



UNIVERSIDADE DA CORUÑA

FACULTADE DE FILOLOXÍA

Grao en Inglés: Estudos Lingüísticos e Literarios

TRABALLO DE FIN DE GRAO / BA THESIS

Death, Nature and Society in Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*, T.S.

Eliot's *The Waste Land* and F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*

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A Coruña, 2021

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ABSTRACT

In this BA thesis I proceed to the revision of the imagery in *The Waste Land* (1922) through the intertextual analysis of the modernist imagery present in T.S Eliot's poem and the novel *The Great Gatsby* by F.S Fitzgerald (1929), as well as its hypothetical projection in contemporary works. The main purpose and motivation that has led me to carry out this multi-textual comparative analysis lies in the will to delve into the themes common to these modernist works, and their influence on contemporary novels of post-apocalyptic culture such as *The Road* by Cormac McCarthy (2006): the weariness and desolation of the modern individual in the face of the world, the failure of materialistic society, the decay of nature and the pessimistic vision of the future, as well as death as a cathartic process.

Through an in-depth examination of the descriptions, images, actions and reflections of the characters and voices found in the works that have been analysed, this study has allowed me to find similarities inherent in two of the most significant modernist works, also offering a possible connection to another novel published in a distant historical and literary context, although somehow intertwined with this cultural current due to various economic, politic and social factors, as has been concluded throughout the thesis. Similarly, this dissertation argues that the disillusionment and hopelessness, the dramatic and terrible vision of modern society and nature, conceived by many authors in the 1920s-30s, is replicated again in the 20th century in an even more explicit manner.

The ideas developed throughout my study are the result of extensive research into the biographies of the authors, the socio-economic context in which their works were written and the repercussions they have obtained, as well as a personal interpretation of

the texts after an exhaustive analysis of the images, symbols and motifs found in them. The collapse of the capitalist system, the failure of the American dream, myth and religion, life and death as a cyclical movement, or the ecological problems that have been emerging since the last century are studied in detail through their representation in *The Waste Land*, *The Great Gatsby* and *The Road*. This thesis, therefore, uses specific fragments of these works to justify the arguments provided, although I have also drawn on the opinions of literary critics, authors and researchers in the field to support the theories and conclusions offered in this work.

Keywords: analysis, comparative, Cormac McCarthy, death, F.S Fitzgerald, history, intertextual, modernism, nature, post-apocalyptic, *The Great Gatsby*, *The Road*, *The Waste Land*, T.S Eliot, society, symbols.

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INTRODUCTION

The aim of this BA thesis is to compare the images and symbolism present in the modernist works *The Great Gatsby*, by Francis Scott Fitzgerald, and *The Waste Land*, by T.S. Eliot, as well as the influence that this literary current has had on *The Road*, a novel written by Cormac McCarthy and that has been labelled post-apocalyptic.

Firstly, I will analyse the vision that these works offer of the world in sociohistorical contexts separated by a century, although I will stress the similarities that *The Great Gatsby* and *The Waste Land*, one a novel and the other a poem, present due to the close relationship that exists between their respective authors, since it would not be possible to understand the connection between the two texts without considering the close relationship that existed between T.S. Eliot and Francis Scott Fitzgerald. Not only were the two authors contemporaries and stalwart supporters of modernism, but they also reciprocally admired and inspired each other. In fact, John W. Bicknell, an acclaimed literary critic, has suggested that "Fitzgerald knew Eliot's poem almost by heart" (557), noting the deep fascination that *The Waste Land* aroused in the author of *The Great Gatsby*.¹

I have introduced Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* in this study to illustrate how certain debates proposed by modernism are echoed in contemporary literature, especially those dealing with the bleak aftermath of a socio-economic crisis, namely, on the one hand, the consequences of the First World War, and on the other, the scenario following a catastrophe with social and ecological repercussions.

¹ Eliot's epigraph, from Petronius's *Satyricon*, is spoken by a character named Trimalchio, who was famous for throwing wild parties. Not surprisingly, it seems no coincidence that the original title of the novel published in 1925 was *Trimalchio in West Egg*, which can be inferred to be a nod to T.S. Eliot's poem.

