rosalia, all provide a glimpse into the fate of humanity. When compared to the characteristics of the prophet as described by Robert L. Thomas in his essay “Literary Genre and Hermeneutics of the Apocalypse”, Leon Trout’s narrative technique gives him the appearance of a prophetic narrator because he knows of events that the novel’s characters have not yet experienced. Initially, the prophet “incorporate[s] prediction of the future into its function” which “entail[s] a degree of authority” and finally, and quite significantly, “the prophet [is] able to perceive the thoughts and the motives of other persons.” (Robert L. Thomas, 2002, p. 83-84). As previously noted, being a ghost allows Leon Trout to know the motivations and thoughts of all the other characters.

At this point, it would be interesting to focus on the notion of the prophet-narrator’s authority. This authority arises from the fact that he knows the future and thus the end of the world in the case of an apocalyptic narrative. In the words of Bertrand Gervais's *L'imaginaire de la fin*,

[u]n des traits récurrents de l'imaginaire de la fin est la présence d'une parole prophétique, détentrice d'une connaissance singulière : instruite des événements

à venir, elle annonce la fin du monde et en décrit le déroulement. Cette parole est une maîtrise des événements et du temps. Au chaos de la fin du monde répond l'anticipation des événements eux-mêmes, leur intégration à un scénario dûment établi (Gervais, 2009, p. 32-33).

Leon Trout knows how most of mankind will become extinct, and how a small group of survivors will procreate into a completely transformed species over centuries of biological evolution. He has control of narrative time. He uses projections to unveil pertinent aspects of the plot, and creates a state of anticipation for the reader. The force of revelation becomes even stronger than that of the anticipation. How could human beings have been able to transform into marine animals covered in fur and with fins? To achieve such a significant transformation of human beings as they were physically in 1986 there must have been a major crisis. It is precisely this moment of crisis that defines the apocalyptic narrative and whose conjectures of destruction strike a collective chord in the human imagination.

The Crisis of the Blind Monsters

In *Galapagos*, just prior to the apocalyptic crisis that occurs, Leon Trout evokes one of his father's novels:

I am reminded one of my father's novels, *The Era of Hopeful Monsters*. It was about a planet where the humanoids ignored their most serious survival problems until the last possible moment. And then, with all the forests being killed and all the lakes being poisoned by acid rain, and all the groundwater made unpotable by industrial wastes and so on, the humanoids found themselves

the parents of children with wings or antlers or fins, with a hundred eyes, with no eyes, with huge brains, with no brains, and on and on. These were Nature's experiments with creatures, which might, as a matter of luck, be better planetary citizens than the humanoids. Most died, or had to be shot, or whatever, but a few were really quite promising, and they intermarried and had young like themselves (Vonnegut, 1985, p. 50-51).

This lengthy quotation is essentially a *mise-en-abyme* of a novel in which the process of destruction and transformation takes place according to Darwin's proposed theory of evolution¹². Two underlying social critiques stand out in this quotation from the novel *The Era of Hopeful Monsters*. In this passage, Kilgore Trout first severely criticizes humans who contribute to the destruction of their natural habitat, to which they will no longer be able to adapt, and who, as they blindly contribute to their own demise, do not experience a moment of crisis. Instead, the summary points the finger directly at environmental causes as the catalyst for the morphological evolution of the human species. In *Galapagos*, it is right after this *mise-en-abyme* that the crisis, predicted and announced by the narrator, Leon Trout, since the beginning of the novel, materializes into a series of destructive actions and events. This moment appears, to appropriate a term from Kermode (1967, p. 72), as a *transitional* period in the "end" times that include both the *before* and the *after* of the crisis. These periods of transition when the monsters

¹² References to Darwin are rather numerous throughout the novel, beginning with the name of the vessel *Bahia de Darwin* that ensures the survival of the few remaining humans. In addition, there are accounts of the research conducted by the English scientist appearing in Chapter 3 when the narrator marvels at his work: "And the name of the his book summed up its pitiless contents: *On the Origins of Species by Means of Natural Selection, or the Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life*" (Vonnegut, 1985, p. 9).

believe only in themselves both blinds them and transforms them into complacent artisans of their own destruction.

While the biblical plagues of the Apocalypse occur in groups of seven, those of the Apocalypse according to Vonnegut are grouped into sets of three. First, there is the death of three characters and what they represent, followed by the occurrence of three destructive events that lead to the end of the world as it had been known up to that moment.

To explain the transitional moment that constitutes the apocalyptic crisis, we must return to the story, which is rather difficult to summarize clearly. As mentioned earlier, *Galapagos* begins in 1986 while the characters are waiting in a hotel for the departure of a cruise advertised as “The Nature Cruise of the Century”. Originally, the cruise was supposed to assemble a diverse group of prominent passengers such as: Mick Jagger, Jackie Onassis, Walter Cronkite, Rudolph Nureyev, Paloma Picasso, Dr. Kissinger, William F. Buckley, etc. whose presence would draw a crowd of the wealthy elite who would pay to bask in the aura of their celebrity. However, a major economic crisis - which will be discussed in detail below - causes all the celebrities to cancel their reservations at the start of the cruise. Only a few unknown people are willing to commit to the cruise:

But now, less than twenty-four hours before the cruise was to begin, there were only six guests, including *James Wait, in the two-hundred-bed hotel. And the other five guests were: *Zenji Hirogushi, twenty-nine, a Japanese computer genius; Hisako Hirogushi, twenty-six, his very pregnant wife, who was a teacher

of ikebana, the Japanese art of flower arranging; Andrew MacIntosh, fifty-one, an American financier and adventurer of great inherited wealth, a widower; Selena MacIntosh, eighteen, his congenitally blind daughter; and Mary Hepburn, fifty-one, an American widow from Ilium, New-York [...] (Vonnegut, 1985, p. 12-13).

Three of these characters, Andrew MacIntosh, Zenji Hirogushi, and James Wait, whom are important in the first part of the novel, die during the apocalyptic crisis. The first is an unscrupulous businessman who is taking the cruise in order to find investors to help him exploit the technological innovations of the second character Zenji Hirogushi, who invented an electronic device, called Mandarax, capable of translating one thousand different languages, and of diagnosing many diseases. Furthermore, it possesses an almost infinite database of quotations on all subjects from famous authors from around the world. Mandarax can be interpreted as the technological incarnation of human language. While trying to flee the hotel in the middle of a mob scene, both MacIntosh the businessman, and Hirogushi the scientist, will be shot by an angry soldier. Later, the third character, James Wait, dies of a heart attack when a Peruvian bomber attacks the bus he is taking to the *Bahia de Darwin*. James Wait, who possesses a multitude of identities, is a sociopath who had already married, robbed and abandoned seventeen women. The child of an incestuous coupling, Wait was a homosexual prostitute before becoming a gigolo and a swindler.

These three characters symbolize the three main causes of humanity's destruction in the second part of Galapagos. Macinstosh symbolizes the wild and triumphant, liberal

economy. Hirogushi represents scientific and technological advances, which are as equally triumphant and tyrannical – by replacing humans in their most basic, relational function, language – and, finally, James Wait who embodies the corruption that tears apart social fiber and prevents effective community. Each of the three individual *plagues* can be extrapolated to three of a much larger scale: global economic crisis, atomic warfare, and mass epidemic.

From the beginning of the novel, the narrator frequently describes the poor state of the global economy and the inequalities between countries that eventually lead to complete global chaos.

It [Ecuador] was bankrupt, and so could no longer buy food from countries with plenty of topsoil [...] and the people were beginning to starve to death. Business was business. Neighboring Peru and Colombia were bankrupt too. [...] Mexico and Chile and Brazil and Argentina were likewise bankrupt – and Indonesia and the Philippines and Pakistan and India and Thailand and Italy and Ireland and Belgium and Turkey (Vonnegut, 1985, p. 15).

This economic scourge, caused by the greed of chrematistic human beings who enrich none but themselves, results in the complete impoverishment of entire populations in already poor countries. Peru is under the dictatorship of leaders who, in attempts to distract the population from their poverty, launch an unjustified war against Ecuador.

A second plague appears in the novel. Throughout the crisis, a Peruvian bomber incessantly bombards the port of Guayaquil, leaving scenes of terror and horror in his wake. As if that was not enough, the Apocalypse ends in an incurable and irreversible,

biological epidemic, which results in permanent loss of humanity on every continent: “Some new creature, invisible to the naked eye, was eating up all the eggs in human ovaries, starting at the annual Book Fair at Frankfurt, Germany. [...] After that [...] they couldn’t have babies anymore” (Vonnegut, 1985, p. 99).¹³ After experiencing a slight fever as the only symptom, women could only confirm their infertility. The virus was impossible to control: “Nor would any way be discovered for stopping the disease. It would spread practically everywhere” (Vonnegut, 1985, p. 99).

The apocalyptic crisis in *Galapagos* is, therefore, produced by an assembly of individual apocalypses - the violent death of three people - with collective apocalypses of what they represent: economic (MacIntosh), scientific (Hirogushi), and social (Wait). This is, quite conventionally an eventful Apocalypse. In other words, one can associate events that occur in the novel to events of the biblical account of the Apocalypse (false religion (liberal economy), war, famine, epidemic, etc.). This eventful Apocalypse, offspring of the monsters of blind hope, is supported and confirmed by another very important loss: that of language.

This thesis has already mentioned the Mandarax, a device invented by Hirogushi, a heartless and soulless scientist. At the death of its creator, Mandarax is recovered and sent to the last human survivors prior to their departure from the continent. As noted earlier, the Mandarax incarnates human language. Not only does it know a thousand languages, he can use this oral communication to diagnose diseases and to interpret the

¹³ Robert T. Tally Jr. comments on the origin of the novel’s epidemic: “This annual event [the Frankfurt Book Fair], though the largest of its kind, would not necessarily be ground zero for the end of the world. But by using the world’s largest book fair as the site where humanity ends, Vonnegut links the profession of writing to his apocalypse, an apocalypse written in the optative mood.” (Robert T. Tally Jr., 2011, p. 125).

meaning of, or comment on certain situations by appropriately quoting various authors. Mandarax acts as a technological usurper of human knowledge and spirit. For example, it knows and has mastered the techniques of ikebana, the traditional art of flower arrangement in Japan, of which Hisako Hirogushi, the wife of the inventor, is a specialist. She is deeply insulted to have her knowledge of this ancient art be questioned by a simple, plastic machine. In addition, Mandarax contributes to the dispossession of mankind's knowledge and its most fundamental means of interaction, language. Contrary to the hopes of the scientist and businessman, Mandarax does not enrich them, but rather embodies the slow loss of language that accompanies the loss of humanity. To understand this loss, we must return to the death of Hirogushi Zenji, the founder of Mandarax, killed by the bullets of an outraged soldier. When he dies, he drops his beloved Mandarax, which he had always kept by his side, and inadvertently leaves the door to the hotel's communications office open. This unobstructed opening allows the six young Kanka Bonos girls to embark on the *Bahia de Darwin*. We learn that they are orphans, the last survivors of a prehistoric tribe of the Amazon, who have fled their habitat destroyed by pesticides to end up in the city to beg. During the civil war in Guayaquil, the orphans are starving in the streets, desperately searching for food. In approaching the Western hotel they hope to find something to eat. This is how they enter the hotel lobby and join the rest of the characters leaving for the island of Santa Rosalia. These girls, however, speak only Kanka Bono, an Amazonia dialect unknown to all, even Mandarax. At first, as it is absolutely impossible to communicate with them, the young Kanka Bonos present a linguist quagmire in the novel, and according to Gervais, "[l]es désordres langagiers [...] mènent à la dégradation d'une langue qui s'opacifie et dont le stade ultime est une

inquiétante matérialité, une langue devenue chose [...]” (Gervais, 2009, p. 120). A thing or an object is exactly what Mandarax is, and this seemingly useful apparatus turns out to be no more than a gadget, completely unnecessary for the survival or evolution of humanity. Mandarax remains on the island for a few years, but is eventually destroyed, consumed, along with oldest survivor of humanity, by a white shark: “She [*Mary Hepburn*]got a hand on it, too, then a great white shark ate both her and Mandarax” (Vonnegut, 1985, p. 179). What possible meaning or sense could come from the absolute destruction of humanity and language in favor of evolutionary mutations? What does this modern Apocalypse reveal?

A Sense of Contradiction

In *Galapagos*, the meaning of Apocalypse, of the destruction of an ancient world to make way for a new one, is mired in a multitude of oppositions prompted by happenstance. In fact, the meaning *is* contradiction, and adds to the general irony of the novel’s tone. In the novel, Destruction provokes birth, an event in which the birth of the new world is an allegory, like the birth of a human being: a giant flood of water precedes the rupture of the bowline, separating the *Bahia de Darwin* from the continent just as a mother’s water breaks prior to birth which culminates in the cutting of the umbilical cord. However, in the novel, the severing of the boat’s moorings, the birth of the human colony, is caused by a violent explosion: “The detonation of dagonite, son of glacco, direct descendant of noble dynamite, caused a tidal tide wave in the estuary [...] Most importantly: It snapped the white nylon umbilical cord which tied the future of humankind to the mainland” (Vonnegut, 1985, p. 131). To add to the sense of contradiction, there are several significant examples of oxymorons throughout the novel.

They allow the transition from a completely dysphoric world – enough to have deserved annihilation – to a euphoric state, but not to a utopia, since the transformation has cost mankind its truest and deepest characteristic, its intelligence, that is referred to, through the use of metonymy, throughout the novel as the big “brain”. Or, as the narrator confesses: “Yet again I trot onstage, the only villain in my story: the oversize human brain” (Vonnegut, 1985, p. 167). In other words, the underlying theme of contradiction inherent in *Galapagos* such as the death of one species giving rise to another and evolution’s favoring of smaller brains over its larger predecessors, sets the stage for an Apocalypse, or end of the world, which leads to the continuity of the human race despite its profound transformation. The new world remains linked to the former in a certain way, since the contradiction, ontologically joins the opposites in equal forces.

La fin, en tant que clôture, implique un antécédent: un monde, un ordre, une loi, détruits par des forces trop vives. Elle implique une transition, le passage à un autre monde, qui se substitue au premier. Parfois, ce changement est instantané et la transition se réduit à sa plus simple expression; il peut être graduel et occuper un certain intervalle, et la transition devient un lieu en soi, un espace intercalaire, tendu vers le nouveau, bien qu’érigé sur les ruines de l’ancien (Gervais, 2009, p. 113).

In this case, Gervais illustrates how space and time dominate the apocalyptic world in *Galapagos*. most notably in the first years after the ship’s passengers leave the continent to a totally new environment until a million years later when their descendants are covered with fur and have fins.

To understand the overall meaning brought about by the contradictions in Vonnegut's novel, we must look at the most important moments in the storyline. First, the end of the world occurs on a young continent, and the new humanity stands on an island overflowing with life, although it is deemed unviable for humans. The story's narrator, with his ghostly faculties, is at times subjective - he has a personal story - and omniscient at others. The founders of the New World are disparate strangers, rather than celebrities united by fame or fortune. Among them, six unknown girls from a tribe on the brink of extinction in the ancient world, the Kanka Bonos, bear the offspring of the new breed of mankind. The daughter of Hisuko Hirogushi, the wife of Mandarax's creator, was born with hypertrichosis, an anomaly in which the skin is completely covered with hair. In Aikiko's case, however, her biological mutation that leads to the transformation of future progeny into seal-like beings comes from the radiation her grandmother had been exposed to during the bombing of Hiroshima several decades before. This is, once again, a birth with roots originating in destruction. Paradoxically, the "big brains" that the narrator holds accountable for the cause of humanity's extermination, were also responsible for the design of the artificial insemination program that would ensure its survival. The first child conceived on the island, a boy embodying hope, is named Kamikaze, the Japanese word meaning "sacred wind". In post World War Two English, however, the term refers to suicide, or self-destruction. And finally, to describe the state of humanity a million years later, the narrator gainsays the anthropological theories about the importance of hands in human evolution: "And all the people are so innocent and relaxed now, all because evolution took their hands away" (Vonnegut, 1985, p. 113).

Most notably, the contradictions are reflected throughout the novel's structure in which two major intertexts oppose each other: the Apocalypse and the theory of evolution, and whose titles even appear in *Galapagos*. In the first chapter, the "I" narrator, Leon Trout, appears for the first time when he compares his story with a biblical text: "If there really was a Noah's ark, and there may have been – I might entitle my story "A Second Noah's Ark"¹⁴" (Vonnegut, 1985, p. 4). In the following chapter, Leon Trout quotes from two of Charles Darwin's essays: *The Voyage of the Beagle* and *On the Origins of Species by Means of Natural Selection, or the Preservation of Favored Races in the Struggle for Life* (Vonnegut, 1985, p. 8-9). Both of Darwin's scientific texts are deeply opposed to the prior religious texts, if not contradictory. The first belongs to the ancient world of mystical beliefs in God as creator of all life and all events. The second refers to a more modern, autonomous world, rationally understood by human science, which contains in itself the elements of its own evolution. The first quickly revolutionizes the world by a major disaster, a flood, while the second establishes a series of minor events which, over time, eventually bring about change. In his article "Surviving the End. Apocalypse, Evolution, and Entropy in Bernard Malamud, Kurt Vonnegut, and Thomas Pynchon", Peter Freese discusses how Kurt Vonnegut establishes a significant link between two major interpretive myths of human history:

He can apply the law of natural selection with a vengeance and devise an apocalyptic scenario that does not use the common motif of an all-encompassing sudden destruction but thrives on the even more frightening theme of an

¹⁴ Although not often viewed as such, Noah's Ark is in fact an Apocalypse. From The Book of Enoch in the Old Testament, this text begins with the story of Noah's visions of world destruction by angels who are preparing a flood. Noah then gathers two of every kind of animals and brings them on an ark to preserve their existence after the world's destruction.

irreversible regression of the predatory man into a harmless and brainless link in the natural food-chain (Freese, 1995, p. 168).

At this point, a definitive meaning of the Apocalypse in *Galapagos* emerges: any change fast or slow, yields destruction *and* creation, a loss and a gain. The contradiction allows these opposites to come together, and to create a *comic* perspective on a highly tragic event, like the destruction of humanity, caused by humans themselves. Joseph W. Meeker explains the usefulness of comedy in an apocalyptic tragedy:

The comic point of view is that man's high moral ideals and glorified heroic poses are themselves largely based upon fantasy and are likely to lead to misery or death of those who hold them. In the world as revealed by comedy, the important thing is to live and to encourage life even though it is probably meaningless to do so. If the survival of our species is trivial, then so is the comedy (Meeker, 1996, p. 160).

