“How Does The Never To Be Differ From What Never Was?”: The Importance of Dreams and Memory in *The Road*

Diogo Barbieri

FACULDADE DE LETRAS DA UNIVERSIDADE DO PORTO - CETAPS

Citation: Diogo Barbieri. “‘How Does The Never To Be Differ From What Never Was?’: The Importance of Dreams and Memory in *The Road*.” *Via Panoramica: Revista de Estudos Anglo-Americanos*, série 3, vol. 10, n.º 2, 2021, pp. 60-73. ISSN: 2182-9934. Web: http://ojs.letras.up.pt/. DOI: 10.21747/2182-9934/via10_2a4.

Abstract

The haunting presence of memories and dreams from an unregenerate past society thoroughly permeate the action of Cormac McCarthy’s vision of the post-apocalypse in *The Road*. Besides the intention of contrasting the barrenness of the world that the protagonists inhabit with the lively imagery of the old world, the recollections that invade the father’s inner self provide a clash between personal and collective narratives which push him to struggle for survival and protect his son in an effort to “carry the fire” of humanity. Parallelly, the symbolism of the dreams that we encounter throughout the novel hold valuable clues that can be accessed to resolve the ambiguous closure to *The Road*. In the first part of this paper, I will revisit the field of memory studies to reveal the importance that memory holds as a provider of meaning for life in the apocalypse. The second part of the article develops a theory that absolutely disregards any optimistic reading of the end of the novel, as it presents us with the possibility that what we read in the last pages of the book constitutes the wish-fulfilment produced by the boy’s dying dream. To investigate this enticing theory that was furthered by Jacob M. Powning, I will assess this hypothesis through the lenses of Psychoanalysis. McCarthy’s interest in the psychoanalytic studies, and his fascination with the dream world will help to develop a pertinent proposition that seeks to ultimately resolve the enigmatic Deus Ex-Machina that closes the novel.

Keywords: Cormac McCarthy; Dream; Memory; Apocalypse; Psychoanalysis

Resumo

A presença assombrosa de sonhos e memórias de um passado que não pode ser regenerado permeia a ação da visão pós-apocalíptica apresentada por Cormac McCarthy em *The Road*. Para além da intenção de contrastar a esterilidade do mundo habitado pelos protagonistas com as

imagens vivazes do mundo antigo, as lembranças que invadem o espaço íntimo do pai causam um choque entre narrativas pessoais e coletivas que o motivam a lutar pela sobrevivência e a proteger o seu filho num esforço por "carregar o fogo" da humanidade. Paralelamente, o simbolismo dos sonhos que encontramos ao longo do romance contém pistas valiosas que podem ser analisadas para resolver a conclusão ambígua da narrativa. O presente artigo pretende, primeiramente, revelar a importância das reminiscências do pai como criadoras de propósito para a vida no apocalipse, revisitando estudos académicos na área da memória. A segunda parte do artigo desenvolve uma teoria que descarta por completo qualquer leitura otimista do romance, apresentando a possibilidade de que a conclusão de *The Road* constitua a realização de um desejo produzido pelo sonho do filho moribundo. Esta fascinante teoria que foi avançada por Jacob M. Powning será avaliada através de uma análise de foro psicanalista que visa ampliar esta hipótese. O interesse que o próprio McCarthy nutre por estudos da psicanálise, bem como o seu fascínio pelos mistérios do subconsciente e o mundo dos sonhos, ajudarão a desenvolver uma proposta pertinente que procura resolver fundamentalmente o enigmático Deus Ex-Machina que encerra o romance.