The methodology employed is based on an intertextual analysis of these three works, following different aspects which I will deal with in each chapter, including real fragments of the texts in order to explain the theories developed. The first chapter attempts to examine the decay of contemporary societies providing a Dantesque vision of modern cities, and also stresses the absence of religious faith among humans. The second chapter, "From the wasteland to the promised land", focuses on the fragmentation of the modern world, as well as on the personal development of the characters depicted by these authors, linking the present and the past, and observing the dangers of taking the concept of the American dream to its most extreme dimension. The final chapter, "Death in the waste land: a new beginning", delves into the motifs of death and rebirth and the cyclical movements of the world, offering an ecocritical vision concerning the relationship between nature and consumerism.

Throughout this dissertation, I will particularly focus on the recreation of different scenarios that represent the fragmentation and decay of the world in the respective periods, as well as on the pessimistic tone and their implicit message regarding the dehumanisation and the loss of connection with nature due to the excessive consumerism of capitalist modernity. I will endeavour to demonstrate that, after extensive research, I have been able to interpret many similarities between two works written in the 1920s and a novel published at the beginning of the new century, and I will elaborate on the conclusions drawn with regard to the views on social, cultural and philosophical issues observed in these texts.

For this purpose, three works have been used as the main secondary sources: John W. Bicknell's *The Wasteland of Scott Fitzgerald*, Harold Bloom's compilation of the interpretations by different authors concerning the symbolism present in *The Great Gatsby*, and *Post-Apocalyptic Culture*, by Teresa Heffernan.

1. THE MODERN CITY AS A WASTELAND

According to Harold Bloom, *The Great Gatsby* may be seen as a companion work to T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*, given that both literary pieces were written as "a desolate vision of a world without faith or order" (9). Indeed, the decadent imagery and symbolism present in both the novel and the poem has undoubtedly been the main subject of the comparative analysis between these two works throughout the 20th century, and in reading some passages of *The Great Gatsby* one cannot help but conceive this masterpiece as an echo of Eliot's *The Waste Land*. Nevertheless, if any symbol in particular can illustrate the influence that the poem has exerted on the novel, it is definitely The Valley of Ashes².

In the opening scene of the second chapter, Fitzgerald's narrator describes in the following terms one of the most important settings in the novel, a place that is essential to understanding the tone and meaning of the work and that will ultimately prove pivotal to the development of the plot of the story:

About half way between West Egg and New York the motor-road hastily joins the railroad and runs beside it for a quarter of a mile, so as to shrink away from a certain desolate area of land. This is a valley of ashes—a fantastic farm where ashes grow like wheat into ridges and hills and grotesque gardens where ashes take the forms of houses and chimneys and rising smoke and finally, with a transcendent effort, of men who move dimly and already crumbling through the powdery air. Occasionally a line of grey cars crawls along an invisible track, gives out a ghastly creak and comes to rest, and immediately the ash-grey men swarm

² I will use capital letters to refer to The Valley of Ashes given the relevance that this scenario acquires in the development of this thesis.

up with leaden spades and stir up an impenetrable cloud which screens their obscure operations from your sight (Fitzgerald 16).

This representation of The Valley of Ashes somehow evokes The Valley of Dry Bones³ (Bicknell 557), a desolate place where there is no room for hope nor future life; a place that, like a prophetic vision, heralds the decay of the modern world, a ghostly image that is also replicated in Eliot's *The Waste Land*. The Valley of Ashes is not a typical road, as Fitzgerald uses this area as landscape imagery to symbolize the theme of death and decadence of the society of his time. Furthermore, when Nick Carraway, the homodiegetic narrator of the story, describes the main street in The Valley of Ashes, he explicitly refers to it as waste land: "The only building in sight was a small block of yellow brick sitting on the edge of the *waste land*, a sort of compact Main Street ministering to it and contiguous to absolutely nothing" (Fitzgerald 7; emphasis added). In his prologue of *The Great Gatsby*, Guy Reynolds explains that "Fitzgerald has adapted Eliot's sense of the contemporary landscape to an American setting, creating an analogous amalgamation of the modern and the mythic" (VIII), and in my opinion, the daunting vision conveyed in The Valley of Ashes indeed echoes the decadence of the world as Eliot conceives his own Waste Land in the passage "Unreal City":

Unreal City,

Under the brown fog of a winter dawn,

A crowd flowed over London Bridge, so many,

I had not thought death had undone so many.