Thus, in *Galapagos* the Apocalypse's provocation of the regression of mankind to a more primitive, animal state by reducing the size of the human brain is comic. A kind of counterintuitive surprise awaits the reader: the abatement of pure intelligence (technology, science, language, etc.), leads to a more cohesive euphoric society for the post-human progeny: "Subsequent generations, though, after the last of the old people died, would become a family which included everyone. It had a common language and a common religion and some common jokes, and songs, and dances, and so on [...]" (Vonnegut, 1985, p. 169). Vonnegut's apocalyptic motif allows him to create a new

world with an outcome as comic as unexpected, and which Robert T. Tally Jr. sums up as: “The result is a new humanism, without humans” (Tally, 2011, p. 114). This type of humanism is the ultimate contradiction. It is void of complacency, yet it still appears to favor, or encourage, life come hell or high water. The seed of this perspective is planted in the novel's epigraph, itself a contradiction considering the tragic fate of its author: “In spite of everything, I still believe that people are good at heart. – Anne Frank (1929-1944)”. Most of all, the novel maintains hope for mankind, in spite of mankind, as Anne Frank observed. Such hope, however, is scarcely present in the post-apocalyptic world of *The Road* by Cormac McCarthy.

CHAPTER 2

Cormac McCarthy *The Road*

In the evening the murky shape of another coastal city, the cluster of tall buildings vaguely askew.

He thought the iron armatures had softened in the heat and then reset again to leave the buildings standing out of true. The melted window glass hung frozen down the walls like icing on a cake. [...]

In the night sometimes now, he'd wake in the black and freezing waste out of softly colored world of human love, the songs of birds, the sun.

Cormac McCarthy, *The Road*

The storyline in *The Road* may appear rather simple after the analysis of *Galapagos* in which many characters experience a multitude of apocalyptic events leading to a radical transformation of their physiological makeup over the following million years. *The Road*, the tenth novel by Cormac McCarthy, published in 2006 and winner of the Pulitzer Prize in 2007, depicts a father and son - the reader never knows their true names or identities- wandering in what appears to be the United States of America in the aftermath of some event or series of events that lead to the near annihilation of all forms of biological life. Although the existence of other humans is dramatized throughout the novel, only six other developed characters actually appear during their pilgrimage. The novel does not specifically describe or detail the causes or actual occurrence of the Apocalypse. It does, however, provide a simple and vague

description of one such potential moment that the father character remembers from about ten years earlier: “A long shear of light and then a series of low concussions” (McCarthy, 2006, p. 52). What mysterious event is it that leads to this near destruction of the world? The impact of a meteorite or that of nuclear warheads? The novel does not resolve this question but, one thing for certain, the consequences are tragic. As in *Galapagos* when political problems occur in Guayaquil, the characters consider the same two possibilities of destruction “He [the boat’s captain] said that the human beings had every reason to expect more such planet smashers at any time, and should devise apparatus for distinguishing between enemy missiles and meteorites” (Vonnegut, 1985, p. 76). The explosion resulting from the collision of a meteorite with the earth and the explosion of a nuclear missile are part of a contemporary collective imagination of the most probable causes of a more modern Apocalypse. Yet, in Vonnegut's novel it is these slow progressive changes, occurring over tens of thousands of years that eventually cause a veritable end of the world. In *The Road*, the Apocalypse is more of a cliché, a sudden and total destruction. The changes occur very rapidly. During the initial impact, seen from afar by the narrator, plants are either reduced to dust, burned, or petrified. Animals and humans suffer the same fate, their mummified corpses are littered everywhere along the road. In the cities, buildings of glass, steel and concrete are twisted and frozen in their eternal ruin.

With vivid descriptions and details hauntingly reminiscent of scientific jargon¹⁵, the setting of the novel portrays what would appear to be a nuclear winter or the

¹⁵ See the following articles on “Nuclear Winter” and “Impact Event”:
<http://www.newscientist.com/article/dn11287-nuclear-winter-may-kill-more-than-a-nuclear-war.html> and
<http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2002/04/020409074322.htm>.

aftermath of an impact with a substantial meteorite. Regardless of its true nature, the explosions caused the displacement of several tons of earth and rock high up into the stratosphere. The air loaded with dust and ash allows only traces of pale sunlight to filter through to the earth's surface and causes the snow and rain to become gray. Given this dense layer of dust blocking the solar heat rays, the atmospheric temperature suddenly drops 20° Fahrenheit, resulting in further destruction of the food chain. With a reduced number of natural food sources, the rate of starvation increases for some of the survivors. As soon as the wind blows, it carries with it clouds of dust and ash that are re-deposited on all surfaces, inside or outside, leaving the landscape dull shades of gray. Moreover, the original collision appears to have knocked the earth from its equilibrium provoking constant and uncontrolled fires, large sea storms, and earthquakes.

Unexpectedly, the novel's aftermath leaves several survivors, one of whom is pregnant. Immediately following the "shear of light", there is a brief description of the father character's wife, who is standing right behind him: "She was standing in the doorway in her nightwear, clutching the jamb, cradling her belly in one hand. What is it? She said. What is happening?" (McCarthy, 2006, p. 53) In this scene, McCarthy brings together images of mankind on the brink of its demise and those of a child just prior to being born. At the heart of the destruction of humanity is the birth of a child who will become the center or focus of the novel's narrative. Unlike his father, the child has known no other world than the post apocalyptic one into which he was born. These two characters, therefore, possess completely different visions, and understandings of the world where they travel along the devastated and dangerous road.

The novel's narrative unfolds in a predominantly linear fashion, much like the road itself they travel. A father and son wake up beside a road on which they have been traveling as they head south in hopes of finding a more favorable climate somewhere along the coast. Their living conditions are very difficult. Although they are able to survive, they must continually seek shelter and food. In the post-apocalyptic world, all the elements are against them. It is perpetually very cold and dark and their clothes are falling apart, leaving them poorly protected from snow and rain. They transport their meager possessions in a grocery cart when the terrain permits, or else in a backpack. The road is long, hundreds of miles, and filled with various pitfalls. But the greatest adversity is undoubtedly the encounters with other survivors. At every opportunity, the protagonists flee human encounters because, in these times of famine, men have become murderers, thieves, and above all, cannibals. The notion of the maxim, a *dog eat dog world*, appears several times throughout the novel in the various scenes of cannibalism. In the novel, there are two types of *dogs*, characters referred to as "bad guys" - those who eat human flesh - and the "good guys" - those who do not. Under such conditions, the father's first and foremost function is to defend his son, the embodiment of fragility, in an otherwise brutal world full of constant threat. Although he is inherently good, the father does not hesitate to rob or even kill those who attack his son or himself. To the son, his father embodies both physical and mental strength. From the beginning of the novel, however, it becomes clear that the father's infallibility is no more than that of a son idolizing his father. Under the façade of this fallibility, his weakness escalates in the form of a cough that portends the worst. In a heart-wrenching scene at the end of the novel, he dies, leaving his son alone to continue the road south, at the mercy of the dangerous new

world. The child eventually meets up with some “good guys” who welcome him into their family, offering him protection, or even salvation.

Time as an Effigy

In a fairly conventional manner, the narrative of *The Road* takes place in the past, following a series of events that have already occurred when the narrator tells the story. S/he has no true identity, and is *extra* and heterodiegetic, meaning simply that the narrator is *outside* the story s/he is telling, and in which s/he does not participate in any way. However, even if the perspective is from outside of the narrative and distanced enough vis-à-vis the story, the narrator focuses primarily on the actions and thoughts of the father character.

The story itself proceeds linearly, as seen in the depiction of how time passes in this quote from the first page of the novel: “Tolling in the silence the minutes of the earth and the hours and the days of it and the years without cease” (McCarthy, 2006, p. 3). The events are told in their logical sequence, starting with the awakening of characters along the road, following their day-to-day travels, and eventually leading to the father’s death and the son’s rescue at the novel’s culmination. There are only a few disturbances in time throughout the diegesis whose primary motive is that of *quest*. The characters follow the road in order to reach a presumably more favorable climate in the south. This structure of the quest implies they will have to face various ordeals, for example as they travel through diverse spaces (mountains, plains, cities) to get there. Each place offers unique challenges for survival. Throughout this quest, time represents a projection into the future, and in the process of meeting projected goals, such as arriving in the south, the father becomes a guide. By examining the father’s concern for arrival at their final

destination, his true motive becomes apparent: to protect his child and to find the “good guys”; therefore, increasing the probability of his son’s long-term survival. In this post-apocalyptic world, conventional and objective time markers are uncertain: “He thought the month was October, but he wasn’t sure” (McCarthy, 2006, p.4), or when he states that it was “Late in the year. He hardly knew the month” (McCarthy, 2006, p. 29). Perception of time changes from long term to immediate or short term, and each activity itself forms the chain with ensuing events: time here is only in the moment. “An hour later, they were on the road” (McCarthy, 2006, p. 5). This notion of *quest* highlights the existence of a future and potentially better world but one of which the child does not know its past.

Through a series of analepses, like those of the father’s dreams and memories, the narrative travels back into the pre-apocalyptic world, highlighting the stark contrast between the gray and the cold of the boy’s world, and the abundant life and color of the father’s dreams of the ancient world:

In dreams his pale bride came to him out of a green and leafy canopy. Her nipples pipeclayed and her rib bones painted white. She wore a dress of gauze and her dark hair was carried up in combs of ivory, comb of shell. Her smile, her downturned eyes. In the morning, it was snowing again. Beads of small gray ice strung along the light wires overhead. (McCarthy, 2006, p. 18)

These dreams evoke and recreate positive feelings and sensations, that are absent from the world of post-apocalyptic devastation. Yet dreams are severely criticized by the narrative because they appear like a Siren’s song that might incite apathy and even lead

to death: “He said the right dreams for a man in peril were dreams of peril and all else was the call of languor and of death” (McCarthy, 2006, p. 18). Similarly, memories, or daydreams, strike the father with their clarity and vivacity:

He could remember everything of her save her scent. Seated in the theatre with her beside him, leaning forward, listening to the music. Gold scrollwork and sconces and the tall columnar folds of the drapes at either side of the stage. She held his hand in her lap and he could feel the tops of her stockings through the thin stuff of her summer dress. *Freeze in the frame.*¹⁶
Now call down your dark and your cold and be damned (McCarthy, 2006, p. 18-19).

The phrase highlighted in the above quotation is pivotal in understanding the way in which time functions in *The Road*. This is a representation of a moment frozen within the movement of time like the road itself. Although the characters follow the road south, time in the novel is not always in motion, either in the present or past, it is sometimes static, stopping completely in the novel. Stripping time of its normal and fluid nature adds a morbid or mortiferous dimension to the novel. The vivid memories of feelings the father felt for his wife become a frozen image of a bustling but somehow eternal past. Throughout the story, several other images appear of objects that are merely representations of what they once were. The frozen objects symbolize the absoluteness of the eternal nature inherent in loss or death. For example, when the characters find apricots at the grocery store, the narrator describes the fruit as “wrinkled effigies of themselves” (McCarthy, 2006, p. 22). And the devastation of the once thriving flora is

¹⁶ I have taken this phrase out of italics for emphasis.

expressed in a similar manner at the end of the novel: “A vast low swale where ferns and hydrangeas and wild orchids lived on in ashen effigies [...]” (McCarthy, 2006, p. 276).

An effigy is an image of someone or something, a representation of a living entity with a past and a future, that has been captured in an artistic illustration of its essence, removed from the normal progression of time. Like a painting, illustration, photograph, or sculpture, each motif is forever still. There are several types of this kind of representation in *The Road* that evoke death’s ability to stop time. First, dreams, which have already been mentioned in this essay, are described as the direct line of communication between the living and the dead. But during the ephemeral moment of transition between dreaming and consciousness, time is temporarily frozen, followed by destruction: “And the dreams so rich in color. How else would death call you? Waking in the cold dawn it all turned to ash instantly. Like certain ancient frescoes entombed for centuries suddenly exposed to the day” (McCarthy, 2006, p. 21). This type of scenario is reproduced when the father reveals the following image with the light of the flame. Like the flash of a camera or bright sunshine, the light captures an image: “He shielded the glare of it with his hand and when he did he could see almost to the rear of the box. Human bodies. Sprawled in every attitude. Dried and shrunken in their rotted clothes. The small wad of burning paper drew down to a wisp of a flame and then died out [...]” (McCarthy, 2006, p. 47). These forms of still life images also appear along the road in broad daylight, exposed as the characters continue their journey and observe numerous scenes of mass death: “By day, the dead impaled on spikes along the road” (McCarthy, 2006, p. 33): or in this more detailed scene of the remains of murder and evisceration of human beings, which notably contains the artistic term *frieze*, notably a homonym of the word freeze:

Shapes of dried blood in the stubble grass and gray coils of viscera where the slain had been field-dressed and hauled away. The wall beyond held a frieze of human heads, all faced alike, dried and caved with their taut grins and shrunken eyes. They wore gold rings in their leather ears and in the wind their sparse and ratty hair twisted about on their skulls. The teeth in their sockets like dental molds, the crude tattoos etched in some homebrewed woad faded in the beggared sunlight. [...] The heads not truncheoned shapeless had been flayed of their skins and the raw skulls painted and signed across the forehead in a scrawl and one white bone skull had the plate suture etched carefully in ink like a blueprint for assembly. (McCarthy, 2006, p. 90)

In these scenes where time is frozen in the form of death, there are also many detailed descriptions of the surrounding landscapes that lay equally in ruins. The narrator often halts the journey south in a devastated town, again emphasizing its immobility. Life has withdrawn from the space, causing time to stop. Moreover, a *mise-en-abyme* in the form of a painting, supports the static representations already discussed. The narrative describes the entrance to the underground shelter where the father and son spend a few days and compares it directly to a work of art: “The faintly lit hatchway lay in the dark of the yard like a grave yawning at judgment day in some old apocalyptic painting” (McCarthy, 2006, p. 155). Here, the association between the painting and its ability to freeze time is unequivocal.

The language used throughout the novel also reflects this temporal phenomenon. When time progresses in linear or chronological order, its language must remain

consistent with movement. In other words, the conversation between father and son accompanies the events as the father tells pre-apocalyptic stories to his son. He asks and answers questions, he expresses his intentions, and he explains various phenomena, etc. On the other hand, in moments of crisis, such as the following example when a fire comes dangerously close to them, the father requires his son to “Make a list. Recite a litany” (McCarthy, 2006, p. 31). His language is no longer fluid, following the momentum of the action. Instead, it adopts an immobile posture, one of fixed form. The novel’s narration is, in and of itself, an example of such a form. Throughout the story, the father and son repeat that they are “good guys” and they “carry the fire”¹⁷; often enough that their words could be considered an incantation or mantra. Such repetition contributes to the sense of the stopping of time, and heightens the immutable status of the characters.

Again, the narrative of *The Road* has no major temporal disturbances. Instead, time is juxtaposed throughout the novel with space in movement. This gives the diegesis its realistic and linear aspects. However, through occasional visions, effigies, paintings, frescoes, or fixed forms of language, time stops, imitating death, which is above and beyond history. Rune Graulund explains this analogy:

As with place, so with time, for though history is still present in *The Road*, it is only as a fading memory. It is not a *totally* static world, yet it is one that obviously soon will be, a world in which time has stopped and a world in which progress and evolution are no longer to be found (Graulund, 2010, p. 60).

¹⁷ These references can be found in at least four moments throughout the novel: (p. 37, p. 83, p. 216, and p. 278-279).

Professor of American literature, literary theory and semiology at UQAM, Bertrand Gervais' essay *L'imaginaire de la fin*, also describes the notion of frozen time: “*La figure épurée d'un tel homme, déambulant entre les décombres, parle d'un temps en dehors du temps [...]*” (Gervais, p. 12). Alternating between linear time – chronological and complete events and experience – and eternal time – that of death – the narrative represents an imminent, apocalyptic moment (time), when all mankind's temporal references evaporate before this endless destruction.

Crisis: Apocalyptic Sprawl

Paradoxically, however, the schema of the Apocalypse in *The Road* is ever-present enough to the point of having its own unique form of time. In addition, the novel also displays a wide range of topics about time with direct reference to biblical texts. These allusions are difficult to miss throughout the text, and appear as early as the first page:

[...] on the far shore a creature that raised its dripping mouth from the rimstone pool and stared into the light with eyes dead white and sightless as the eggs of spiders. It swung its head low over the water as if to take the scent of what it could not see. Crouching there pale and naked and translucent, its alabaster bones cast up in shadow on the rocks behind it. Its bowels, its beating heart. The brain that pulsed in a dull glass bell. It swung its head from side to side and then gave out a low moan and turned and lurched away and loped soundlessly into the dark. (McCarthy, 2006, p. 3-4)

This creature is born of a state of flux in the father's imagination somewhere between his sleeping and conscious states. The Beast lurks on the border of the character's consciousness, much like it lies on the edge of the novel, adding to its apocalyptic tone. Given the numerous religious references throughout the novel¹⁸, (see page 65 of this thesis), this creature can be compared to various frightening creatures or even to the Beast that appears in the genre of the canonical Apocalypse, and which can be found in various forms dating back to the earliest biblical writings. One could even say that the novel opens under the auspices of the Beast because its novelistic counterpart appears in the first few lines of text. In the vision, the Beast moves between the aquatic and terrestrial worlds. More precisely, it primarily exists at the junction between water and land; on the shores of a lake, itself housed in a granite cave. It emerges from the water, crouching along the banks eventually disappears into obscurity.

In his essay, Richard Bauckham explains the striking similarities between the characteristics of the Beast from the Book of John and that of *The Road*: "*En outre, la conjonction de la Bête de la mer et de la Bête de la terre (13, 1.11)*¹⁹ *fait écho au couple traditionnel des monstres, Léviathan et Béhémoth, qui règnent respectivement sur la terre et sur la mer. Ainsi les figures des Bêtes représentent essentiellement des forces primordiales du mal [...]*" (Bauckham, 2006, p. 106). What is this evil represented by the Beast at the beginning of Cormac McCarthy's novel? The biological dimension of the Beast's organic "flesh" strikes the reader. In addition to images of bones, various organs and entrails are also mentioned: the brain, heart, eyes, and intestines. The deterioration of

¹⁸ At one point in the novel the father tells his son, "My job is to take care of you. I was appointed to do that by God". Several other biblical references can be found on pages 65 and 66 of this thesis.

¹⁹ The numbers in parentheses correspond to various verses from the Book of John in the New Testament.

the creature's fragile and corruptible humanlike body parallels the ailing physical condition of the father whose life is in peril. A few pages later, the father withdraws from his son to the center of a crack in the bedrock where he assumes the same position as the Beast in a bout of tussis: "He descended into a gryke in the stone and there he crouched coughing and he coughed for a long time" (McCarthy, 2006, p. 11). This is the first sign of symptoms of the disease from which he will eventually die. Moreover, at the end of the novel, just a few hours before his death, the father awakes from a dream that is reminiscent of a passage at the start of the novel: "He woke in the darkness, coughing softly. [...] Drip of water. A fading light. Old dreams encroached upon the waking world. The dripping was in the cave" (McCarthy, 2006, p. 280). The Beast is no longer a figment of his imagination as it has completely usurped him. The father has become a Beast whose body is breaking down. Unlike in the traditional Apocalypse, this hero will not overcome the evil in *The Road*. In the last instance, the Beast does not appear here as a wicked, frightening, nor external creature, but rather an insidious and sneaky evil existing just below the surface of consciousness - disease - which goes about its destructive work tirelessly and without any real opposition.