Palavras-chave: Cormac McCarthy; Sonho; Memória; Apocalipse; Psicanálise

In an essay that explores the theme of memory in McCarthy's *The Road* and *No Country for Old Men*, scholar Marie-Reine Pugh considers that the protagonists of these novels must mediate between the pressures of both the personal and collective memory, emphasizing that the consideration of these distinct yet approachable theories is indispensable to unveil the character's purpose in the diegesis of each work:

> By having characters shoulder the weight of both types of memory [personal and collective], McCarthy's novels actively question an individual's obligations to the larger communal past as well as the community's artificial pressure on individual motivations, which pushes characters to reexamine their assumptions about their self-identity and greater purpose. (51)

The tension created by both types of memory will force McCarthy's characters to face their own conceptions of the self, and subsequently to question their purpose in life. In *The Road,* the father is consistently afflicted by the weight of both types of memory, however, should we analyze these memories through the lenses of Paul Ric*œu*r, or Pierre Nora (to whom I will return later), we might infer that even though the powerful invasions of memory in the father's inner world leave him utterly exasperated, they are essential contrivances, produced by the father's subconscious, to tackle the barrenness of the apocalyptic world, and provide meaning for a nihilistic existence.

David Lowenthall, the American historian, and geographer, defines memory as an individual process of awareness. He states that "[t]he remembered past is both individual and collective. But as a form of awareness, memory is wholly and intensely personal . . . . We recall only our own experiences at first hand, and the past we remember is innately our own" (194). Lowenthall expressly overlooks the origin of memories. Even though he recognizes that the genesis of remembered memories might be either private or shared, nonetheless, it is the self that experiences the actual remembering (194). Moreover, in the process of remembering, the individuals reshape those memories according to their personal scope of the world and its events. Consequently, Lowenthall considers the individual mind as the place where the past resides.

On the other end of the spectrum of memory studies, we find the French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs, the originator of the idea of collective memory. For him, memory is a social phenomenon, for he believed that "it is in society that people normally acquire their memories", and that similarly, "[it] is also in society that they recall, recognize, and localize their memories" (38). Since Halbwachs notices that our memories, and our sense of the past are inherently influenced by external factors; he centers his thesis on the principle that the vulnerability of individuals against the power of the social narratives causes them to be unconsciously controlled by their memories.

However, in *The Road,* McCarthy projects a world that is recessing to a state of pre-language, and pre-culture:

> The world shrinking down about a raw core of parsible entities. The names of things slowly following those things into oblivion. Colors. The names of birds. Things to eat. Finally the names of things one believed to be true. More fragile than he would have thought. How much was gone already? The sacred idiom shorn of its referents and so of its reality. Drawing down like something trying to preserve heat. (88)

The apocalyptic earth that father and son inhabit is devoid of all its collective frameworks and social constructs, which hinders the father from experiencing memory as a social phenomenon. The father cannot "recall, recognize and localize" (Halbwachs 38) his memories in society for his only companion is a boy born in the new barren world, who looks to his father as a "being from a planet that no longer existed" (McCarthy 153).

In this sense, the father is left to be tortured alone by his personal memories, which seem to haunt him with reminiscences of a better past that cannot be restored -

he is harassed by images filled with beauty and hope, of a time when the world was teeming with life, and one could live rather than scarcely survive:

> He could remember everything of her save her scent. Seated in a theatre with her beside him leaning forward listening to the music. . . . 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 this frame. Now call down your dark and your cold and be damned. (McCarthy 18)

There are many other manifestations of torture caused by the father's personal memory, which could stem for instance, from the insistent reminder of his wife's coldness for abandoning him and their son, leaving the father alone to care of their child in the wretchedness of the wasteland:

> As for me my only hope is for eternal nothingness and I hope it with all my heart.
> He didnt answer.
> You have no argument because there is none.
> Will you tell him goodbye?
> No. I will not.
> Just wait till morning. Please.
> I have to go.
> She had already stood up. (McCarthy 57)

Accordingly, the dreams that haunt the father at night, and thoroughly permeate the action of the novel, are also strong harbingers of personal memory, causing coextensive torment by the ethereal presence of an unregenerate past:

> In his dream she was sick and he cared for her. The dream bore the look of sacrifice but he thought differently. He did not take care of her and she died alone somewhere in the dark and there is no other dream nor other waking world and there is no other tale to tell. (McCarthy 32)

Life in *The Road* requires a persistent state of vigilance, particularly when dwelling through it with a child under one's care. In consequence, the father constantly scorns the invasion of memory in his inner world (either if caused by dreams or daytime recollections), for it breaks the state of alertness that is necessary to protect himself and his son from the grip of death. *The Road*'s narrator explicitly addresses such tendencies when referring that the father "mistrusted all of that. He

said the right dreams for a man of peril were dreams of peril and all else was the call of languor and of death" (McCarthy18).