To complete this account of apocalyptic imagery, Cormac McCarthy's novel contains many scenes of devastation caused by fires and earthquakes: "It neared, growing louder. Everything trembling. Then it passed beneath them like an underground train and drew away into the night and was gone. [...] It was an earthquake. It's gone now" (McCarthy, 2006, p. 28). The natural disasters in *The Road* are similar to those in the apocalyptic Book of John that, in conjunction with images of the cities in ruins along the father and son's journey, illustrate total and utter desolation of both nature and of

mankind's creations. Along with the seven seals, trumpets, and vials, the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse announce and bestow many evils upon humanity: destruction by war, death, famine, and plague. In the following quote, Bauckman interprets several passages from the Book of the Apocalypse concerning several of these disasters that are found in *The Road*:

Le chapitre 18 amplifie l'image de la ville assiégée et brûlée (cf. spécialement 18, 8 : « peste... famine... consumée par le feu ») [...] et que la fumée de son incendie monte perpétuellement. (19,3). [...] Le tremblement de terre est celui qui accompagne la théophanie du Dieu saint venant pour le jugement final. Le feu [...] devient au chapitre 18 le feu du jugement divin [...] La fumée de Babylone monte pour toujours comme celle d'une Sodome apocalyptique plongé dans un éternel étang de feu et de soufre (Bauckham, 2006, 33).

As in the biblical version of the Apocalypse, these hecatombs leave a radically different world in their wake. In *The Road* the ruins are characteristically omnipresent, but are noted to be on an unusually massive scale: "Such ruins are usually local phenomena, sites of uncertainty in a world that remains largely familiar if not entirely the same. But, what if the condition of ruin affected the entire human world? In that case, our entire sense of self, memory and place would dissolve" (De Bruyn, 2010, p. 780). This dissolution of identity is expressed in various ways in the novel primarily through humanity's regression to more animal behavior and through the loss of language.

The Book of Revelation states that after the destruction, the world would become a desert inhabited only by wild and dangerous animals: “[...] *on nous dit aussi que le site de la ville devient un repaire pour les animaux du désert (18, 2)*” (Bauckham, 2006, p. 33). In *The Road*, this animal presence exists, but in a roundabout and unexpected way. There are little to no surviving animals except for a handful of humans. In this new world, however, there is a form of regression that condemns them to wander the earth, leaving the civilized, sedentary, modern way of life behind them, returning to a more primitive, nomadic lifestyle. They must forage to eat like their hunter-gatherer ancestors did during the Paleolithic period, and cook their food and warm themselves by a fire, when they are able to make one. In addition, the major taboos from which civilized society distanced itself, no longer exist in the post-apocalyptic world. For example, when he sees his son threatened by a man who takes him hostage and puts a knife to his throat, the father does not hesitate to kill the stranger, thereby violating the taboo of murder. The physical description of the attacker also leaves no doubt about the powerful bestial presence that has been rekindled within mankind: “Eyes collared in cups of grime and deeply sunk. Like an *animal*²⁰ inside a skull, looking out the eyeholes” (McCarthy, 2006, p. 63). The impetus of this feral portrait dominates the scene. Despite the father’s attempts to reason and discuss with the man, offering safety to him if he were to leave them alone, the stranger throws himself on the child and the father shoots him without any hesitation. Furthermore, the fear expressed by the boy in response to this event is also described using a simile that compares him to an animal: “The boy, so frail and thin through his coat, shivering like a dog” (McCarthy, 2006, p. 67).

²⁰ I have put the word into italics for emphasis.

This regression to animality, to a pre-civilized, human condition, resonates in the very heart of the novel's apocalyptic dimension throughout the numerous scenes of cannibalism. The father and son are considered "good guys" constantly fleeing the "bad guys", small bands of people who prowl the landscape looking for other human beings to eat: "men who would eat your children in front of your eyes" (McCarthy, 2006, p. 174). Cannibalism categorically divides the good from the bad, the civilized from the human animals. Such cannibalistic *mise-en-scènes* occur twice in the novel and both scenes are described like paintings, suspensions of time, as discussed earlier. In the first account, the father, while searching a house in the hope of finding food, opens a trapdoor in the floor and looking inside discovers: "Huddled against the back wall [are] naked people, male and female, all trying to hide, shielding their faces with their hands. On the mattress lay a man with his legs gone to the hip and the stumps of them blackened and burnt. The smell was hideous" (McCarthy, 2006, p. 111). Shortly after witnessing the atrocity, the father and son see a few dangerous looking men arrive, and to whom the captives appear to belong. Although there are no explicit scenes depicting the consumption of human flesh, such a conclusion is imposed or confirmed by the ensuing conversations between the boy and his father. Through the repetitive and anguished questions of the child and the father's forced admission, the reader understands that this is undoubtedly a scene of cannibalism. "Are they gonna eat them? / I dont know. / They're going to eat them, aren't they? / Yes" (McCarthy, 2006, p. 127). The trapdoor frames a world in which human being are reduced to human flesh, to animals, to meat, temporarily stored in a larder, prior to their consumption. For the partly dismembered captive, the process has already begun. Later, the text broaches the actual consumption of human flesh in this scene:

“What the boy had seen was a charred human infant, headless and gutted and blackening on the spit” (McCarthy, 2006, p. 198). The baby, like a lamb, had been dressed, skewered, and roasted in such a way that was clearly for the sole purpose of consumption. These most striking scenes determine the boundary between good and evil in the (post)apocalyptic world which, a border, when crossed, reverts mankind back to its animalistic origins. In *Galapagos*, the transformation towards a smaller brain and more fish-like anatomy is considered as evolution, whereas in *The Road*, the return to more animalist behavior like cannibalism is seen as regression. Moreover, this primitive violence reminds the father of tragic memories of the consequences of such behavior in events prior to the beginning of the story: the suicide of the man's wife, the boy's mother. These acts of predictable violence terrorized the son who no longer wished to fall victim to or witness to such atrocities and the father says: “They are going to kill us, rape us and eat us and you wont face it” (McCarthy, 2006, p. 56). For this reason, the father teaches his son how to commit suicide in case the “bad guys” ever apprehend him: “If they find you, you are going to have to do it. Do you understand? Shh. No crying. Do you hear me? You know how to do it. You put it in your mouth and point it up. Do it quick and hard” (McCarthy, 2006, p.113). Although he feels resentment towards his wife for having committed suicide, the father believes that self-destruction is preferable to murder and slow, piecemeal consumption by their captors. For H. Thomas Schaub, the destruction of society via the transgression of fundamental taboos itself leads to self-destruction: “In the face of apparent meaninglessness and of the violence loosed by the struggle for survival, the man's wife had chosen suicide” (Schaub, 2009, p. 158). Thus, the collective and

original apocalypses are riven into various forms of regressions that for some, like for the wife, lead to voluntary and complete self-destruction.²¹

This social destruction is inevitably accompanied by the destruction of the basic element of human society: language. As in *Galapagos*, *The Road* illustrates a systematic destruction of language, unique to the apocalyptic crisis according to the model proposed by Bertrand Gervais²². The erosion of language is perceived as of the first lines of the novel when the reader learns that the characters do not possess proper names – with one exception that will be discussed later in this essay. In fact, the man is simply referred to as “Father” and the child as “the boy”²³. This style of nomenclature dissolves any personal or individual identity in two fairly obvious ways: depersonalization and generalization. These characters are nobody and everybody at once. They boil down to little more than their role and function. Although each character possesses a unique and identifiable personality, there is little to no discursive markers present in most of the prose. They are simply forms, the archetype of humans on the road to extinction. This dissolution of identity caused by the Apocalypse is also repeated by the loss of the fathers various remaining traces of identity. The language used to explain the father’s personal past come by way of objects and symbols rather than by language or discourse within the novel. An example of this symbolic event is detailed and precise:

He’d carried his billfold about till it wore a cornershaped hole in his trousers. The one day he sat by the roadside and took it out and went through the contents.

²¹ One way to analyze time in the novel is to see it as regressing rather than stopping. However, the process of temporal regression is natural, not human. Essentially, the narration evokes a flashback going as far as the creation of the universe, to a moment of original stillness: “Perhaps in the world’s destruction it would be possible at last to see how it was made. Oceans, mountains. The ponderous counterspectacle of things ceasing to be. The sweeping waste, hydroptic and coldly secular. The silence” (McCarthy, 2006, p. 274).

²² See p. 30 in chapter 1.

²³ The lack of proper names is not a habit in Cormac McCarthy’s novels, as Ashely Kunsu remarks: “More typical of McCarthy are the more than seventy named characters of *Blood Meridian*” (Kunsu, 2009, p. 60).

Some money, credit cards. His driver's license. A picture of his wife. He spread everything on the blacktop. Like gaming cards. He pitched the sweatblackened piece of leather into the woods [...] (McCarthy, 2006, p. 51).

In addition to the direct loss of the character's identity, the destruction of language also accompanies the devastation of the world. The symbiosis between language and existence cannot be clearer than in the following exert: "The world shrinking down about a raw core of parsible entities. The names of things slowly following those things into oblivion" (McCarthy, 2006, p. 88).

There is also the phenomenon of language that is constantly obscured by silence. For example, the father and son speak very little to each other, only enough for the father to teach his son what he absolutely must know to survive and nothing more. Their discussions also take place largely in the interrogative mode, because the father wants to know if his son has understood and integrated the information he receives. Much like his father, the son constantly asks questions, but in order to express his curiosity about the world around him. Since they rarely meet face to face with other characters, their opportunities for discourse remain limited to their familiar mode of exchange. There is, however, one significant encounter that illustrates the value of language. While walking down the road, the characters see a man sitting on the roadside quite a distance farther down the road. Distrust and fear are the father's first reactions as he suspects the man to be a decoy. From closer range, the father and son realize that this is an old, blind man who is fragile and afraid. The child is fascinated by the encounter with another human being and wants to take care of him. On the other hand, his father, hindered by mistrust and fear, forbids him. He first wants to know who the old man is. During their exchange,

the child asks several questions, but only one essential one: “Tell us where the world went” (McCarthy, 2006, p. 166). At this moment, the old man takes on the role of a prophet. His age provides him extensive experience and knowledge of the pre- and post-apocalyptic worlds raising the possibility that he could provide them with the meaning of the Apocalypse and thus make sense of their pilgrimage in the aftermath. The old man says he knew the end of the world was going to happen. Moreover, he said: “I always believed in it” (McCarthy, 2006, p. 168). This vision reveals the Apocalypse for what it is: a fable that predicts its own occurrence. But, to understand it, one has to believe it. In addition, the old man says his name is Ely²⁴, like the biblical prophet from the Old Testament who is frequently quoted in the New Testament. He appears as the archetypal figure of the prophet, in essence, immortal, possessing eternal life²⁵. This most likely explains why McCarthy chose to add this character among the few human survivors of the Apocalypse. The presence of the prophet as a constituent of the apocalyptic genre was already highlighted in first chapter.²⁶ Again, this kind of character intervenes offering his visions of significant events. This time, however, the prophet proves to be worthy of the father’s first impression. First mistaken for a decoy, an imitation, the old man proves to be both ineffective and false, as evident in his paradoxical speech: “There is no God and we are his prophets” (McCarthy, 2006, p. 170). A prophet in a world without God is an aporia of thought. His use of language distorts the meaning of the apocalyptic fable. In

²⁴ For further information regarding the prophet Ely/Eli(e), consult the following biblical references: Samuel 1:9, Matthew 27:46, Psalm 22:1.

²⁵ An interpretation of the of the New Testament affirms that Eli(e) is one of the two prophets (along with Enoch) who are among the first to come back to earth following the Apocalypse. Ashley Kunsu refers directly to this interpretation in her article “Maps of the World in Its Becoming: Post-Apocalyptic Naming in Cormac McCarthy’s *The Road*”: “The name ‘Ely’ paired with the character’s discussion of God [...] conjures the biblical prophet Elijah, who will return to the earth on the Day of Judgment, before the Messiah. (Kunsu, 2009, p. 70)

²⁶ See chapter 1, pages 29 and 30.

fact, up to that moment, as a prophet, he had made a single but obvious prophecy for the living; that death is still to come: “When you’re alive, you’ve always got that ahead of you” (McCarthy, 2006, p. 169). Eventually, Ely exposes his true identity: “Is your real name Ely? / No” (McCarthy, 2006, p. 171). The prophet had lied. His speech is false, thus language has served, as the father suspected, to deceive both he and his son. The emptiness of language is pervasive in the novel and is summed up by the father when he pejoratively describes the man, stating that Ely “[...] has made of the world a lie every word” (McCarthy, 2006, p. 75). In *The Road*, language does not bring about truth, and from that perspective it is therefore unnecessary, even useless.

At one point in the novel, language temporarily ceases to exist as expressed through the boy's aphasia resulting from the traumatic events he witnesses. For example, he is speechless for several days after seeing the baby roasting over the campfire, to the point that his father becomes concerned: “He didn’t know if he’d speak again” (McCarthy, 2006, p. 109). This phenomenon has already occurred several times throughout the novel. When he is attacked at knifepoint, he becomes “[...] mute as a stone” (McCarthy, 2006, p. 66) and at the end of the novel when his father is wounded by an arrow, he mutters: “I dont want to talk about anything” (McCarthy, 2006, p. 269).

Again, language does not solve or resolve the situation. In the novel, language is, at its best an ephemeral comfort, and at its worse misleading. But, language is the cement of social life. Without language, there are no relationships. In *The Road*, the Apocalypse destroys all aspects of social fabric. Logically therefore, language also loses its value because it can no longer help one understand or interpret the world in which one exists. Bertrand Gervais discusses this phenomenon when he writes that “[l]es perturbations

intrinsèques à toute fin rejoignent ce qui est au cœur de la relation du sujet au monde, à savoir le langage. Il est notre façon d'exister dans l'univers, et toute menace à cette existence même l'atteint dans ses fonctions fondamentales d'interface et de principe de compréhension" (Gervais, 2009, p. 16). It may be tempting to interpret only the erosion and the near disappearance of language in *The Road*. Yet, given time to reflect on the sense or meaning of the story, language becomes the bearer of a different, more general meaning, which necessitates the reinvention of a world after or beyond the Apocalypse. Ashley Kunsa proposes this notion of how the loss of language follows the disappearance of one's experienced and perceived reality, but she nuances her definition: "This is not to say that meaning has gone out of the world. The point here is that the nature of the meaning has changed: the method of naming McCarthy uses offers a refiguring of meaning in the language of the new, post-apocalyptic world" (Kunsa, 2009, p. 63). On the surface, *The Road* presents a story of tragedy. But surprisingly, buried deep within the cataclysm hides the need for reinvention and recreation.

The Meaning Revealed

To briefly summarize, *The Road* tells the story of a man and his son walking south in hopes of finding more hospitable living conditions along the coast. They wander through the ruins of a socially and biologically devastated world in which they survive heartbreak and misery, as well as violent attacks from other survivors of the Apocalypse. Further complicating their journey, the father suffers from an illness that causes constant coughing and his disease worsens and eventually kills him, leaving his son alone on the road. This is a great tragedy for the son who loses the one person who protected him,

leaving him alone at the mercy of the hostile, apocalyptic world around him. It is difficult to interpret the novel as anything more than a tale of immense pessimism. However, as in the biblical apocalypse, the end provides hope and triumph to a select few. In this novel, there is, in fact, one in particular who has been chosen, the son. Here, one cannot disregard the mythical or religious dimension surrounding descriptions of the boy. First, from the very beginning, the story links the child directly to the voice of God: "If he is not the word of God, God never spoke" (McCarthy, 2006, p. 5), or: "He watched him stoke the flames. God's own fire-drake" (McCarthy, 2006, p. 31), and finally, in awe before the blondness of his son's hair, he has the following thought: "Golden chalice, good to house a god" (McCarthy, 2006, p. 75). These allusions create a sacred dimension to the child whom his father must protect and defend. The boy appears as an incarnation of the new world, of hope itself. That is why the dying father repeats several times that they were the "good guys" and they carried fire, as he sees light shine in the gray air from behind his son: "He watched him come through the grass and kneel with the cup of water he'd fetched. There was light all about him" (McCarthy, 2006, p. 277). Before dying, the father answers his son's questions to reveal to him his inherent sacredness, every answer including a metaphor of fire. Not only does the boy carry the fire, he embodies it: "Is it real? the fire? / Yes it is / Where is it? I don't know where it is. / Yes you do. It's inside you. It was always there. I can see it" (McCarthy, 2006, p. 279). Furthermore, the father tells him: "You're the best guy" (McCarthy, 2006, p. 279), signaling to him that he is the chosen one, the best of the remaining few. Ostensibly, at least to the father, it is through him that the survival of humanity could take place. Thus, the meaning of the Apocalypse is revealed and its meaning is consistent with the myth in which the *chosen one* embodies

hope, renewal. Jean Morency talks about the theme of renewal in his comparative study of Quebecois and American literature entitled *Le mythe américain dans les fictions d'Amérique*. In his essay, he confirms the idea of renewal as a fundamental, underlying aspect of American culture: "*J'ai postulé [...] que le mythe américain était un mythe de transformation, de renouvellement [...]*" (Morency, 1994, p. 14). Accordingly, in *The Road*, just after the death of his father, the son finally meets the "good guys", a family of two adults and two children, and with whom his survival, if not the entire reconstruction of the world, is placed.

This apocalyptic finale is also accompanied by a revival of language. Although the child suffers frequently from aphasia while traveling throughout the violent world with his father, he eventually exercises his oral faculties after his father's death. In attempt to maintain their relationship, even in death - time outside or beyond time - the father had asked his son to speak with him: "If I'm not here you can still talk to me. You can talk and I'll talk to you. You'll see. / Will I hear you? / Yes. You will. You have to make it like talk that you imagine. And you'll hear me. You have to practice" (McCarthy, 2006, p. 279). After the father's death, his son starts to follow the instructions his father had taught him: "He tried to talk to God but the best thing was to talk to his father and he did talk to him and didnt forget" (McCarthy, 2006, p. 286). This quotation has significant implications regarding the transfer a sense of divinity. Since the beginning of the novel, the child had represented God in his father's eyes. At that moment, it is the father who becomes God to his son. This demonstrates unequivocally the secular dimension of the Apocalypse in *The Road* where, despite the numerous references to religion or to the sacred, humankind's faith resides in mankind itself: the father believes in his son and the

son believes in his father. The world is reborn through the generations, even in an almost completely devastated, Godless world. Like some many essays about the novel, it is important to analyze the novel's final paragraph to reveal another meaning:

Once there were brook trout in the streams in the mountains. You could see them standing in the amber current where the white edges of their fins wimpled softly in the flow. They smelled of the moss in your hand. Polished and muscular and torsional. On their backs were vermiculate patterns that were maps of the world in its becoming. Maps and mazes. Of a thing which could not be put back. Not be made right again. In the deep glens where they lived all things were older than man and the hummed for mystery. (McCarthy, 2006, p. 286-287)

The opening words "Once there were" educe the clichéd *Once upon a time* from countless fairytales in which time is forever frozen in a distant, irretrievable past. This time reflects the complexity and beauty of a world that can no longer be "[...] put back. Not be made right again." The Apocalypse destroyed biological life, now void of any possibility of its resurrection. From an ecological perspective, the novel illustrates the great threat of such destruction. From the same and point of view, De Bruyn suggests that the final scene shows the deteriorating relationship between humans and their habitat:

Man could once project himself and his thoughts onto the natural world – seeing the patterns on the backs of fishes as the map of things to come, interpreting rocks in terms of bears, fish in terms of knives or snake in terms of evil – but this anthropomorphic possibility has now evaporated. Ultimately, the passage does not only evoke a natural scene that is lost (the forest, the river, the fish) but also a

mode of relating to nature that is similarly lost (the fish as a map of the future)
(De Bruyn, 2010, p. 788).

Certainly the contrast between the apocalyptic devastation and the natural world is remarkable²⁷ and appears throughout the novel. In this study, particularly pertaining to this final paragraph, it would be difficult, if not irresponsible not to refer to Robert Lalonde's essay, entitled *Le monde sur le flanc de la truite. Notes sur l'art de voir, de lire et d'écrire*. Here, another meaning of the Apocalypse is suggested which is much more subtle and philosophical than in the sociological sense (renewal of the world) or an ecological one (warning against the destruction of the environment). For Lalonde, whose book addresses the mechanisms of creative writing and how they are interconnected with the observation of nature, the trout's flank is alive, receiving the light that it reflects on a new world: "*Oui, tiens maintenant je sais pourquoi je [...] songe au monde reflété sur le flanc de la truite. [...] Le monde pour ainsi dire redonné. Sens²⁸ dessus dessous, recrée. Le monde revisité de la fiction*" (Lalonde, 1999, p. 17). If we extend this analogy to the last paragraph of McCarthy's novel, it would be through the ephemeral moment of fiction, so deeply connected to life, that reality, even in its most difficult moments such as the death of mankind's habitat, can be imagined and depicted. And this fiction, even more than reality, possesses the infinite ability to create meaning.

²⁷ This is precisely why this theme appears in the quotation of this chapter's epigraph.

²⁸ Lalonde uses set, fixed or *frozen* speech "sens dessus dessous" to demonstrate how meaning is transformed by language, as light is transformed when refracted off a trout's flank.

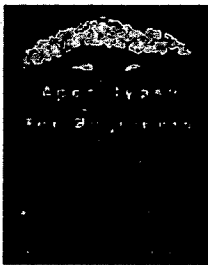
CHAPTER 3

Nicolas Dickner *Tarmac*

En passant devant les frigos, j'ai noté la plus récente invasion asiatique : le tofu. J'ai étudié un paquet avec curiosité. Pour le moment, il s'agissait d'une denrée exotique et peu ragoûtante. Dans quelques années, elle serait parfaitement intégrée à notre diète, banale comme le Nutella la bombe H

Nicolas Dickner, *Tarmac*.

To include Nicolas Dickner's novel *Tarmac* (2009) in a thesis on the apocalypse is clearly apropos. While the French title gives little to no insight of themes within the novel, one need not go any further than the cover of the English translation of the novel (see below), or its title, that contains the word itself – *Apocalypse for Beginners*²⁹ – superimposed over a rudimentary but characteristic image of a nuclear mushroom cloud³⁰.



It would therefore be impossible to avoid such an interpretation.

The novel tells the story of Hope Randall who comes from a family with a particular lineage. For countless generations, each family member has a vision that predicts the end of the world at some moment

during his/her lifetime. It goes without saying that the prophecies never come to fruition.

What does occur to all those whose predictions fail is madness. Following her mother on

²⁹ I will speak about the English title in greater depth later in this thesis.

³⁰ In 2010, Lazer Lederhendler was awarded the Cole Foundation Prize for Translation (QWF) for his translation of Nicolas Dickner's *Tarmac*. The English title is evoked simply to demonstrate how the various themes in the novel on atomic energy and warfare can be interpreted as apocalyptic.

her own personal quest for the end of the world, Hope leaves Nova Scotia and ends up, by chance, in Rivière-du-Loup, where she meets Mickey. The two teens become friends and share a large part of their lives together, at each other's house, at school, and at work. From the first encounter, it is clear that Mickey has feelings for Hope. Shortly after learning the specific date of her personal end of the world, Hope chooses to go in search of the prophet who has also predicted the end of all humanity on this same day.

Hope's quest takes her to New York, and then Seattle on route to her final destination, Tokyo. She eventually meets up with her prophet in the Japanese city where she settles down and matures into an adult woman who, at the end of the novel, Mickey scrambles to rejoin. Most importantly, none of the characters die on July 17, 2001, the day that Hope Randall had predicted for the end of the world. In Dickner's *Tarmac*, the Apocalypse does not therefore have the same destructive dimension as in the two American novels discussed earlier in this thesis. It does not produce any devastating natural disaster, nor plague, nor war. Instead, the novel begins with the reunification of Germany, symbolized by the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. A few years after this historic event, however, the United States of America invades Kuwait (1991) rekindling fears of a covert nuclear attack. In fact, the novel is peppered with references to nuclear threat. Both its vocabulary and various figures of speech evoke this fear – mushroom cloud, atom, fission, bunker, shelter, radiation, irradiation, nuclear, plutonium, energy, and Hiroshima. In a baseball stadium where she meets Mickey for the first time, Hope tells him that: "*La nuit dernière, j'ai rêvé de la bombe d'Hiroshima*" (Dickner, 2009, p. 12). This is a very strange way to introduce oneself. And when the young man asks why

she has dreamed of Hiroshima, Hope demonstrates her profound and unrivaled knowledge of every detailed aspect of the 1945 A-bomb explosion:

– Little Boy [nom donné au missile atomique] faisait environ 15 kilotonnes. [...] Si ça explosait au-dessus de nos têtes, à environ 600 mètres d'altitude – comme à Hiroshima – alors l'onde de choc raserait la ville sur un rayon de 1,5 kilomètre. Ça donne une surface d'environ 7 kilomètres carrés. L'équivalent de... / Elle plissa les yeux, absorbée par une prodigieuse division mentale. / – ... 2500 terrains de baseball (Dickner, 2009, p. 13).

And, as though she hadn't offered enough precision, Hope describes the potential consequences that a nuclear explosion of similar magnitude would have on Rivière-du-Loup:

Le centre commercial volerait en miettes, les bungalows seraient soufflés, les voitures projetées comme des boîtes de carton, les lampadaires s'allongeraient au sol. Et ça, c'est seulement l'onde de choc. Ensuite il y a la radiation thermique. Tout serait réduit en cendres sur des dizaines de kilomètres carrés – beaucoup, beaucoup de terrains de baseball! À proximité de la bombe, la chaleur dépasserait la température à la surface du Soleil. Le métal entrerait en fusion. Le sable formerait des petites billes de verre (Dickner, 2009, p. 13-14).

Hope finishes her description by adding that all human beings would be “vaporized” by such a blast within a few millionths of a second. Through the use of realism in the various descriptions, the novel targets nuclear annihilation as being a possible, if not probable, threat. While this type of imminent danger was absent in *Galapagos*, and only one of the

suspected causes of the world's destruction in *The Road*, in *Tarmac* nuclear war is the primary potential culprit leading to the end of the world. With the emphasis placed on nuclear warfare, essentially, one could deduce that in this Dickner novel, the end of the world will be of nuclear origin, or will simply not occur.

Yet despite all references to nuclear weapons, the characters lead a quiet life in a bungalow in Rivière-du-Loup where they attend their local High school. Rather than provoking reactions of anguish or fear, the nuclear threat serves more like a topic researched for a science fair. Hope talks about it with encyclopedic, scientific language detailing how it functions. She also uses historical jargon to explain its evolution while making several allusions to the consequences of such an attack. Her lack of fear seems contradictory to the enormous potential risk of mankind's annihilation. In fact, in the novel nuclear threat is an allegory for *transformation*, which itself is comprised of a destructive phase. To do this, the text proceeds according to a mode, at times a parody - taking inspiration from the biblical story of the Apocalypse - and at others, more comic in nature, somewhere between irony and derision. The fact that Hope does not die at the end - on the contrary, the story opens with the possibility of a period of renewal in her life - accentuates the comic nature of an Apocalypse that never materializes. The real transformation within the novel occurs on a personal level as Hope matures from an adolescent to a fertile adult. Along her journey, it is her childhood that is "*vaporisée*" by time. This significant transformation in one's life is portrayed through the hyperbolic representation of nuclear crisis, as well as all the clichés it entails. The English title of the novel foregrounds this ironically over-simplified dimension of the Apocalypse. In essence, *Apocalypse for Beginners* comes across as a kind of manual for surviving

destruction, but a false destruction, because it is eventually resolved by change or renewal.

To bring the Apocalypse to the individual level, the narrative functions in different ways. First, through the use of time, which oscillates between the subjective and the objective. On one hand, the Apocalypse is entirely a figment of the human psyche, but unlike *Galapagos*, for example, it does not exceed the boundaries of conventional spatio-temporal measures like months, years, or seasons. On the other hand, Hope's story, unlike the characters' in *The Road*, takes place at a specific, defined period (1989-2009) and makes references to documented historical events. During the 20 year period in which the narrative takes place, the protagonist has the time to experience a long-term personal crisis, her coming of age, based on the *bildungsroman* model. In *Tarmac* the language is also affected by the crisis, but this occurs primarily through the use of confusing speech and language. Knowledge and designation of language are broken down or fragmented on several occasions to the point where they eventually lose their meanings. The prophet figure is also more active and influential in this novel in which anticipation of the Apocalypse motivates a majority of character's decisions and actions. Finally, the Apocalypse is resolved within a syncretism: at first the elements are in opposition, but eventually they come together to reveal their meaning, that of transformation, which occurs somewhere between two identifiable steps: destruction and renewal.

The Shock of Time

To begin this analysis, it is important to discuss the meaning of the French title of the novel, *Tarmac*. In English, the word designates a paved road or runway and in French,

“[l]a partie réservée au stationnement et au déplacement des avions dans un aéroport” (Le nouveau petit Robert, 2008, p. 2510). It is a middleground, an *intermediary* place between landing and take off. On the tarmac, a flight ends and/or a flight begins. In the word *tarmac* has a clear and direct correlation with Hope Randall experience of a profound transformation over the course of the novel. She begins the story as a young, budding adolescent eventually blossoming into an adult woman at the very end of the story. Between the two, and following the chronological events of the story, she travels in search of a new identity/destination. This type of story mimics the structure of the *Bildungsroman* as explained by Julia Round in her article entitled *The Apocalypse of Adolescence*: “This term, which in German means ‘novel of education’, was coined by Johann Morgenstern in the early 1820s. It is generally used to describe a story that tells of the maturation and moral, social or psychological development of a young protagonist” (Round, 2010, p 2). In the structure of such texts, time is linear, as one stage of life ends - adolescence - another begins - adulthood. The time of adolescence is thus experienced as a temporal hub, spatially represented as a tarmac in Dickner’s novel.

“*Tout allait mieux depuis que la fin du monde était derrière nous*” (Dickner, 2009, p. 269). This final sentence in the novel ironically shows how life continues after an event that the protagonist perceives as an apocalypse, and how an end brings about a new beginning. The pronoun “nous” implicitly includes Mickey and Hope as they are reunited as adults. From the start of the novel, the story includes both young protagonists and is narrated primarily in the first person “je”, but occasionally in the “nous” which includes Hope. Mickey narrates his encounter with her from the moment she arrived with her mother in Rivière-du-Loup. He tells of their daily life, their intimate discussions and of

Hope's departure to the Orient in search of her prophet. The moment that Hope leaves Rivière-du-loup, the two characters no longer live or spend time together, but the text narrates the remainder of Hope's adventures in New York, Seattle, and Tokyo through an omniscient, omnipresent perspective. Logically, this implies that when the two are reunited, Hope tells her story to Mickey, the intradiegetic narrator who, despite having an external perspective on Hope's experiences, remains nonetheless subjective in his relationship to the events. An example of this unusual, second-hand narration can be found in the absence of any psychological depth or development of Hope's character. It is as though the narrator does not have access to her deepest thoughts apart from a few obvious insights on her state of mind. The story also mixes moments from Mickey's life, narrated in the first person "je", with those from Hope's life, until the "we" finally brings the two characters back together as one, characters that the narrative had distanced geographically but never completely separated. According to Michael Minden, as quoted by Julia Round, this is characteristic of contemporary *Bildungsroman* that involves the narrator and subject who is maturing: "It is precisely this double determination that is reflected in the *Bildungsroman*: the (secret) alliance between an assured narrative voice, equipped with general maxims [...] and the 'poor dog' of an empirical subject who has to make his way amid the vicissitudes of concrete circumstances" (Round, 2010, p. 3). In *Tarmac*, the narration is essentially twofold: either Mickey narrates the events in which he participates with Hope using the "je/nous" of intradiegetic narrative, or he becomes a heterodiegetic narrator using "elle" when he narrates the adventures she has told him about her journeys to find her prophet. The narration, therefore, is primarily subjective,

because it is based on events experienced by these two characters together, or by those Hope has detailed to Mickey.

On several occasions, however, time becomes more objective when it relates to historical events. The novel mixes the story with history and is divided into three sections. The first part begins with the explosion of the atomic bomb in Hiroshima, Japan in 1945 and continues up to 1989 when Hope's mother moves to Rivière-du-loup to await her personal end of the world. The second part spans the period between the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the summer of 2001. The final and shortest part covers the few weeks after July 17, 2001 just prior to the historical period of the World Trade Center bombings of September 11, 2001³¹. The characters' personal experiences, which inherently follow a subjective time frame, are directly related to the objective time frame of historical time. In such cases, the dynamics between the two opposing aspects of *peripetia* and *historia*, terms that Paul Ricoeur discusses in *Temps et Récit*, are at play. Ricoeur defines *peripetia* as "le possible que l'auteur conçoit" and *historia* as "le réel" (Ricoeur, 1983, p. 288-289). Ricoeur's proposition is based upon Northrop Frye's claim that the author proceeds "à partir d'une forme d'unification et l'historien en direction de celle-ci" (Ricoeur, 1983, p. 292). *Tarmac*'s narration follows a more conventional, unified form in which the official and documented history is combined with the fictional aspects of the novel. Ricoeur uses the term *métahistoire* to refer to this style that is characteristic of postmodern literature: "Seule une métahistoire peut oser considérer les récits historiques comme des fictions verbales, proches par leur contenu et leur forme de leur contrepartie littéraire" (Ricoeur, 1983, p. 289). There are numerous examples of *fictions verbales* in *Tarmac* that come

³¹ There is no discussion of the September 11, 2001 incident in *Tarmac*. However, most readers of this novel know that this is an important date that signifies, from a historical and social perspective, the end of one world and the beginning of another.

directly from the pages of history, but are influenced by the narrator's subjectivity. For example:

Elle [Hope] se trouvait à connaître deux ou trois choses sur la vie du grand physicien. Par exemple, Einstein avait effectivement envoyé une lettre au Président Roosevelt afin de l'inciter à développer la bombe atomique avant que les Allemands ne le fassent. Il avait réellement été sioniste socialiste et avait refusé la présidence d'Israël vers 1950. Et il avait véritablement affirmé : 'J'ignore avec quelle arme on fera la Troisième Guerre mondiale, mais la quatrième se fera avec des couteaux à pré-lart achetés au Home Hardware du coin'. (Dickner, 2009, p. 37)

The actual historical events (Second World War) are ironically emphasized in the narration by using italicized, axiological adverbs related to or indicating truth. In the final sentence of the above passage, however, Einstein is quoted in direct speech that is validated by the adverb *véritablement* despite that fact that the sentence is more or less erroneous. Together, these literary and linguistic devices come together to form Ricoeur's *fiction verbale*. Not only does this creation unite history and poetic fiction, it subjects the former to the latter. By mixing fact with fiction, subjective discourse becomes reminiscent of historical events, and with ironic authority. The subjective encompasses and surpasses history.

Another example of subjective predominance is when Hope³², rather than succumbing to the will of her destiny, opposes the uncertainties of her apocalyptic visions

³² It is interesting to note that semantics of the name Hope mean optimism for the future. This is the case for Hope who, despite her expected tragic fate, attempts to find an alternative and more favorable outcome to her personal end-of-the-world moment on July 12, 2001.

when she provokes the revelation of the precise moment of her personal end of the world.

She discusses her intentions with Mickey:

[...] Ça m'a seulement rappelé une citation d'Einstein : 'Dieu ne joue pas aux dés.' [...]

– Mais Einstein se trompait, Dieu joue aux dés ! [...]

– C'est simple, je vais trouver la date de la fin du monde au hasard. [...]

[d]eux minutes suffirent pour déterminer que l'apocalypse se produirait le 17 juillet 2001 (Dickner, 2009, p. 68-69).

The moment that chance or luck has procured a date, Hope attempts to verify it by comparing it with other potential moments during the year. She finally concludes: “*[...] toute réflexion faite, l'été pouvait s'avérer un bon moment pour la fin du monde*” (Dickner, 2009, p. 71). The young protagonist occasionally opposes her destiny and the historical words of one of the greatest scientific minds to obtain her goals. In Hope's case, subjectivity triumphs without a shadow of doubt. The character who is at the heart of the process of transformation has taken control of her own situation in Japan, and is not directly influenced by history, in fact, quite the contrary. That is why it is possible to affirm that Hope experiences a personal and unique significant transformation, which can be considered in the novel as an analogy of the apocalypse. Moreover, the narration focuses on this notion of the individual characters' superiority over history. For example, the narrator makes the following comment while watching a television show about the fall of the Berlin Wall: “*Si récente, l'histoire roulait déjà en boucle*” (Dickner, 2009, p. 56). From that moment on, historical time in the novel cycles back upon itself and could, therefore, be considered, in its entirety, as a construction of human subjectivity. It is no

longer a question of a conventional sequence of unified epochs that need to be understood and respected. Instead, history becomes a series of events that can arbitrarily be rearranged or relocated according to the narrator's discretion and not necessarily in their original, linearly chronological order. Therefore, in the the final scene of the novel, even if it seems elusive, a very common object (but highly significant for every woman), an envelope of a sanitary napkin that she sends to Mickey shows definitively that Hope had survived her personal apocalypse by being completely transformed into an adult ready for reproduction.