Curiously enough, in succession of this same statement, the father's unconscious mind seems to rebel against his own conscious thoughts. After struggling for some time to fall asleep, when he is finally able to do so, he is invaded once more by the dream-land beauty of the pre-apocalyptic world: "He dreamt of walking in a flowering wood where birds flew before them he and the child and the sky was aching blue . . ." (McCarthy 18). As one can deduce, the attempts to impose on himself the repression of personal memories are rather pointless, for the mysterious workings of the subconscious, as well as the influence of the external narratives of the old world will be constantly pushing repressed memories to the surface.

Still in the first stretch of the novel, when the father was battling the most to repress the haunting images of the past from his mind, he feels paradoxically drawn to show his son the house where he grew up. The son, however, shaped by the anxieties that troubled his father, feels terrified to explore this piece of personal history:

> Are we going in?
> Why not?
> I'm scared.
> Dont you want to see where I used to live?
> No. (McCarthy 25)

Yet, the father, still drawn by the power of the collective narratives, neglects the child's apprehensions and proceeds to narrate memories from his conventional childhood:

> This is where we used to have Christmas when I was a boy. . . . On cold winter nights when the electricity was out in a storm we would sit at the fire here, me and my sisters, doing our homework. . . . We should go, Papa, he said. Yes, the man said. But he didnt. (McCarthy 26)

It becomes rather clear that even though the father is continuously suffering from the haunting images of his personal memory, and insistently pushing them away to keep his focus centered on the menacing outside world, the external narratives of the past (Christmas; standard familiar moments) keep pushing the personal memories back to his brain, without his proper recognition or control. In this case, the sole clue of consistency with the father's former stances on the perils of memory and dreams, can only be deduced by the anxiety that the boy feels while exploring the house. The

child displays an utter disquietude by the nostalgic impulse of his father, which mirrors the father's former thoughts. Either if by mere instinct, a simple mirrored reflection of his father's ways, or a Jungian inscription of the collective unconscious in the boy's DNA; this disquietude emphasizes the abnormality of the father's impulse in the context of the novel. Additionally, the Beckettian moment in this paragraph, provided by the stasis that overwhelms the father upon his son's insistent pleads to leave the house, denotes further evidence of how much power the collective memories pose to an individual.

If we consider the effectiveness of the father's uncontrollable impulses to dive into recollection, notwithstanding his awareness of the inherent perils that such indulgence poses to life on the apocalypse, one can infer that the father's subconscious is screaming at his conscious self, as to alert him to the importance that memory holds to their survival in *The Road*. Just as Marie-Reine Pugh notices in her essay: "His reminiscing goes beyond escapism: his memories of the past can add meaning to the present" (53).

Indeed, some meaning needs to be produced out of this quest for survival, or else both father and son might suffer a similar fate to the mother. Human rationality begets for the search of meaning in life, without such continuous pursuit, death becomes appealing. Yet, how will the memories of the pre-apocalyptic life produce meaning in the wretchedness of *The Road*?

Paul Ric*œu*r's studies on the reciprocal relationship between the acts of remembering and forgetting regard the subsequent aftermath on the perception of historical experiences, as well as on the production of historical narratives. But they also address the tensions between personal and collective memory and might provide some inceptive clarification to the question formerly proposed. He figures that the close relations we keep with each other are the solution to the struggle that both type of memories pose to the sense of identity of an individual (132). In his book, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, he states that ". . . my close relations are those who approve of my existence and whose existence I approve of in the reciprocity and equality of esteem" (132).