The representation of time, most notably in opposition, comprises another phenomenon that places the individual at the heart of his transformation. The coupling of the past and the future is essentially an incarnation of the moment of apocalyptic personal transformation that Hope experiences throughout the novel, between her bygone days and those yet to come. These types of comparisons occur frequently in the novel as illustrated in the following examples: "*Hope, comme la plupart de mes contemporains, peinait à percevoir la complémentarité naturelle entre la science-fiction et l'archéologie*" (Dickner, 2009, p. 46) or, "*Le sous-sol moderne est apparu durant la guerre froide, c'est le produit d'une civilisation obsédée par son avenir. Mais quand on y pense bien, la dernière fois qu'autant d'Homo sapiens ont habité sous terre, ça remonte à l'âge de pierre*" (Dickner, 2009, p. 47) and finally: "*Pour le citoyen moyen de 1945, la bombe atomique venait du futur, au même titre que les extra-terrestres de La guerre des mondes. Tandis que des physiciens perforaient le cœur de l'atome, dans les campagnes on s'éclairait encore à lampe à l'huile*" (Dickner, 2009, p. 65)³³. By reconfiguring these time

³³ Only the anthropological terms *Homo sapiens* and the title *La guerre des mondes* are in italics in the novel.

periods, in an almost contradictory manner, the diegesis clearly illustrates the evolution, the transformation, and the passage from one world to another. In *Tarmac*, this particular moment is associated with the “apocalyptic” transformation of the novel’s heroine.

A Crisis of Contrasts

Why compare this coming of age, a personal or individual event, with the apocalypse, a group or collective catastrophe? Firstly, because the two represent a period of significant transformation but also because, as discussed above, the notion of the individual is so predominant in the novel that his/her transformation could easily be interpreted as an analogy based on the myth of the apocalypse. Again, as seen early in this essay, the threat of nuclear disaster also conjures up the potentiality of the final apocalypse of modern society throughout *Tarmac*. Several aspects of Hope’s identity are fused with the nuclear age in which she lives and that preceded her. Even her mother was born “[...] *le jour même où les Américains expérimentaient une nouvelle bombe à hydrogène aux îles Marshall*” (Dickner, 2009, p. 21). For Mickey, even his perception of Hope is based on nuclear energy: “[...] *j’imaginai son cortex fissionner en silence des noisettes d’uranium 235*” (Dickner, 2009, p. 48). A few paragraphs later, the reader learns that Hope has not yet started her menstrual cycle despite being 17 years old; and she is even considered a medical mystery since there aren’t any plausible explanations for her condition. When Mickey asks her “– *Qu’est-ce que ta mère en dit ?*”, she answers, “– *Qu’il n’existe aucun problème qu’une bonne fin du monde ne peut pas régler*” (Dickner, 2009, p. 99). The potential transformation from childhood to womanhood that constantly haunts Hope is expressed through a comparison to nuclear apocalypse. And, as is the case

in many examples of the Apocalypse, this transformation includes a crisis that includes the deconstruction of language.

In *Tarmac*, this process does not occur in the same way that it did in *Galapagos* or in *The Road*. Instead, it is the words themselves that are distorted or effaced. This takes place by creating confusion in the discourse between the apocalypse and the insignificant or trivial, always with the intention of subordinating the collective to the individual. For example, during a chemistry class, Hope unlocks the potential energy of lemons and constructs an elaborate calculation based on one of Enrico Fermi and Llewellyn Thomas's models³⁴:

On pouvait, dans le cas présent, partir du fait qu'un citron contenait entre 15 et 20 calories, c'est-à-dire (elle pianota sur sa calculatrice) une valeur moyenne de 73,2 kilojoules (x). La bombe d'Hiroshima avait, pour sa part, dégagé une puissance estimée à 15 kilotonnes, ce qui donnait environ $6,3 \times 10^{13}$ kilojoules (y). Pour convertir l'énergie de la bombe, il suffisait de diviser y par x , ce qui donnait un total de $8,6 \times 10^{11}$ citrons ou, plus commodément, 860 655 mégacitrons – soit la production agricole de la Floride durant 6000 ans (Dickner, 2009, p. 64-65).

Her rigorous calculation entails a most peculiar and inappropriate element, lemons, in order to arrive at a significant conclusion. The use of lemons to chemically create an atomic bomb stems from her imagination and not really from the laws of chemistry or quantum mechanics. Thus the intellectual rigor of scientific language is lost to the triviality of the object. Other forms of mathematics also contribute to the discursive and

³⁴ The Thomas-Fermi model is based on a quantum mechanical theory and is used to approximate the distribution of electrons in an atom. <http://www.math.caltech.edu/SimonPapers/53.pdf>.

scientific confusion. After several throws of the die, revealing her end of the world to be on July 17, 2001, Hope scribbles the following on her locker door at high school:

17 07 2001 17 07 2001 17 07 2001 17 07 2001 17 07 2001 17 07 2001 17 07 2001
17 07 2001 17 07 2001 17 07 2001 17 07 2001 17 07 2001 17 07 2001 17 07 2001
17 07 2001 17 07 2001 17 07 2001 17 07 2001 17 07 2001 17 07 2001 17 07 2001
17 07 2001 17 07 2001 17 07 2001 17 07 2001 17 07 2001 17 07 2001 17 07 2001
17 07 2001 17 07 2001 17 07 2001 (Dickner, 2009, p. 108).³⁵

At first glance, her numeric patterning connotes the binary code, which is both complex and highly significant in mathematics and the foundation of computer language. However, the presence of the additional numbers, 7 and 2, makes this a quaternary code and therefore, invalidates this interpretation. Rather than being a coherent and revelatory sequence encoded in binary code, it is just a personal obsession of a future date.

Moreover, confusion permeates the spoken language of many of the novel's characters. As soon as she learns that her personal apocalypse will supposedly take place in 1989³⁶, Hope's mother, Ann Randall, who is also the town librarian:

[...] *consacra par exemple la moitié du budget annuel de la bibliothèque à l'achat d'une extravagante collection de textes antiques : des bibles en araméen, en hébreu, en grec, un facsimilé des manuscrits de la mer Morte, l'Épopée de Gilgamesh, l'Énuma Elish³⁷ et le Livre des Morts. Elle ne rentrait plus chez elle,*

³⁵ In the novel, the table of numbers continues for 19 lines or three quarters of a page. It is not necessary to include the entire entry but quite a few were added to recreate the novel's visual effect.

³⁶ It is interesting to point out that 1989, the moment of Ann Randall's personal doomsday coincides with a historical end of the world in Germany when East Germany and West German came together to form a new, unified Germany. This put an end to the cold war between them and created a new and different world.

³⁷ This is the Babylonian creation myth, whereas L'Épopée de Gilgamesh is a Mesopotamian myth. Both, however, are very ancient texts.

passait ses nuits dans le sous-sol de l'hôtel de ville à étudier les langues mortes de la Mésopotamie en mangeant des ramens (Dickner, 2009, p. 23).

Ann Randall also begins to speak different languages in her sleep. Notably, she is muttering biblical languages: “[...] *et elle recommença à souffrir d'anxiété, de période de fébrilité soudaine et inexplicable. Une nouveauté s'y ajouta, toutefois : elle parlait désormais assyrien dans son sommeil. / Assyrien ou hébreu ou sumérien [...] Sa mère s'endormait chaque soir en lisant une grosse bible multilingue*” (Dickner, 2009, p. 29). In parallel, Hope reads and studies the seventeen volumes of a Russian language method book. She commits herself to learning Russian at the precise moment of a major, historical, nuclear accident: “*Elle mémorisait ses premiers verbes irréguliers quand se produisit l'incident de Tchernobyl*” (Dickner, 2009, p. 22). The addition of foreign or dead languages produces a state of confusion that creates distance within the novel. As in the previous example of Einstein's discourse, the words no longer mean anything. They lose their sense, becoming mere signs or symbols, or just plain gibberish. Bertrand Gervais explains this phenomenon:

La confusion annonciatrice de la fin du monde ne fait pas qu'atteindre le corps social ou les sujets qui doivent se déprendre de ses rets, elle se répand au langage lui-même qui devient opaque et étranger. La langue n'y joue plus son rôle usuel, elle s'écrase, devant une masse concrète, lourde, et encombrante. Les mots commencent à ne plus rien dire, la transparence qui est le gage de leur fonctionnalité s'évapore, et c'est leur matière même qui réapparaît et s'impose, avec d'autant plus de force qu'elle marque leur inutilité (Gervais, 2009, p. 53).

One of the clearest examples of general linguistic confusion in the novel is when Hope arrives in Tokyo where she is confronted by a total lack of any comprehension of the Japanese language. There, she only possesses a few, predetermined sentences that she learned in a tourist guidebook and that have little in common with her experiences in modern day Tokyo. This provides the opportunity for further ironic narrative on the nuclear crisis:

[...] *le guide Rough Planet Tokyo contenait une section de phrases prêtes à prononcer, telles que : « Où peut-on trouver un bunker dans les parages ? (Sumimasen, kono atari ni chika sherutaa wa ari masu ka ?) ou « Puis-je emprunter votre masque à gaz / votre habit antiradiation ? » (Gasumasaku / houshanou bougyo suutsu o kari te mo ii desu ka?)³⁸ » (Dickner, 2009, p. 175).*

The confusion of language, in conjunction with the irony of the narrative, gives precedence to the novel's irrational dimension of the nuclear crisis. In light of this overwhelming emotion, language falls apart, much like rational thinking does during a mental breakdown. Moreover, fears of the apocalypse that personally affect all members of the Randall family, are considered, more or less, a psychological pathology: "*L'arbre généalogique des Randall aurait pu servir à enseigner l'histoire de la psychiatrie en*

³⁸ In the humoristic short story, *Der Arme Dolmetscher*, written by Kurt Vonnegut Jr. in 1955, the story's protagonist is chosen as the battalion's German translator despite the fact that he only knows about 20 words in German. As the Japanese language is reduced to a few nonsensical war-related sentences learned from a guidebook in *Tarmac*, the same is true for German in *Der Arme Dolmetscher*: "With this booklet, all I had to do was run my finger down the left-hand column until I found the English phrase I wanted, and then rattle off the nonsense syllables printed opposite in the right-hand column. 'How many grenade launchers have you?' for instance, was *Vee feel grenada vairfair habben zee?* Impeccable German for 'Where are your tank columns?' proved to be nothing more troublesome than *Vo zint eara pantzer shpilzen?*"

Amérique du Nord au cours des cent cinquante dernières années [...]” (Dickner, 2009, p. 20).

To thwart this linguistic confusion, the narration turns to metadiscourse on the apocalypse. Beyond the “vision” that each member of the Randall family has of his/her own apocalypse and the imperative presence of a prophet – which will be discussed shortly – *Tarmac* uses metadiscourse to replace irony with an objective perspective of the grave nature of the situation. By quoting the words of a professor, the narrator literally gives a course on the apocalyptic genre:

L’Apocalypse n’était pas simplement un livre du Nouveau Testament, mais d’abord et avant tout un genre littéraire – un peu comme le roman policier ou la science-fiction. [...] On écrivait des apocalypses en temps de crise. C’était la littérature des gens opprimés, de ceux qui espéraient l’arrivée du Jugement dernier, le moment où ils seraient sauvés et les méchants condamnés. Voilà pourquoi dans la bible, on annonce toujours une fin du monde imminente : il s’agissait d’une source d’espoir, d’une bonne nouvelle. D’ailleurs, en grec, apocalypsein signifie simplement « révélation ». Au fond, l’apocalypse traduit une vision assez optimiste du cosmos (Dickner, 2009, p. 81).

The apocalyptic revelations in *Tarmac* are part of what Northrop Frye refers to as *panoramic*: “[...]the panoramic apocalypse, the vision of staggering marvels placed in a near future and just before the end of time. As a panorama, we look at it passively, which means that it is objective to us” (Frye, 1982, p. 136). In a short paragraph, the novel offers a subjective vision of a series of events leading to the end of the world, and a glimpse into the creation of a new one. Hope and Mickey each describe a panorama that may be

considered as sociological, important, and adapted to different historical moments. For example, the narrator explains Hope's commentary on the events of 1989, although they are still yet to come at that moment in the novel.

Hope, toujours en phase avec l'actualité, annonçait pour sa part la chute du régime soviétique et la fin de la guerre froide d'ici les deux prochaines années, et elle ajoutait que bientôt nous cesserions de craindre la bombe atomique. Désormais, nous redouterions l'obsolescence industrielle de l'URSS – comme d'ailleurs l'avait démontré l'incendie de Tchernobyl. Ce nouveau péril serait bien pire que la bombe H : il s'agirait d'une menace que personne ne contrôlerait, un mécanisme d'autodestruction fiché au cœur de l'Imperium Sovieticum (Dickner, 2009, p. 59).

The notion of the Apocalypse is not really terminal in *Tarmac*. On the contrary, it is a reoccurring theme, coming back time and time again in the modern world. The following lengthy excerpt details Mickey's quantitative predictions of a number of upcoming disasters - some ordinary, and others outrageous – that relate to another historical period, ten years after the fall of the Berlin Wall, the arrival of a new millennium:

Dans la nuit du 31 décembre 1999, les compteurs tournèrent lentement, un fuseau horaire après l'autre – mais rien ne se produisit, et le soleil se leva sur une civilisation intacte. [...] Comment la fin du monde pouvait-elle inquiéter qui que ce soit ? / L'effet de serre, les tsunamis, les accélérateurs de particules, le radon et les nanotechnologies, l'économie de marché, les trous noirs, les

épidémies de nourrissons neuro-éruptifs, le pic pétrolier, la glace 9³⁹, la réorientation de l'axe terrestre et les sorties d'orbite, les mutations génétiques, l'azoospermie, l'atrophie et/ou l'hypertrophie du soleil, les créatures (gluantes ou écaillées) émergeant des abysses océaniques, l'inversion des pôles, la transformation industrielle des humains en ripe agglomérée, l'augmentation de l'entropie, les anomalies gravitationnelles, les androïdes, le méthane pélagique, les gras saturés et les gras hydrogénés, les pandémies de grippe aviaire, les pesticides et/ou herbicides, les émeutes, les antibiotiques et la République populaire de Chine – la liste de nos périls ressemblaient de plus en plus aux ingrédients imprimés sur un paquet de ramen : une liste invraisemblable. Mais nous étions désormais au-delà de toute vraisemblance. Nous avons tant attendu la fin du monde qu'elle faisait désormais partie de notre ADN. (Dickner, 2009, p. 245-246)

Essentially, in *Tarmac*, the notion of the apocalypse is characterized as now being coded within an individual, within the most basic building blocks of any living individual, as indicated by the metaphor of DNA. For Hope, therefore, the apocalypse occurs on a personal rather than collective level despite the collective aspect of the expression “[...] notre ADN”, *Tarmac* refers to the destiny of Hope and only herself as a character who experiences an essential modification, even though she is a human being built upon a specific AND like every other member of the species. The above analysis of time has shown how Hope intervenes to provoke the discovery of July 17, 2001 as the date of her personal doomsday. The only aspect missing is a prophet to confirm this date. In the

³⁹ This is in direct reference to Kurt Vonnegut's *Cat's Cradle* in which a polymorph of water, called Ice-nine (*glace 9*), leads to the end of the world.

context of time, there is a direct link between the apocalypse and the trivial within her crisis, giving precedence to the individual over the collective.

Northrop Frye provides an interesting and relevant definition of prophesy in his work *The Great Code. The Bible and the Literature*: “prophecy is the individualizing of the revolutionary impulse, as wisdom is the individualizing of the law, and is geared to the future as the wisdom is to the past” (Frye, 1982, p. 125). Individuality is at the very heart of the process of apocalyptic imaginings, even in the ancient texts. For example, in the contemporary world of *Tarmac*, the encounter between Hope and her prophet takes place with the help of a modern form of communication, advertising:

Soyez prêts !
La fin du monde aura lieu le 17 juillet 2001
Découvrez dès aujourd’hui
les prophéties de Charles Smith
traduites en 18 langues (incluant le tibétain)
commandes postales :
Levy Publishing – PO BOX 2816362 New York

(Dickner, 2009, p. 146).

The concurrence between the fateful date Hope reveals by rolling the die and the one pinpointed by her prophet sparks the young protagonist to venture off in search of his whereabouts. The novel’s dimension of *peripetia* begins when Hope takes the bus to New York where she finds only her prophet’s publisher, Lévy, who tells her that Charlie Smith is living in Seattle. Within a couple of days, Hope travels west across the United States of America to be stood up by Smith shortly after her arrival. The character that she meets informs her that Smith had left for Tokyo in order to avoid being harassed by a multitude of fans following his predictions concerning the end of the world. Without hesitating, Hope flies directly to Japan without knowing a single person, nor a single word of

Japanese. Eventually she befriends Merriam, a young bartender, who takes her in for the time it takes her to find her prophet. The first time that Hope walks into the bar, she hears: “Come we go burn Babylon, [...], Come we go burn Babylon one more time” (Dickner, 2009, p. 186). Bob Marley’s song lyrics associate Tokyo for Hope with Babylon, a megalopolis in which it is possible to lose one’s self physically, but also spiritually. Her constant trips around the city, each time to a different location and following different directions, portray Tokyo as a city in a constant state of flux, and to such an extent that buildings seem to appear and disappear overnight.

Only after numerous attempts does Hope finally meet her prophet Charlie Smith. Charlie Smith, perhaps one of the most common or cliché American names dispels much of his prophetic mystique⁴⁰. He is certainly not original, nor enlightened. Furthermore, just prior to meeting him in a local baseball stadium – a clear symbol of American sprawl – she watches some children playing and thinks: “*Au fond songea-t-elle, ça ressemble moins à l’apocalypse qu’à une bande dessinée de Charlie Brown*” (Dickner, 2009, p. 218). Here, the apocalypse is reduced to its secular dimensions, to contemporary American culture, omnipresent, even at the end of the world. The Japanese prophet says he adopted an American name and identity to escape his family. The postmodern world has made him a victim of his own success. He is forced into hiding because his end-of-the-world predictions inspired the masses to flock in order to draw from his wisdom. In the end, Charlie Smith turns out not to be a prophet, because he has nothing to teach Hope, or even a false prophet because he doesn’t even lie to her. He does not answer any

⁴⁰ Although Charlie and Smith are two very common American names, it is interesting to note that the founding father of Mormonism, considered by some as a sort of prophet, was named Joseph Smith Jr.

questions and provides no explanation or insight about the symbolism of July 17, 2001. Shortly after excusing himself to use the restroom, he simply disappears.

Although the presence of a prophet is typical of the apocalyptic genre, here the prophet character is present but void of any real function. Smith, who does not prophesize to Hope, or who has nothing more to offer than his/her persona, is of little or no use to her. The protagonist stands alone before her own fate, as before history, without a guide.

Essentially, apocalyptic crisis in *Tarmac* borrows several preconceived notions from the biblical genre, but without really giving them any strength or narrative development or bringing them to fruition. Even if it adopts some of its conventions, like the fear of mankind's annihilation, the apocalypse, in its epic and destructive collective sense, is reduced to its contrasts – the individual, the collective and the innocuousness of the modern world. In *Tarmac*, the apocalypse is merely an analogy of personal transformation.

The Meaning of Syncretism

As discussed above, the contrasts inherent within *Tarmac*'s apocalyptic crisis bring about an apocalypse on the personal or individual level. This model follows along the same lines as its traditional collective predecessor, by the destruction of a past world – a former identity – whose destruction opens the door to a new world with a new identity.

The death of Hope's mother on July 12, 2001, is certainly a major event in the symbolic destruction of Hope's former identity. After referring to many of the perils with which the modern world is faced, the narrator learns of Ann Randall's death, and asks himself a question: "*Comment Ann Randall avait-elle osé mourir quatre jours avant la fin*

du monde ? À cette échelle, l'ironie changeait sûrement de nom" (Dickner, 2009, p. 247).

Mickey knows that Hope's end of the world has been predicted for July 17, 2001, and learning of her mother's death only adds to his anguish. Furthermore, while attempting to meet up with Hope in Japan in order to inform her of her mother's passing, Mickey learns that his parents are separating, and that his girlfriend, Karine, is breaking up with him. To add insult to injury, the Bauerman's family cement company is sold to an American conglomerate. All told, this is clearly the end of an era as neither Mickey nor his brothers take over the family business. The number of various *ends* increases as the story reaches its conclusion.

The apocalypse as a predicted final moment creates the anticipation of its own materialization. Since the prophet has confirmed the date, something must occur at that particular moment. If not, then the prophesy rings false. The pronouncement of a specific date for the world's demise is what gives the prophet his/her authority⁴¹. Its arrival conventionally arouses uneasy expectancy, as well as a need to search for any signs that might allow for understanding of and preparation for the apocalypse. Exceptionally, none of this happens in *Tarmac*. Throughout the pages in which Mickey describes his day-to-day life, that specific day is labeled as "*Une journée banale*", a term that reappears later in the text: "*Jusqu'à maintenant, le 17 juillet ressemble à une journée banale*" (Dickner, 2009, p. 259). It is no longer a question of the world's end or the apocalypse. This day does not live up to its *promise* of total devastation and, therefore, loses any of its potential apocalyptic qualities. Nonetheless, Mickey remains on the lookout for what he calls *signs*:

⁴¹ Bertrand Gervais discusses the importance of predicting the specific moment of the apocalypse. "*De telles dates s'imposent comme l'argument par excellence d'une parole prophétique capable non seulement d'anticiper le déroulement des événements de la fin du monde, mais encore d'en désigner le moment précis*" (Gervais, 2009, p. 33).

“Je déambulais dans les allées de la pharmacie, échouai dans le rayon des serviettes hygiéniques. De quel signe pouvait-il bien s’agir ? (Dickner, 2009, p. 264). It is not until the following day that the sign reveals itself. Mickey receives a letter from Japan, sent by Hope Randall:

Juste un emballage vide. / Je le défroissai avec la paume de la main et l’examinai avec soin, d’abord intrigué, puis incrédule, et enfin à deux doigts du choc nerveux. Malgré l’absence totale de caractères latins, il n’y avait aucune ambiguïté possible quant au produit que cet emballage avait contenu. / Des serviettes hygiéniques. / Il s’agissait même (si je me fiais à ma toute récente expertise) de serviettes extra-minces, hypoallergènes, avec micropores NanoNikki™ et rebords hyper-étanches-mais-néanmoins-douilletts. Le modèle pour jeune japonaise active et moderne. / Hope Randall n’était plus une énigme pour la science (Dickner, 2009, p. 266-267).

The novel’s meaning is revealed as a coming of age story: Hope finally menstruates and therefore, hormonally becomes an adult woman. This is the revolutionary moment foreshadowed at the start of the novel and hyperbolically expressed through the metaphor of nuclear crisis. From that moment on, a new world begins.

Hidden behind this initial meaning is the unrequited desire that Mickey has had for Hope since the first time they met. Each time that it is mentioned, his desire is expressed as a paradoxical syncretism that accentuates both power (by the juxtaposition of opposites) and restraint (by the impossibility of their union). The initial manifestation of desire as a means of uniting opposites is clear when Hope takes her shower while Mickey is trying to concentrate on his math homework. His rational thought is disturbed by his

erotic imagination: *“J’essayais de garder mes yeux sur ma feuille, en vain. Il me venait des idées en forme de rayons X. Mon esprit s’attaquait au mur, perçait l’atome, pénétrait dans le préfini, le bois et la vapeur, cartographiait la fine silhouette de Hope en train de se savonner”* (Dickner, 2009, p. 41). A similar reaction occurs when Hope is puzzled by the results of the die and she ponders the philosophical value of chance. Mickey’s thoughts, however, wander elsewhere: *“Je l’ai regardée se débattre avec ses paradoxes intérieurs. Cette brèche dans son assurance dévoilait une Hope plus humaine, plus féminine. Qui aurait cru que le doute puisse être aussi sexy ?”* (Dickner, 2009, p. 70).

Finally, during a mundane moment watching television together, Hope places her leg over Mickey’s. For him, this simple act is far from unremarkable, and full of sexual inuendos: *“C’était un geste tout simple, qui allait de soi, et, en même temps il s’agissait de la grande explosion de Halifax, de l’éruption du Krakatoa, d’une supernova”* (Dickner, 2009, p. 96). Throughout *Tarmac*, the narrative subtly combines opposites to illustrate the nature of adolescent desire that finds neither solution nor satisfaction in its immaturity. Nothing short of an individual apocalypse of the metamorphosis into sexual maturity could resolve this aporia. The last sentence of the novel comes as a relief to Mickey and takes on a completely new meaning: *“Tout allait mieux depuis que la fin du monde était derrière nous”* (Dickner, 2009, p. 269). Reduced to a personal level, the apocalypse has lost its collective, destructive force to become a symbolic representation of individual transformation.

CHAPTER 4

Dominique Fortier *Les larmes de saint Laurent*

La montagne crachait-elle des flammèches dans la nuit, offrant une inquiétante féerie de jaunes, de rouges et d'oranges sur le noir du ciel, que le prêtre à l'aube claironnait : « Et il y eût de la grêle et du feu mêlés de sans, qui furent jeté sur la terre ; et le tiers de la terre fut brûlé, et le tiers des arbres fut brûlés, et toute herbe fut brûlée. »

Dominique Fortier, *Les larmes de saint Laurent*.

Located at the junction between the South American and Caribbean plates, the Island of Martinique, known today for its magnificent landscape and tourism, was once the setting for intense and prolific volcanic activity. Its most infamous volcano and highest topographical point, Mount Pelée, is an active volcano situated along the northern end of the island. Standing at an altitude of 4583 feet, the mountain's summit possesses all the typical, dome-like characteristics of a stratovolcano. Unlike volcanoes that spew rivers of molten lava when active, Peleé erupts to produce pyroclastic flows, which consist of a current of fast-moving, superheated gas combined with large pieces of rock. On May 8, 1902, Mount Pelée erupted and its glowing cloud flowed down over the mountain causing the death of approximately 30,000 people, almost the entire population of the city of Saint-Pierre, located at the base of the mountain. The city of Saint-Pierre, Martinique's economical capital since its colonization by the French in 1635, was considered until that moment to be the "le petit Paris des Antilles". There, society functioned in typical colonial fashion, with Whites at the head of political and public

affairs whereas Blacks were at their service. Following this historic volcanic eruption of 1902, the entire population was decimated with the exception of two men, Louis-Auguste Cypris and Léon Compère. Cypris was protected by the thick walls of his prison holding cell while Léon Compère, smelling greater amounts of sulfurous gases in the air, sought refuge in the basement of his workshop. Villagers who came to their aid from the neighboring town of Morne-Rouge eventually rescued the two men. Louis-Auguste Cypris's destiny turned out to be quite remarkable. After surviving three days in his holding cell, he emerged with burns and open sores covering his entire body. Mistaken as the sole survivor of a major catastrophe⁴², he was hired shortly thereafter by the infamous American Barnum & Bailey's circus for whom he worked as a circus freak, showing off his burns and telling his tale of survival to spectators from the four corners of the United States, until he died in 1929⁴³.

This historical and well-documented series of events is the inspiration for the first chapter of Dominique Fortier's novel *Les larmes de Saint Laurent*, published in 2010 by Alto Éditeur. The second chapter also highlights another lesser-known historical figure, Augustus Edward Love (1863-1940). Love was a British mathematician who explained how a type of terrestrial waves, known as *Love waves*, propagates during an earthquake. Ironically, despite their inoffensive title, love waves are the most destructive, radiating

⁴² It is important to highlight that Bapiste Cypris is among a few survivors. In the novel, however, he is portrayed as the only survivor of the volcanic eruption.

⁴³ All the above historical information is paraphrased from the following web links: http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/country_profiles/4537753.stm; <http://www.mount-pelee.com/>; http://books.google.ca/books?hl=en&lr=&id=7B7L_aZ-bR4C&oi=fnd&pg=PT1&dq=leon+compere+leandre&ots=-Td_nCgJJC&sig=MG6z8gLd5If_7HypovT-oZnZ0xQ#v=onepage&q&f=false.

outward from the earthquake's epicenter⁴⁴. The novel narrates the love story between Love and his wife, Garance, a musician who is in tune with and particularly attentive to the earth's songs or "*chants*". Garance dies while giving birth to twins, leaving Edward in a state of profound depression. The novel is based on the lives of two men who actually existed, and could, therefore, be considered a historic, yet romantic interpretation of their lives. Dominique Fortier highlights the fictive dimension of her work, despite the various historical references: "*Le portrait que j'en fais (de Baptiste Cyparis et d'Augustus Edward Love) est tout droit sorti de mon imaginaire. [...] [A]u-de là de certaines données de base, j'ai inventé beaucoup, probablement parce que je me fais davantage confiance maintenant.*"⁴⁵ Unlike the first two, the third and final chapter of *Les larmes de Saint Laurent* does not make any reference to any real or historical person or anecdote. Instead, it follows the lives of two fictional descendants of Cyparis and Love who meet in a park in modern day Montreal.

At first glance, the link between Dominique Fortier's novel and the apocalyptic themes mentioned in this study is not overtly apparent. However, in the first chapter entitled "*Monstres et merveilles*" there are numerous direct quotations about the Apocalypse from the Bible. Furthermore, the character Baptiste Cyparis, who survives the 1902 volcanic eruption of Mount Pelée, is perceived by his contemporaries as the sole survivor of the volcanic apocalypse. Alone, black, and completely disfigured, he becomes a circus freak for the Barnum & Bailey's circus. The second chapter also has its own apocalyptic slant depicting scenes of destruction in the city of Pompeii after the eruption

⁴⁴ Consult the following websites for further information concerning Augustus Edward Love and Love waves: <http://www-history.mcs.st-and.ac.uk/Biographies/Love.html>;
<http://seismo.berkeley.edu/blog/seismoblog.php/2009/07/27/title-5>.

⁴⁵ Malavoy-Racine, Tristan. "Dominique Fortier. Longueur d'ondes", Voir Montreal, 6 May 2010.

of Mount Vesuvius. Finally, in the third chapter, apocalyptic themes are incarnated in the characters' identities as well as in the use of intertextuality. There is a literary explosion of apocalyptic themes at the beginning of the novel whose energy dissipates into secondary themes of fire and earthquake throughout the remainder of the novel. It is also plausible to interpret the apocalypse in its intrinsic dimension of renewal or rebirth, rather than destruction. In fact, there is never a question or even a remote possibility of the complete annihilation of humanity anywhere in the novel. The apocalypse is more symbolic, on a more human scale, of the devastating natural disasters within a specific and isolated region. Lucien Boia explains that this type of localized, doomsday perception originates from very far back in the history of humanity:

Ces « procédés » [mythes primitifs de destruction par l'eau, le feu, le tremblement de terre, l'épidémie] ne faisaient qu'extrapoler des expériences historiques réelles des communautés primitives. Communautés fragiles et soumises aux caprices d'une nature indomptée qui régnait sur l'homme. Un déséquilibre naturel ou un cataclysme (inondation, incendie d'une forêt, séisme, épidémie) pouvait facilement les disloquer. Désastre qui équivalait à une véritable fin du monde, car le monde était très petit, limité par l'horizon de chaque groupe et de chaque peuplade (Boia, 1999, p. 13).

Unlike the novels studied in the previous chapters, mankind in *Les larmes de Saint Laurent* is not in any way responsible for the mass destruction of the inhabitants of Saint-Pierre or Pompeii. On an individual level, the death of a woman in labor in chapter two seems like a natural disaster as brutal as a volcanic eruption. Throughout the novel, the untamable force of nature dominates a frail and fragile mankind, destroying most of it.

Civilized man becomes a primitive victim to the fury of nature's force. This diametric relationship between brute force, symbolized by nature and the earth, and human fragility is at the very core of the novel. The fear of death is like an ultimate crack in the earth, swallowing up all living beings, some of whom will escape and guide humanity and its subsequent generations until the end of time.

Despite the omnipresence of natural devastation and fear, in the first two chapters the novel clearly affirms that human life continues in spite of the natural disasters (volcanic, earthquake) that the species endures. That is why it is possible to say that *Les larmes de Saint Laurent* emphasizes the notion of the future. This may seem paradoxical, given the historical dimension of certain events, but it is precisely this aspect that gives the novel a certain predictability of events that projects it into the future. In addition, a series of omens in various forms helps to support the temporal structure of projection into the future, itself supported by intertextuality. The crisis is in essence a transformation represented by themes of the carnival, erosion of language, and the wanderings throughout a post-apocalyptic world. Finally, *Les larmes de Saint Laurent*, more than all the novels studied to date, has the strongest sense of continued existence. Not the survival of human beings, like the individuals in *Tarmac*, but that of the human race that is immortalized within its habitat, the earth itself.

Time as an Omen

It has already been mentioned that the first two chapters of *Les larmes de Saint Laurent* were based on historical events. This has a significant impact on the temporal structure because the sequence of events in the novel, although modified, refers to a

historical and predetermined order, whose details and outcomes are known. In other words, the chronology of historical events that inspired the novel took place before and outside the context of this fictive work. That is why, in her acknowledgments at the end of the novel, Dominique Fortier says: “[...] *j’invite ceux qui souhaiteraient en savoir plus sur Saint-Pierre au moment de l’éruption à consulter Fire Mountain de Peter Morgan*”⁴⁶ [...]. *On y trouve entre autre une chronologie rigoureuse des événements à laquelle je me suis permis de déroger*” (Fortier, 2010, p. 331).

Along the same lines, the author provides the reader with Edward Love’s biography:

Né en 1863, le mathématicien Augustus Edward Hough Love s’est intéressé aux questions de géodynamique et d’élasticité des solides, domaines dans lesquels il a réalisé d’importantes découvertes. Il a mené à l’Université d’Oxford une carrière plus longue et plus brillante que celle que je lui ai imposée à Londres. [...]

(Fortier, 2010, p. 332)

Clearly there is a historical time that precedes the fictional time in *Les larmes de Saint Laurent*. Paul Ricoeur, whose theories appeared in the chapter on *Tarmac*, devoted much of his intellectual energy to the relationship between history and art of writing. He helped to establish the link between *peripetia*, events conceived by the author, and *historia*, events as they happened in history⁴⁷. In Fortier’s novel, not only do *peripetia* and *historia* overlap, but there is also a consequence produced by the presence of a historical framework at the root of this fictional novel. Essentially, this matrix includes its

⁴⁶ Peter Morgan, *Fire Mountain. How one man survived the world's worst volcanic disaster*, London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2003.

⁴⁷ See chapter 3, page 75.

own destruction. The events caused by the volcanic eruption of Mount Pelée follow their own timeline, ending when Baptiste Cypris emerges from his stone cell and is hired by Barnum & Bailey's Circus. Each step happens according to history, to reality, and this established order carries with it a logical continuation of ensuing events, also predetermined narratively by the fact that they have actually occurred. This historical backdrop serves simply as a historical framework onto which the fictional aspects of the novel are added. This structure, formed by the events surrounding the explosion of a volcano that killed the 30,000 people in Saint-Pierre, left only one official survivor⁴⁸. Moreover, it adds to the structure of the apocalyptic narrative elicited in biblical scripture superimposed over the threat of natural disaster.

Like the island's subservient class, Father Blanchot, Saint-Pierre's parish priest, interprets all the natural volcanic threats as signs of the Book of Revelation: "*De la fumée s'élevait-elle du cratère le matin qu'il annonçait d'une voix lugubre : « Il monta du puits une fumée, comme la fumée d'une grande fournaise ; et le soleil et l'air furent obscurcis par la fumée du puits. »*" (Fortier, 2010, p. 55). As Mount Pelée's signs become more and more indicative of its eminent eruption, the parishioners gather in the church in hopes of finding protection there. All the while, Father Blanchot recites entire sections (written in italics in the novel) from the apocalyptic scripture. He is convinced that the moment of God's final wrath was upon them. "*Le père n'en doutait plus : c'était bel et bien à l'Apocalypse qu'il lui était donné d'assister, en la commentant, en suivant son progrès, pour ainsi dire, pas à pas, tandis qu'elle déployait devant ses yeux éblouis son spectacle de feu.*" (Fortier, 2010, p. 57). Next, the priest intensifies his sermon with lengthier

⁴⁸ The presence of a second survivor, Léon Compère-Léandre, found on the outskirts of town in the basement of his workshop have been downplayed or omitted from many historical references.

excerpts focusing primarily of the fall of Babylon for reasons of impurity. Shortly after the entranced preacher's sermon, the glowing cloud swallows up the church killing all the panicked believers.

The biblical scripture acts like a third alternative level of time. Beyond historical and fictional timelines, the apocalyptic narrative follows more of a biblical timeline, flowing from one chapter to another, connecting one event to another: the opening of the seals, the arrival of the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse, a variety of signs and trumpet blasts, the arrival of Beast, and finally the complete destruction of the world, and the redemption of God's devotees. This symbolic time is well known, and therefore, predictable, and possesses its own eschatology. Paul Ricoeur discusses this subdivision of time that is directly linked to historical time but to which fictional time could be added when based on history:

D'une part, le temps historique paraît se résoudre en une succession d'intervalles homogènes [...] ; d'autre part, il se disperse dans une multiplicité de temps dont l'échelle s'ajuste à celle des entités considérées : temps court de l'événement, temps demi-long de la conjoncture, longue durée des civilisations, très longue durée des symbolismes, fondateurs du statut social en tant que tel (Ricoeur, 1983. p. 314-315).