It is rather evident that the boy cannot mediate his father's memories from the old world, but the close relationship between both might help alleviate the despair of the present reality. The needed strength to keep pushing for survival reaches the father through the hope that his son represents to him, for he regards the child as the carrier of goodness and morality, in a world of debased humanity: "He knew only that the child was his warrant. He said: If he is not the word of God God never spoke"

(McCarthy 5). The father's interactions with the son contradict the hopelessness of his initial introspections - he seems convinced of the impossibility to regenerate the past, but he nonetheless keeps both hope and moral certainty alive for the sake of his son. The father is even portrayed as being embodied by the American spirit of manifest destiny when mentioning his duty to protect the boy, as he states that his ". . . job is to take care of you [The Boy]. I was appointed to do that by God" (McCarthy 77). As a result, the son becomes a vessel of divine hope and morality, the sole barer of human goodness, and subsequently, the single provider of meaning for their continued existence in the wretchedness of the world.

Furthermore, this manifest destiny of protecting the child, and regarding him as the last flame of human nature, motivate the father to keep a code of ethics and morality that he carefully instils into the boy. Apart from being a constant assurance of good morals to his son, this idea of keeping their humanity and subsequently "carrying the fire", provides further justification for survival, while simultaneously imparting a deeper meaning to a barren existence:

> We're going to be okay, arent we Papa?
> Yes. We are.
> And nothing bad is going to happen to us.
> That's right.
> Because we're carrying the fire.
> Yes. Because we're carrying the fire. (McCarthy83)

However, the close relationship between father and son is not the only contrivance capable of producing some meaning to existence in the apocalypse. Neither does it represent the sole effort of the father to perpetuate the past and subsequently, ensure the continued existence of humanity. Pierre Nora's concept of *lieux de mémoire* (sites of memory) furthers that with the acceleration of history, the relation between Memory and History, which was already problematic, started to shift profusely:

> Our interest in *lieux de mémoir*e where memory crystallizes and secretes itself has occurred at a particular historical moment, a turning point where consciousness of a break with the past is bound up with the sense that memory has been torn . . . . There are *lieux de mémoire*, sites of memory, because there are no longer *milieux de mémoire*, real environments of memory. (Nora 7)

The term “acceleration of history” denotes a fast-growing motion of the present into an historical past that cannot be reached again, ensuing a rupture in collective consciousness that is only exacerbated by the annihilation of real environments of memory in the contemporary world. To corroborate this tendency in contemporary existence, Nora offers the example of the “irrevocable break marked by the disappearance of peasant culture” (7). Similarly, in the apocalyptic world suggested by McCarthy in *The Road*, there are no real environments of memory, although the rhythm of history was not simply accelerated, it was completely terminated, along with all societal frameworks and collective consciousness.

In his essay, “Between Memory and History: *Les Lieux de Mémoire*”, Pierre Nora notes:

> These *lieux de mémoire* are fundamentally remains, the ultimate embodiments of a memorial consciousness that has barely survived in a historical age that calls out for memory because it has abandoned it. They make their appearance by virtue of the deritualization of our world - producing, manifesting, establishing, constructing, decreeing, and maintaining by artifice and by will a society deeply absorbed in its own transformation and renewal . . . . (12)

In this sense, we may consider that the father incarnates a *lieu de mémoire*, for even though the society of *The Road* is quasi non-existent, rather than “deeply absorbed in its own transformation and renewal” (Nora 12), the father stands as one of “the ultimate embodiments of a memorial consciousness that has barely survived” (12). Furthermore, the invasion of the past into his mind, through memory and dreams, along with the assuring impossibility of the past’s recovery, propel the father to engage in his own artificial ritualization (what Nora connotates as “deritualization”) of the world, in an effort to re-establish his humanity, and that of his son.

One of the earliest most staggering moments of the novel happens when the father must shoot a member of a gang, who is grabbing the boy, and threatening him with a knife pointed to the throat. This encounter causes the boy to be evidently traumatized, and the father becomes ever more stunned by the absurdity of this new existence as he takes care of his son and needs to reassure himself of his purpose: “This is my child, he said. I wash a dead man's brains out of his hair. That is my job” (McCarthy 77). The memory of the old world contrasts starkly with the reality that the father has to bear, which influence him to ritualize the barren present life, struggling to reconnect with some sort of ancient collective continuity to validate his own identity and existence: “All of this like some ancient anointing. So be it. Evoke the

forms. Where you've nothing else construct ceremonies out of the air and breathe upon them" (McCarthy 77). Similarly, the same effort is portrayed on a former episode of the novel, when the colour of a fire storm triggers the father's memories, and press him to ritualize the world once again, so that his past does not fall into oblivion: "The color of it moved something in him long forgotten. Make a list. Recite a litany. Remember" (McCarthy 31). The father is constantly struggling to resuscitate a collective conscience, which in the context of *The Road*, is the same as to state that he is fighting for a sense of continuous humanity in a world devoid of morality, while simultaneously searching for a meaning that pushes him to persist in their survival on the road.