Even though the expression of fictional time is quite typical in *Les larmes de Saint Laurent* because of its use of omniscient, ulterior narration, it does, however, prevent the anticipation of events, the other levels “*couches*” of time – historic and symbolic – which allow the prediction of any ensuing events.

Northrop Frye clarifies the distinction between the different forms of time:

For the ordinary historian, of course, everything in history is unique. No action exactly repeats in exactly the same circumstances. But the kind of history that you find for instance in the Book of the Judges does show you the same situation recurring within different contexts each time in order to bring out a more universal pattern (Frye, 2004, p. 236).

It is possible and quite plausible to deduce, on the level of symbolic time, that Baptiste is one of the chosen few. His life has been spared, and he finds redemption, which, as will be discussed later, he passes down to future generations. Similarly, in a long scene in the second chapter, Augustus Edward Love and his wife Garance stroll amidst the ruins of Pompeii. The events that nearly instantaneously destroyed the city following the eruption of Vesuvius in AD 79 is the setting of a post-apocalyptic world, which emerges after the disaster:

Edward s'éloigna, avança péniblement dans la lourde poussière couleur de plomb, cherchant à se représenter les entrailles d'où avaient jailli deux mille ans plus tôt les flammes qui, si elles avaient anéanti la cité romaine, étaient néanmoins porteuses dans leur destruction d'une forme de vie éternelle, puisqu'elles flambaient, inchangées, depuis la nuit des temps, semblables au feu dont brûlait de toute éternité le Soleil et les étoiles qui les toisaient haut dans le ciel (Fortier, 2010, p. 192).

From the very thought that evokes the violent and mass-destruction of Pelée, also arises the continuation of life beyond the catastrophe, based on historical understanding of the incident. The end and the ensuing renewal are directly linked in a cause and effect type of

relation. In this case, more than ever, the apocalypse is a moment of transformation leading to a new and different world.

Time throughout the novel is oriented towards the future and is amplified by everything that leads to prediction, whether it be signs, prophecies, or omens. For example, at the beginning of the story, Mount Pelée shows clear signs of volcanic activity: “[...] *la Pelée se mit toutefois à crachoter, laissant échapper de faibles nuages gris ou blancs, parfois accompagnés de courtes secousses*” (Fortier, 2010, p. 21). This causes a reaction in the fauna living in the vicinity: “*Instinctivement, les animaux réagissent aux mouvements de la montagne : Les animaux domestiques comme les bêtes de ferme affichaient depuis le début du mois [de mai 1902] un comportement singulier, certains refusant de se nourrir alors que d’autres, qui avaient toujours été d’une douceur absolue, distribuaient ruades et coups de dent [...]*” (Fortier, 2010, p. 51). Furthermore, the group of social elites, on expedition along the mountainside, notice hundreds of dead birds floating in the poisoned pond. Until that moment, the various signs had been ignored by those living in Saint-Pierre because the mountain had been an all too familiar and peaceful presence for so many centuries, and, therefore, no longer seemed to pose any real threat or danger. The majority of the people lived their daily lives as though nothing was happening, until about a month prior to the explosion, when the warning signs began to multiply, creating fear and anxiety in a growing number of citizens, many of whom sought refuge in the local church. There, the Priest welcomed them with a symbolic arsenal of apocalyptic references: “[...] *la maison du Seigneur fut pleine nuit et jour, retentissant à toute heure de la voix puissante du curé qui rappelait les destins*

tragiques de Sodome et Gomorrhe les immondes, de Babylone l'impure, de Babel l'orgueilleuse" (Fortier, 2010, p. 54).

As mentioned earlier, the Priest's sermon overflows with long quotes from the Book of Revelation, creating anxiety among the faithful who will eventually be burned to death in their pews, paralyzed by fear. The religious discourse adds to the tension and foreshadowing of events. The list of the destroyed cities, real or imaginary that had fallen under God's wrath evokes the symbolic threat of the punishment looming over the heads of the citizens of Saint-Pierre, and who eventually share the same fatal destiny as those mentioned in the biblical scripture.

Just prior to the eruption, Baptiste Cyparis climbs alongside the mountain in order to understand its intensifying volcanic activity. Since he grew up in the shadows of the mountain, he does not really fear the menacing signs. He stops beside a small volcanic "chiminée" that emits the foul stench of brimstone, but that is lined with pleasant mineral rock formations by which Baptiste is fascinated:

Baptiste voulut un jour cueillir l'une de ces fleurs minérales à même le roc d'où elle avait éclos. Tendant la main pour en saisir délicatement un pétale entre le pouce et l'index comme il l'aurait fait d'un papillon qu'il aurait craint d'effaroucher, il découvrit que la pierre était brûlante et retira précipitamment les doigts. Il lui resta pendant plusieurs jours, sur la pulpe du pouce, une vilaine boursouffure d'où s'écoulait un liquide clair comme de l'eau, qui fut remplacée par une pâle cicatrice dont les contours irréguliers rappelaient, en miniature, la rose de pierre qu'il avait voulu prendre et dont il portait maintenant l'image

*gravée dans sa chair, comme une punition, une récompense ou un présage*⁴⁹.

This passage reveals how Baptiste incarnates the notion of the future. He is marked by the mountain, a sign that he sees as a *presage* or omen. Furthermore, he shares his name with a prophet from the New Testament⁵⁰. As if to clearly illustrate his ties to John the Baptist who was killed by decapitation, Baptiste Cyparis is intentionally served a particular part of the fish for his meal. “[...] *il [the servant] résolut de trancher la bête en tronçons qu’il déposa sans ménagement dans l’assiette de chacun. Baptiste, servi le dernier, se vit remettre la tête argentée où l’œil rond et la bouche ouverte semblaient exprimer une surprise sans nom*” (Fortier, 2010, p. 16).

Again, the prophet is the one who possess the ability to recognize the coming of the apocalypse that comes to him/her in the form of a vision. In Baptiste’s case, the burning of his hand on the mountain is a form of prescience of the fiery destruction soon to follow. He survives his journey, but is permanently scared. Just prior to the eruption, he is imprisoned for having assaulted a man. At that moment, narrative time comes to a complete halt and splits off into a multitude of various actions⁵¹. Now frozen, time switches over to a more descriptive, factual ellipsis of the catastrophe: “*Et puis en un instant tout cela fut soufflé, et infiniment plus encore ; tout cela multiplié par cent, par mille, par trente mille : anéanti*” (Fortier, 2010, p. 67). The adverb *tout* condenses the countless events that occurred during the eruption, and the number thirty thousand

⁴⁹ I have taken this word out of italics to highlight its significance.

⁵⁰ Jean le Baptiste announces the arrival of Jesus of Nazareth whom he later baptizes. In addition, he has many things in common with the prophet Élie from the Old Testament. I have paraphrased general information on Jean le Baptiste from Jean Hadot’s article “Contestation socio-religieuse et apocalyptique dans le judéo-christianisme”: http://www.persee.fr/web/revues/home/prescript/article/assr_0003-9659_1967_num_24_1_2632?Prescripts_Search_tabs1=standard&.

⁵¹ See Annex I for the lengthy quotation detailing all the various actions.

indicates the number of victims to who died, frozen in the andesite produced by Mount Pelée in May 1902.

Time in the novel changes from the order of destructive events to one which sequences the rebuilding of the world, which now is a post-apocalyptic world that continues despite what it just endured: “*Ce n’était pas un paysage d’apocalypse qu’il traversait, mais un paysage de lendemain d’apocalypse, une fois la destruction advenue, accomplie, elle-même consommée dans son propre anéantissement, comme une étoile qui en explosant se consume jusqu’à n’être plus que du vide [...]*” (Fortier, 2010, p. 73).

After the devastation, a second apocalyptic crisis occurs.

Crisis: Somewhere Between the Carnival and a Labyrinth

Les larmes de Saint Laurent begins with scenes from the carnival. The diegesis specifies that it is an annual tradition for the citizens of the city of Saint-Pierre to switch their social roles for a few hours. Since the social order of the city is based on British Colonialism, the carnival swaps not only their social classes – rich and poor – but also simultaneously their race – White and Black. Through the reversal of roles, highlighted by the costumes worn by the participants, the carnival produces a series of various effects depending on social status:

Si les riches et les puissants se prêtaient en général d’assez mauvaise grâce aux réjouissances qui leur semblaient un mal nécessaire, cédant pour une soirée les salles de réception de leurs demeures à leurs serviteurs, les pauvres en profitaient pour vivre en ces quelques jours une caricature de l’existence qu’ils auraient rêvé d’avoir tout au long de l’année et dont, parce qu’il leur était donné de

l'emprunter pour ainsi dire pendant quelques heures, leurs maîtres calculaient qu'ils continueraient d'accepter d'être privés le reste du temps (Fortier, 2010, p. 11-12).

This masquerade erodes the rules and operation of the former world, to create a new one that gets its inspiration from caricaturizing the one it temporarily replaces. The poor take advantage of the luxuries normally reserved for wealthy while the rich experience the humiliation normally reserved for the subservient classes and are clumsy and awkward while serving their temporary “*maîtres*”. The carnival, thus, acts like a revelation of the power and domination apparent within the social structure. According to Bernard Gervais, revelation has a very specific role: “[...] *révéler la méprise, faire connaître l'insu, surtout s'il a la force d'un mythe d'origine, d'un récit fondateur, ne peut que provoquer la fin de ce monde, de cet univers de pensée devenu du coup désuet, erroné, fini*” (Gervais, 2009, p. 119). Saint-Pierre's social structure is based on the myth of racial superiority, the domination of Whites over Blacks. The costumes and role reversal used to reverse the usual hierarchy simply reveal the ridiculous nature of their assigned social status. In his study on French writer François Rabelais, Mikhail Bakhtin focuses on themes relating to the carnival and shows how the Carnivalesque transforms the world: “*Ils [fairs and carnivals] sont donc ambivalents : la destruction et le détronement sont associés à la renaissance et à la rénovation, la mort de l'ancien est liée à la naissance du nouveau ; toutes les images sont concentrées sur l'unité contradictoire du monde agonisant et renaissant*” (Bakhtin, 1970, p. 218). At first glance, Saint-Pierre's social sphere is completely transformed and discombobulated by the carnival, itself a prefiguration, and even an analogy of the complete upheaval wrought by apocalypse,

although the normal social workings of class and order return the day after the carnival. After the eruption, however, the city's entire population is reduced to a lone survivor; the strength of Saint-Pierre's bourgeois social system disappears, leaving a single lowly prisoner; White superiority is temporarily annihilated, leaving one Black man alive. Or, in the words of Bakhtin, "*La catastrophe sociale historique et le cataclysme naturel ne sont rien d'autres que le carnaval avec ses travestissements et son désordre en pleine rue*" (Bakhtin, 1970, p. 235). As with the annual swapping of social roles during the carnival and the volcanic destruction of all social classes spare an individual lone slave, the changes were ephemeral. Colonization eventually returned to the island and Cypris moved on to become a *slave* to the circus.

As in the other apocalyptic crises discussed in this thesis, the one that occurs in *Les larmes de Saint Laurent* includes the breakdown of language. Between the end of the carnival and the arrival of the apocalypse, Baptiste is subjected to the traditional racist authority and is thrown into jail for having stabbed a white male who had just assaulted a young black woman. On the thick, stonewalls of his prison cell, he reads the markings of former prisoners:

Les murs du cachot étaient couverts d'inscriptions laissées au cours des ans par les prisonniers qui y avaient séjourné pour des périodes plus ou moins longues. Certaines, tracées à l'aide d'un morceau de bois carbonisé ou d'un caillou, étaient presque effacées ; d'autres avaient été gravées dans la pierre où Baptiste pouvait les déchiffrer en les parcourant du doigt comme il avait déjà vu un aveugle lire un livre (Fortier, 2010, p. 43).

The diegesis offers no real meaning to the “*inscriptions*”. They are more like partial remains of thought and ideas expressed by former prisoners who etched them onto the walls. Paradoxically, the walls of the prison normally used to detain and to punish, serve to protect and spare Baptiste from the world that is being destroyed around him. The incomprehensible language for the reader is, for him, a sign of the universe on the brink of total destruction. As Baptiste deciphers the various forms of writing on the wall he resembles a prophet capable of decoding various languages. Bertrand Gervais discusses this phenomenon: “*Si la désémantisation du langage est un trait de l’imaginaire de la fin, son contrepoint nécessaire l’est aussi, c’est-à-dire une intensification de l’activité sémiotique. [...] Plus le monde se fait hermétique et le langage opaque, plus le besoin de comprendre est grand*” (Gervais, 2009, p. 64). The relationship of language reflects the necessity of establishing a new language in a post-apocalyptic world. At the moment of the eruption, Baptiste is confined to his cell, an isolated world where he is the only one who understands the symbolic language of the walls. Once he escapes and his wounds heal, he finds himself in a devastated world where he starts having visions: “*Il voyait dans l’obscurité des dragons crachant le feu, d’affreux serpents de mer qui happaient les navires dans les profondeurs, aussi dormait-il le moins possible et avait-il soin de garder toujours auprès de lui une lampe allumée*” (Fortier, 2010, p. 75). According to Gervais, visions are part of the semiotics necessary to construct a new world and to reestablish communication: “*Le texte [apocalyptique] est ainsi irisé de gestes de communication. Jean [de Patmos] nous transmet ce qu’il voit et entend, sans jamais effacer les traces de cette vision et de cette écoute. Il est l’intermédiaire, le truchement par lequel les faits seront connus*” (Gervais, 2009, p.64). Language creates a link between the vision and its

intended message. As an intermediary, the prophet possesses the capacity to name things that do not exist for which s/he alone can create signs (words). This is a spoken language, representative of the imaginary, scribbled language, from which a new world will emerge. While walking around the devastated city for the first time, Baptiste comments on the preposterousness of paper flying all around the streets: “*Absurdement, des papiers avaient survécu à l’holocauste qui avait réduit en cendres le bois, les étoffes et jusqu’aux briques des bâtiments, aussi Baptiste se mit-il bientôt à cueillir dans les décombres qui, le 15 juin, fumaient toujours, les pages qu’il découvrait volant au vent [...]*” (Fortier, 2010, p. 76). Baptiste reassembles the sheets, a hodgepodge of symbols that are completely disheveled, to create a book. Within the collection of various papers, Baptiste notices passages from the Holy Bible. His unique status as the sole survivor and possessor of God’s word makes him appear, not only as the chosen one, but as a prophet.

Il assembla ainsi un bouquet de feuilles qui allait s’épaississant de jour en jour, où Cosette et les Thénardier côtoyaient une liste de semences de légumes adaptés aux climats tropicaux, suivie, sur une feuille plus grande [...] d’un registre des baptêmes puis [...] d’un texte écrit en lettres incompréhensibles qui devaient être du grec, les dépenses du mois de mars de l’hôtel Excelsior et les dernières pages de l’Apocalypse de saint Jean où l’on arrivait encore à lire, en petits caractères trapus : Quiconque ne fut pas trouvé écrit dans le livre de la vie fut jeté dans l’étang de feu (Fortier, 2010, p. 76).

Baptiste was not thrown into the fire, he was spared from it: his name is therefore, written into the annals of life. He belongs to the future and stands before a world yet to be created. As he sifts through the piecemeal, half-burned book, he realizes that the world he

had known had simply and completely come and gone. “*En feuilletant cette liasse de papier, [...] il lui semblait contempler l’histoire de son île, fracturée, interrompue en son milieu, incomplète et pourtant achevée*” (Fortier, 2010, p. 76-77).

His rebirth occurs when he becomes aware of his new identity as a survivor. In the social structure of Saint-Pierre, Baptiste was a simple black man, a servant, a prisoner. He was at the very bottom of the social ladder, but now finds himself alone and without any points of reference, in a strange and unknown world. But, the apocalypse has left its final markings on Baptiste, an epidermal labyrinth charred into the skin on his back:

Si son visage avait été miraculeusement épargné, son torse et son dos n’étaient plus que cicatrice. Il n’aurait su dire s’il s’agissait d’une seule blessure aux infinies ramifications, ou d’un millier de brûlures qui finissaient par se rejoindre et se recouper pour tracer sur sa poitrine ce labyrinthe de chair crevassée, boursouflée, mais là où jadis il y avait une peau noire et lisse se déployait maintenant, comme quelque monstrueux nœud de vipères, une balafre aux mille branches qui désormais faisait partie de lui et dont chacune des avenues tracées par la souffrance menait à l’horreur, inéluctablement. (Fortier, 2010, p. 79)

This dorsal maze is of great symbolic importance, especially as it relates to the end of the world. Like a map, it is a symbol, which Gervais refers to as: “[...] *un signe de l’oubli et de la perte de soi, de l’errance dans un lieu où, à défaut de trouver la sortie, on s’éténue à répéter les mêmes gestes [...]*” (Gervais, 2009, p. 213). The labyrinth, therefore, represents a symbol of destruction, but in the form a pattern that leads from one place to another, and in which one wanders with the goal of arriving somewhere different, new. It is also an illustration of the difficulties Baptiste has reappropriating spoken language.

After having reconstructed the book in his new world, he becomes an ambassador who must create discourse from nothing but a few remnants of a former world. “*Souvent ses mots devaient traverser un semblable dédale : il hésitait longuement avant de parler et, une fois une phrase entamée, s’interrompait au milieu, sachant ce qu’il s’apprêtait à articuler, mais incapable de le faire [...]*” (Fortier, 2010, p. 80). Being a survivor of the apocalypse makes him an interesting attraction for the Barnum & Baily’s Circus. As a freak of nature, Baptiste joins and travels with the circus. Beyond the borders of Saint-Pierre and even Martinique, another world had evolved in parallel, but completely intact, and in which the prophet is nothing more than a hideous anomaly, paraded around with other freaks like the Siamese twins, the lobster boy, or the bearded lady.

In his new errant lifestyle, the catastrophe he survived completely takes over his identity. With each performance, Baptiste has to repeat all the details surrounding his survival of the apocalypse. His story is told so often that one of the other performers, a trapeze artist named Stella mistakes him for the catastrophic event and asks him: “*C’est toi l’Apocalypse ? [...]*” (Fortier, 2010, p. 121). Baptiste symbolizes mankind’s fascination with this biblical myth. When he and Stella make love, she writes on the maze-like scar on his back: “*Puis, elle avait doucement retourné Baptiste et avait écrit sur sa peau brûlée quelque message qui paraissait gravé dans sa chair plus profondément que la blessure qu’y avait laissée le feu de la montagne, comme une invocation*” (Fortier, 2010, p. 122). Etched into his skin by destruction, the map on Baptiste’s body becomes a canvas upon which she expresses her love, the expression of new life. However, Stella eventually rejects him and decides to continue her relationship with the circus manager, Richard Rochester. When she informs Baptiste of her decision

to leave him, “[...]tout à coup il comprit : il n’avait pas échappé à l’Apocalypse, il y avait succombé, comme tous les autres, et ceci [their breaking up / la rupture] était son *châtiment*” (Fortier, 2010, p. 128). As a circus freak, Baptiste is unable to escape his past. He is permanently linked to mass-death, continuously wandering through his various tales of how he survived the volcanic cataclysm. In his role as the lone survivor of the apocalypse, he is unable to rebuild his life or find love. At the end of the chapter, Baptiste returns to prison, falsely accused of arson, at which point he changes his name: “*Non, vous faites erreur, je m’appelle Numa, Numa Lazarus, dit Baptiste sans bégayer*” (Fortier, 2010, p. 135). Baptiste leaves behind him the circus, where, in his tales, he was repeatedly and symbolically projected into a new, post-apocalyptic world. When asked to verify his name, Baptiste changes his name to Lazare. With his new identity, he no longer stutters, he is reborn, much like his namesake, Lazare de Béthanie⁵² whom Jesus brought back from the dead, according to the New Testament. Even with his new identity, Cyparis is unable to escape his past as he once again finds himself in prison, and one of the pivotal characters in the contemporary novel *Les larmes de Saint Laurent*. Finally, in the novel’s final chapter his legacy continues through a character that proves to be a descendent of his. In each of these cases, Cyparis’s life continuously loops back upon itself, which is characteristic of cyclical time.

The second chapter essentially mimics the structure of the first. When Edward Love and his wife leave for Italy to travel and visit the ancient ruins of Pompeii, they notice strange clouds in the sky: “*Ce sont les nuages de la montagne Pelée, annonça Edward, qui ont traversé la moitié de la terre et qui son maintenant au-dessus de*

⁵² For more information on the Lazare’s life, consult the following website:
<http://www.paroissestjoseph.org/historique/eglise-st-lazare/st-lazare-bethanie>.

l'Europe" (Fortier, 2010, p. 156). The link between the two sub-plots is, therefore, clearly established. Even more so when the two explore the ruins full of frozen silhouettes of the humans killed during the infamous Mount Vesuvius eruption, made more realistic through the numerous passages from the works of Pline l'Ancien (Pliny the Elder). Pline l'Ancien perished during the eruption of Vesuvius in AD 79 that completely destroyed the city of Pompeii. There is a striking resemblance between Baptiste and the ancient scholar whose writings survived to teach natural history to future generations for nearly two thousand years. "*Quand on a trouvé son corps, à la fin du dix-neuvième siècle, il tenait encore une liasse de documents à la main*" (Fortier, 2010, p. 258). Pline l'Ancien bequeaths his works to future generations, thus making him appear to be the only survivor of a large-scale disaster, much like Baptiste. When Edward and Garance return from their trip through the post-apocalyptic Italian world, Garance informs Edward that she is pregnant. Unfortunately, she dies while giving birth to twins; another representation of destruction leading to renewal. Edward is completely devastated by the news and from that moment on dedicates himself to his mathematical theories on the movement of the Earth's crust following an earthquake:

Sous sa plume, jaillissait des volcans et des séismes qu'il pourchassait depuis des années et dont on aurait dit qu'il avait brièvement réussi à les capturer pour les emprisonner dans son encrier, d'où il les libérait et les fixait une fois pour toutes en les jetant sur la page comme on épingle sur le papier les papillons. Tout y était enfin : le feu et l'eau, la Terre et la Lune liées l'une à l'autre par les marées où se confondaient leurs souffles emmêlés, ces ondes qui faisaient trembler le sol et les êtres, la musique et le silence qui s'unissaient pour donner naissance à ce chant

mystérieux du monde qui était leur incarnation la plus parfaite, Garance elle-même qui dans ces lignes de la première à la dernière inspirées par elle, continuerait de survivre par-delà leur mort à tous les deux (Fortier, 2010, p. 210).

Like so many other styles of literature, this alternation between life and death – whether real or symbolic – appears throughout the novel. Unlike the other genres, the apocalyptic genre unites destruction with the pursuit of a new world through fundamental changes that separate the old world from the new. Especially because, as Richard Bauckham states in his work *La théologie de l'Apocalypse*: “*Il y a un sens selon lequel l'Apocalypse, en tant que sommet de la tradition prophétique biblique, est particulièrement apte à transcender son contexte originel de pertinence*” (Baukham, 2006, p. 176). What this means in Fortier’s novel is that the representation of the apocalypse, which occurs over a hundred year time span in the first two chapters, creates an interpretive framework for the third chapter whose context is very much another story.

The World Following the End of the World

Les larmes de Saint Laurent has three very distinct chapters that tell quite different stories, all of them loosely or minimally connected. In fact, it is not until the last few pages of the novel that any global understanding of the link can be drawn. The final chapter seems rather distant and removed, in both time and content, from the two preceding chapters. The use of intertextuality makes the link possible between the first two and the final chapter. The male character, William, reads two books with notable titles: *The Last Days of St. Pierre: The Volcanic Disaster That Claimed Thirty Thousand Lives* and *Considérations sur les montagnes volcaniques, De Vesuvio incendio nuntius*.

Apart from these literary references to historical cataclysms, there are no other apocalyptic events that occur in the third chapter. No form of actual devastation occurs anywhere in the diegesis. Despite the omnipresence of death, every defunct person in the story has long since been dead and buried in the cemetery which is the primary setting of the third chapter: tragedy is, thus, a figment existing in history. Despite the fact that death is part of the past, the cemetery houses visual representations of those who were once among the living. Like the example of the carbonized flower in *The Road*, the gravestones are effigies of something that *was*, a life that has ended but remains, in the form of a symbolic marker, eternally frozen in time. The story follows a young man and woman who, on their daily walks along the mountainside, accidentally cross paths, and eventually fall in love. Any signs of destruction or devastation are sparked only by their passion. For example, when they first meet, a bolt of lightning strikes near to where the couple is standing: “*Il n’a pas vu la foudre tomber, mais il l’a sentie, formidable décharge qui, en l’espace d’un instant, unit le ciel, la terre et le feu*” (Fortier, 2010, p. 327). Furthermore, they have their first sexual encounter in the cemetery’s mausoleum, behind its green door, colored by years of oxidizing bronze. Within this stone holding tomb, previous lives are symbolically resurrected as the two characters reveal their identities: Rose Cyparis and William Love. They are each a descendant of the protagonist from the first two chapters that bears her of his family name.

As mentioned earlier, the third chapter takes place a century after the first two. The collective or individual apocalypses experienced by the characters in the preceding sub-narratives have been handed down to the following generations and thus have been given new life after death, each subsequent life holding equal or greater value than that of

its predecessor. “*L’extension de la nouvelle création est aussi universelle que celle de la première création*” (Bauckham, 2006, p. 186). Contrary to popular belief that the apocalypse represents definitive destruction, in the original biblical sense of the word, which is still accepted today, it refers to a period of renewal, the creation of God’s kingdom on Earth. In *Les larmes de Saint Laurent*, the revelation of an inequitable, ignorant world in chapter one – incarnated by Baptiste Cybaris - leads to its destruction by way of natural disaster. From this destruction, however, in chapter three the force of life emerges and propagates by way of two characters that transform their identities by falling in love and then establishing a new world.

The theme of continuity appears at the center of meaning in Dominique Fortier’s novel. However, perpetuity is not only illustrated by the renewal of the stories of different characters whose genes are transmitted and reconfigured in the bodies and spirits of descendants from generation to generation. The notion of legacy goes beyond the limits of mankind, of human flesh. From early on in the novel, perpetuity is embodied in the motif of stone: Baptiste is spared from the volcanic destruction by the thick wall of his prison cell, Edward Love studies the movement of the Earth’s rocky crust during earthquakes, the silhouettes of the residents of Pompeii are carbonized in the cooled lava rock, and finally, Rose Cybaris and William Love unite in the stone mausoleum in the Cimetière Mont-Royal in Montreal. Most strikingly, the seduction of the two lovers takes place amidst the gravestones, eternal markers of the once living, and through the use of another stone effigy, *inukshuks* that the two scatter across the mountain as a sign of their presence there. In the context of this novel, stone has two diametrically opposed functions: it destroys at times, and protects at others. It is also protean. On the one hand,

it is able to change its state and shape during volcanic eruptions or earthquakes and on the other, it remains stable for centuries, even millennia. This is the case of the Monteregian Hills in the Saint Lawrence Valley that include Mont-Royal where the story in the third chapter is set. This chain of hills is made of “*roches ignées intrusives*” (Fortier, 2010, p. 263) that do not erode as easily as the sedimentary layer of gravel and sand that lightly covers and surround them. Essentially, *Les larmes de Saint Laurent* gives a whole new symbolic meaning to rock or stone. They embody the material, solid, and permanent incarnation of the human spirit, a spirit that also endures despite the various forms of cataclysms it may encounter, and the ephemeral lifespan of each individual human being.

CONCLUSION

La fin du temps est arrivée...

Vidéotron Billboard
Sherbrooke, Quebec,
Spring 2012

*It's the end of the world as we know it, and I
feel fine.*

R.E.M.

Since the early scriptures of the Old Testament, followed by the Book of John, apocalyptic concerns have been at the very core of Occidental identity. Despite numerous false predictions of the Apocalypse over the past two thousand years, end-of-the-world narratives continue to grow in popularity and have spread from their religious origins into secular domains. Through the use of intertextuality tracing back to original biblical myths or stemming from more contemporary apocalyptic fears born in a nuclear age, the apocalyptic imagination reveals both the causes and the steps leading to the end of the world, but then calms or appeases concerns of ultimate destruction with the revelation of a new world born of hope, or in religious nomenclature, faith. From this perspective the Apocalypse, therefore, corresponds to an artistic or cultural representation of the primordial fear of death, compensated by the hope of a new world.

In this comparative study of apocalyptic representation in four contemporary novels, two American and two Quebecois, each presents a different and relatively recent

version of the Apocalypse following the stages, as explained in the introduction, of Gervais's model of Time, Crisis, and Meaning/Sense although each story's underlying impetus varies from novel to novel.

The two American novels follow the more traditional model of a collective mass-destruction, from which only a few of the chosen survive. In Kurt Vonnegut's *Galapagos* (1985) the story is twofold. On one hand, it deals with Darwin's theory of evolution through humanity's quasi-annihilation caused by human-ovary-eating bacteria. On the other hand, this mass destruction leaves only a chosen few, like in the biblical tale of the apocalypse, and over a million year period, transform into a post-human, seal-like being. *The Road* by Cormac McCarthy (2009) details a similar but more traditional end-of-the-world story whereas, it appears that its origins are nuclear, thus brought about by the hand of man. This however, is never specified and therefore, not entirely certain. The catastrophe could have been of natural origin (meteorite) that could, in this context, be considered as an act of God. As in *Galapagos*, and the Book of John, the destruction leaves but a handful of chosen individuals who possess the ability and responsibility to create a new and better world.

In the Quebecois novels, the potential for the apocalypse is omnipresent throughout the novel and greatly impacts and influences the protagonists in their adventures. Instead, the meaning of the apocalypse has been reduced from the collective to the individual level representing a moment of significant transition or change for the protagonist. In *Tarmac* (2009), Nicolas Dickner uses the myth of the Apocalypse (through the threat of the atomic bomb) as an allegory for the personal transformation of the protagonist, appropriately named Hope Randall, as she enters adulthood. In this

novel, the end of the world appears quite innocuous leaving center stage to the dimension of transformation. In the fourth and final novel *Les larmes de Saint Laurent* (2010), Dominique Fortier makes direct references to the traditional myth by citing complete sections from the Book of Revelation. Despite the references to the Apocalypse, the novel focuses on the transformation of only one of the story's characters: Batpiste Cyparis. It is through him that the whole narrative unfolds over three generations, in a tale of survival and transformation rather than destruction.

Interpretations of the Apocalypse are nothing new and are usually limited to two variations: literal or figurative. Either the Rapture will cause the complete destruction or transformation of one world to another -- as was falsely predicted only 12 short years ago when biblical fanatics prophesied the Apocalypse upon Christ's return 2000 years after his birth -- or it could simply be, like in the Quebecois novel, a moment of revelation bringing forth change to create a new world, society and most importantly, individual, radically different from its predecessor. At the turn of the 21st century, these two possibilities continue to ignite debate. From either perspective, a greater number of interpretations, theories, predictions have left the sacred and flooded the profane to a point that the Apocalypse has become a marketable and highly profitable subject. Senior analyst and board advisor to the Center for Millennial Studies at Boston University, Chip Beret had accurately predicted this trend:

“Sales of books, videos and other items related to prophecy, the rapture and the end times will continue after the excitement of the year 2000 fades. Prophecy belief is a durable part of the American psyche, whether drawn from the original theological themes, or in infinite variations seeping

into secular society. That the end times are a growth industry in these millennial days demonstrates the central role of this narrative for many of our fellow citizens".⁵³

This study has revealed that the very definition of the word apocalypse is itself in the process of radical change. Over time, the term *apocalypse* has experienced a shift in meaning. It once conjured nothing but notions of collective destruction leading to radical change and salvation can now be reduced to an individual level in which the crisis is only perceived as destructive. The very idea or notion of the apocalypse has changed dramatically from its biblical origins of collective destruction to include smaller, more regional destruction of groups of people, to an individual moment of personal transformation.

This migration from the classical, traditional, and mythological representation of the Apocalypse to a more secular ideology is reflected in different degrees between the American and Quebecois novels presented in this thesis. It is both interesting and essential to highlight that the American authors, Kurt Vonnegut and Cormac McCormac who are both older base their novels on more traditional versions of the Apocalypse focusing on the collective dimension whereas the contemporary quebecois novelists, Nicolas Dickner and Dominique Fortier portray a more individualistic vision or interpretation of the same myth.

Definitively, the myth of the apocalypse has infiltrated into and completely saturated Pop culture, in dozens of blockbuster films, religious survival guides, science fiction novels, as well as other forms of literature. In the process, the word is becoming

⁵³ BERLET, Chip (2001), *End of Times as a Growth Industry*, from the World Wide Web at <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/apocalypse/readings/endtime.html>.

more and more popular and is applied to more and more diverse situations, changing its very meaning or sense. To conclude, there is a very interesting novel that supports the recent shift of meaning in the conceptualization of the term Apocalypse. The reading of *Pop Apocalypse. A possible Satire* (2009), by American author Lee Konstantinou, shows in which the traditional biblical myth of the Apocalypse intertwines with its allegoric, contemporary, coming-of-age offspring. The satirical work pokes fun at faults within a given society and Konstantinou's makes no exception and mocks this most serious myth by projecting it into the near future, into a profane world overrun by pop culture. This comical work reveals the most inappropriate and ridiculous reactions of the various characters on the brink of total nuclear destruction of the planet. Faced with the chaos the apocalyptic crisis has provoked, the protagonist "has more serious problems to deal with". For example, this character struggles with his Ph.D. thesis dealing with his concerns of the tarnishing of Elvis Presley's image due to an overabundance of impersonators. Interest in such an inept subject, clearly an example of global pop-culture, completely overshadows any fears of an imminent apocalypse.

The term *apocalypse* has itself undergone a major shift in meaning. What once evoked only collective fear of eternal damnation or salvation can now refer to an event, day, or moment of transformation for a group or an individual. The word that once evoked thoughts of mass destruction and terror has also become a more commonplace term used to describe the seemingly trivial or mundane, occasionally making the use of the word *apocalypse* appear as a light parody of itself.

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À quatre heures du matin ce 8 mai 1902, jour de la fête de l'Ascension, un homme accoudé au bar du Blessé-Bobo voulait consulter sa montre et se rendait compte qu'on la lui avait volée ; une femme incapable de dormir se levait pour aller voir à la fenêtre si la suie blanche qui tombait du ciel depuis des jours avait enfin cessé ; deux amoureux se retrouvaient à la fontaine Agnès comme toutes les nuits, et partaient ensemble d'un pas impatient ; un chien rêvait qu'il poursuivait un chat et ses babines frémissaient, et ses moustaches, et il poussait dans son sommeil de petits cris aigus ; un vieillard à l'agonie tout à coup se sentait mieux et trouvait le courage de se hisser sur ses oreillers et de demander à boire à la servante assoupie sur une chaise, coiffée de travers, près de son lit ; le Soleil était encore de l'autre côté de la Terre ; le vent murmurant chatouillait les feuilles de palmiers ; un gendarme remplissait un rapport en buvant un café noir ; une fille de joie sur son tabouret, son rouge à lèvres ayant à peine coulé, attendait, le regard fixe, que l'aube arrive enfin ; un maître d'hôtel au-dessus de tout soupçon fourrait dans un sac des cuillères en argent qu'il se proposait d'aller revendre au matin ; un enfant se réveillait d'un cauchemar pour entrer dans un autre ; la mer déposait sur le sable des pognées de coquillages, des touffes d'algues emmêlées et quelques morceaux de bois d'épaves léchés jusqu'à être blancs et lisses comme de l'os ; une mère épuisée d'avoir veillé son fils malade posait sa tête sur l'oreiller près de la tête moite de l'enfant ; un cheval dans une écurie tombait à genoux, puis s'effondrait tout à fait ; une poule non loin pondait un œuf qu'elle contemplait ensuite avec stupeur ; un poète scrutait en vain le ciel brouillé, attendant l'inspiration, et faisait sans s'en rendre compte une tache d'encre là où il avait voulu commencer un sonnet ; des phalènes par centaines se grillaient les ailes contre les ampoules des lampadaires ; un amant se glissait en silence dans le lit de sa

maîtresse alors que le mari de celle-ci dormait quelques pièces plus loin et il mettait la main sur son sein en souriant à demi ; Baptiste couché en étoile sur le sol de sa cellule, écoutait le fourmillement des blattes ; un matelot sur un navire amarré dans le port se pendait par-dessus le bastingage pour vomir un amer mélange de rhum et d'ale ; au fond de l'eau, un câble télégraphique se rompait ; les chauves-souris revenaient vers les grottes où elles passaient la journée suspendues par les pieds ; le pressier du journal L'Opinion regardait le monstre de métal cracher le papier e longs rouleaux ; Gontran de la Chevrotière pétait dans son sommeil et en éprouvait une profonde satisfaction; une colonie de termites achevait un château de terre et de salive haut comme un homme ; le père Blanchot rêvait d'une bête à sept têtes qui toutes étaient blondes et qui le regardaient d'un œil bleu ; une ancienne esclave portait machinalement la main à sa cheville où on lui avait jadis passé les fers ; un antique bananier au plus profond de la forêt tombait dans un froissement de feuilles que personne n'entendait ; la terre sous son écorce tiède bouillonnait ; dans une chambre d'hôpital, un homme à qui l'on avait dit qu'il ne marcherait plus courait en rêve, tandis qu'un étage plus haut une femme blanche donnait naissance à un bébé noir ; un voleur à la tire examinant son butin de la nuit admirait une montre en or dont la trotteuse avançait par petits bonds saccadés. (Fortier, 2010, p. 65-67)