Both Ric*œu*r's and Nora's studies provide evidence of the power that memory holds as a provider of meaning and self-identity to life in *The Road*, and how essential it is to the idea of "carrying the fire", which sustain the existence of father and son throughout their quest for survival. Yet, how could this be related to the symbolism behind dreams? And how does their symbolism might elucidate us on the mysterious end of the novel?

In an essay called "Dreams So Rich in Colour. How Else Would Death Call You", Jacob M. Powning, a graduate from the university of New Brunswick Saint John wrote a compelling argument on how the symbolism enveloping dreams in McCarthy's novel might bring some closure to its ambiguous ending. Like many of us, Powning felt unsettled by the peculiarity of the ostensible happy ending to *The Road*'s plot. The employment of a Deus ex-Machina family that fulfils the boy's deepest expectations, as well as the unpredictable hopeful closure to such a nihilistic plot might strike even the most senseless readers as wishful and incongruent, expressly so when set against McCarthy's body of work. Confronted by such incongruence, Powning raises pertinent issues about how reading this ending at face value is inconsistent with McCarthy's former novels. He mentions the absence of happy endings in any of McCarthy's texts, while simultaneously calling attention to how the writer closed both *The Border Trilogy* , as well as *No Country For Old Men* with dream endings - he writes that "[s]ince McCarthy has never written a happy ending before, and has written vivid descriptions of dreams and laid hints throughout the book about their significance, it is at least possible that this happy ending is the boy's wishful dream" (26).

The core of Powning's hypothesis is that the boy is in fact dreaming when he encounters this family. It absolutely disregards any optimistic reading of the end of the novel, as it presents us with the possibility that what we read in the last pages constitutes the wish-fulfilment produced by the boy's dying dream. I am willing to

corroborate this enticing theory with further interpretations from the novel, and by accessing this hypothesis through the lenses of Psychoanalysis. I believe that McCarthy's interest in the psychoanalytic studies, and his fascination with the dream world, will help to sustain Powning's theory.

The first aspect that is relevant to highlight from this thesis surfaces from a close reading of the moment when the boy is presented to this Deus ex-Machina of a man:

> The man that hove into view and stood there looking at him was dressed in a gray and yellow ski parka. He carried a shotgun upside down over his shoulder on a braided leather lanyard and he wore a nylon bandolier filled with shells for the gun. A veteran of old skirmishes, bearded, scarred across his cheek and the bone stoven and the one eye wandering. When he spoke his mouth worked imperfectly, and when he smiled. (McCarthy 281)

As Powning notices, the term "hove", might be suggestive of the nature of this encounter. "Hove" is the past tense of the verb "to heave", which has two possible meanings. It might hold the meaning of raising, or lifting something with great effort, but it might also mean to linger, or to float, and is usually employed to refer to something that appears from nothingness into view. In this case, either of the uses are extremely suggestive of a vision, or a dream. It could suggest that the man was not essentially materialized, as he could be lingering, like a spectre. But it could also be evocative of its aforementioned meaning: to lift with great effort, as if the boy was harshly struggling to conjure this vision.

If we regard this encounter as an apparition, while parallelly considering the fatal perils that vivid dreams and memory pose as distractions to life in *The Road,* the inference of the boy's death is hardly surprising. Similarly, Powning also alerts to one of the most quoted lines in the novel to sustain the premise that the boy dreamed this encounter: *"And dreams so rich in color. How else would death call you?"* (McCarthy 21).

Indeed, we could argue that the description of the vision is not that colourful, but we should consider that the boy's imaginative world could not be nearly as rich as his father's, since his dreams can only be constructed from what he gathered in his experiences through a world that is "shrinking down about a raw core of parsible entities" (McCarthy 88). And that's exactly what surfaces from the boy's dying vision: the conversation between a man and the boy, a gun filled with extra ammo, and a parka that is grey like the ash, and yellow as the firestorms.

I would also suggest that this notion of vivid dreams being the harbinger of death is mentioned again towards the end of the novel. As the father's health deteriorates, his haunting dreams return in full force: "His dreams brightened. The vanished world returned. Kin long dead washed up . . . " (McCarthy 187). Not only did the father's dreams become clearer, but they were also invaded by close relatives who were long dead. Similarly, the boy's dying vision is also clear in detail, and brings with it a man and a woman that can be immediately linked to a father figure, and a mother figure, which would constitute the only family known to the boy.

Moreover, the paragraph that describes the encounter with the woman stands in stark contrast to the man's description: "The woman when she saw him put her arms around him and held him. Oh, she said, I am so glad to see you. She would talk to him sometimes about God" (McCarthy 286). We are not offered with any description of the woman, whatsoever. She is undefined, vague. She stands as the image of a nurturing mother but is not described as more than a mere voice and an embrace. The contrast between both descriptions provides further evidence of the possibility of the plot ending as the boy's dying dream. He conjured a clear depiction of a man to occupy the place of his father; however, since his mother died when he was yet too young, the description of the woman is but a motherly presence.

Curiously enough, the presence of the mother's memory throughout the novel provides with two more indicators that foreshadow not only the death of the boy, but also his dying dream. The first one appears in the last speech that the mother addresses to the father before committing suicide. She tells the father: "The one thing I can tell you is that you wont survive for yourself. A person who had no one would be well advised to cobble together some passable ghost" (McCarthy 57).

Apart from informing the father about the importance that the child bears to his own survival (hinting that he will not survive for himself), the mother is also foreshadowing the boy's dying dream, since when he is left alone in *The Road,* he cobbles up a whole family of ghosts. Additionally, the boy had already hinted in the novel that for him returning to his mother is a euphemism for death:

> I wish I was with my mom.
> . . . After a while he said: You mean you wish that you were dead.
> Yes.
> You mustnt say that. (McCarthy 55)

Moreover, towards the closing of the novel, the father warns the boy about the dangers of dreams, and their symbolism as harbingers of death, when he states that:

"When your dreams are of some world that never was or of some world that never will be and you are happy again then you will have given up" (McCarthy 189). If we consider this instance while following along the line of reasoning that envisions the end of the plot as the boy's dying dream, this warning of the father becomes overflowed by prophetic significance. The vision of the boy is both of a world that never was, as well as of a world that could never be again, as he envisions a family for himself, with other kids to share experiences, and the nurturing love of a father and a mother. It is a vision that paves the way for the boy's happiness, since it reflects the symbolic fulfilment of his most pressing wish. From his father's words, we can subsequently infer that the boy has given up. Additionally, Freud's study on *The Interpretation of Dreams* reveals that opposing to adults, children's dream "are often simple fulfilments of wishes, . . . they are invaluable as affording proof that the dream, in its inmost essence, is the fulfilment of a wish" (Freud 38).

One could argue that using *The Interpretation of Dreams* to corroborate this theory is somewhat farfetched, since it bears the imposition of a psychoanalytic reading of the novel. Yet, since throughout his career, McCarthy displays a keen interest in the symbolic weight of dreams, and the mysteries of the subconscious, it would be rather nonchalant to neglect the importance of psychoanalysis in the diegesis of *The Road*. In this sense, even though Powning does not expressly refer to psychoanalysis in his theory, he surely addresses the importance of dreams in McCarthy's work, and inadvertently links it to the power of the subconscious manifesting its guarded knowledge through the language of dreams:

> The Border Trilogy represents evidence that, for McCarthy, dreaming connects both the character and the reader to a deeper truth of the world than can be spoken. This theme recurs throughout his work, especially in Blood Meridian, which lapses into lucid nightmare. From this perspective the ending of The Road gives us a vision of the boy's experience that cannot be said, only described through the language of dream. (29)

Apart from the weight that the theme of dreams bears in McCarthy's body of work, he also reveals the interest in psychoanalytic studies in one of his rare appearances to the public eye, in an interview with Oprah Winfrey. When speaking on the power that the subconscious holds, McCarthy tells the commonly known story of how the German organic chemist August Kekulé got to discover the molecular shape of Benzene. Kekulé had hit a wall in his scientific breakthrough, when an *Oroboros*

appeared to him in a dream to let him know of the possible shape of the molecule. He then proceeds to elaborate on this idea, and he states:

> [McCarthy]: If your subconscious has solved this problem and is ready to tell you, why wouldn't it just say: "Hey Kekulé, It's a Ring!"
> [Winfrey]: Yes, why wouldn't it do it that way?
> [McCarthy]: We don't know but it may have to do with the subconscious being older than language, and maybe is more comfortable creating little dramas to tell you things. (McCarthy/Winfrey, video)

McCarthy's words in this interview reveal his scientific interest in the mysteries of the subconscious and the power of dreams, but they also resonate with the theory of the boy's dying dream. The boy's subconscious is creating his own "little drama", his own tale about finding a family. The dream represents the wish of reuniting with his family and responds to the crisis of being left alone in the wretchedness of the apocalypse.

Since the dream is the vehicle with which the subconscious communicates with us, wouldn't it be conspicuous that the subconscious is the voice appointed to bring closure to the plot? In a world devoid of all human and societal frameworks, shouldn't we expect the final voice of the novel to be one that precedes language itself?

Freud believed that the unconscious spoke to us in the dream world through symbols, and that it would be an error to analyse them at face value:

> The dream-content is, as it were, presented in hieroglyphics, whose symbols must be translated, one by one, into the language of the dream-thoughts. It would of course be incorrect to attempt to read these symbols in accordance with their values as pictures, instead of in accordance with their meaning as symbols. (Freud 169)

In the same sense, it would also be an error to interpret the end of the novel for its immediate technical significance as literary composition; a Deus ex-Machina that provides a happy ending seems to be completely incongruent with the nihilism that permeates *The Road*. Moreover, the boy's death at the end enables a direct connection to the final paragraph that otherwise would feel as if it hove itself into the novel:

> Once there were brook trout in the streams in the mountains . . . . 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 they hummed of mystery. (McCarthy 287)

By presenting an image of a past devoid of humankind to behold it or document it ("Maps of the world in its becoming"), McCarthy hints at a projection of a future when humankind is extinct ("a thing which could not be put back"). It shatters any optimistic reading of the closing of the plot: the boy dies, and with him goes the image of "carrying the fire". In the end of *The Road* there is no hope for humankind, just the barren world without people to witness it. We are thus left to question: "How does the never to be differ from what never was?" (McCarthy 32).

Works Cited

Freud, Sigmund. *The Interpretation of Dreams*. Wordsworth Editions Limited, 1997 [1900].

Halbwachs, Maurice. *On Collective Memory*. University of Chicago Press, 1992 [1952].

Lowenthal, David. *The Past is a Foreign Country*. Cambridge University Press, 1985.

McCarthy, Cormac. *The Road*. Vintage books, 2006.

McCarthy, Cormac, and Oprah Winfrey. Interview. "Cormac McCarthy - Subconscious is older than Language." Video. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qidyx3oXqpY. Accessed 7 December 2021.

Nora, Pierre. "Between Memory and History: Les Lieux De Mémoire." *Representations*, no. 26, 1989, pp. 7–24. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/2928520. Accessed 7 December 2021.

Powning, Jacob M. "'Dreams so Rich in Color. How Else Would Death Call You?': An Exploration of the Ending in Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*." *The Cormac McCarthy Journal*, vol. 18, no. 1, 2020, pp. 26–36.

Pugh, Marie-Reine. "'There Is No God and We Are His Prophets': The Visionary Potential of Memory and Nostalgia in Cormac McCarthy's *No Country for Old Men* and *The Road*." *The Cormac McCarthy Journal*, vol. 15, no. 1, 2017, pp. 46–65.

Ricœur, Paul. *Memory, History, Forgetting*. University of Chicago Press, 2006.