³ The Vision of the Valley of Dry Bones is a prophecy in chapter 37 of the Book of Ezekiel. In his vision, the prophet sees himself standing in the valley full of dry human bones.

Sighs, short and infrequent, were exhaled,

And each man fixed his eyes before his feet. (Eliot 60-65).

The parallels in both descriptions are obvious, and a first common element can be easily observed in both places: the existence of a charged atmosphere, a putrid air that confines, mortifies and reduces to ashes every “wastelander”, and which is depicted as a “powdery air” in *The Great Gatsby* and as “a brown fog” in *The Waste Land*. Whereas in the poem the brown fog recalls a Gothic vision, that of a dark city trapped by an exogenous and mysterious natural force, Fitzgerald uses a passage filled with landscape imagery to plant the theme of degradation in the reader’s mind. Throughout the entire novel, the air and the atmosphere in *The Valley of Ashes* appear as descriptive elements that are gradually introduced into the diegesis, staging the decadence of the world as both authors conceive it; the putrefaction is therefore an inherent process of the world that conditions its own inhabitants, a physical but also a spiritual cause of desolation, as if human beings were incapable not only of breathing—an allusion to the impossibility of achieving freedom or succeeding—, but also of living and thriving in a destroyed and poisoned place, doomed to self-destruction.

Similarly, both *The Valley of Ashes* and *The Waste Land* show the presence of a higher element, a deity that seems to observe society from an omnipresent position. In *The Waste Land*, it is Tiresias⁴ who holds that privilege place; in *The Great Gatsby*, the presence of God is conjured up by means of T.J Eckleburg’s billboard. Most importantly, within these two works, the transcendental aspect of the prophetic figure lies in the

⁴ In Greek mythology, Tiresias was a blind prophet of Apollo in Thebes, famous for clairvoyance and for being transformed into a woman for seven years.

underlying meaning of the gaze, in the eyes that both authors confer on this observant creature.

On the one hand, the inexhaustible and prophetic wisdom of Tiresias, according to the myth, is paradoxically based on his blindness and his sexual ambivalence, as Eliot recounts in "The Fire Sermon": "I Tiresias, though blind, throbbing between two lives / Old man with wrinkled female breasts, can see" (Eliot 218-219). Eliot himself in his notes about the poem identifies Tiresias as the most important figure in *The Waste Land*, and indeed he plays a key role in the poem as an objective observer. Nevertheless, although one might deduce that a God or a prophet should usually be a unifying element in the balance of the world, as Matthew Scully suggests, "rather than a principle of order, Eliot's points to Tiresias as a figure of unprincipled disorder" (167), a theory that I subscribe and that would explain the focus on this chaotic climate that the author endeavours to recreate in his work: in other words, the failure of God's project entails the consequent failure of humanity.

On the other hand, in Fitzgerald's novel, this supernatural entity, which is inserted in the middle of The Valley of Ashes, is presented in the shape of a gigantic billboard in which there is no trace of a body, but whose only remains are two human eyes and a pair of yellow glasses, emphasizing the power of his gaze, capable of seeing everything, like an almighty deity:

But above the grey land and the spasms of bleak dust which drift endlessly over it, you perceive, after a moment, the eyes of Doctor T. J. Eckleburg. The eyes of Doctor T. J. Eckleburg are blue and gigantic—their retinas are one yard high. They look out of no face but, instead, from a pair of enormous yellow spectacles which pass over a nonexistent nose. (Fitzgerald 17)

Besides the fact that the name of the former ophthalmologist that appears on the billboard, T.J. Eckleburg, might suggest a curious parallel to the initial letters of the name of the poet, this both-human figure-and-by-product created by a consumerist society bears an unmistakable if uncanny resemblance to T.S. Eliot's Tiresias. In fact, although from different angles, both figures introduce the same pessimistic vision regarding the future of humanity, both the poem and the novel dealing with the dilemma of a secularised and materialistic world.

The paradox of Tiresias' eyes is an image that I personally interpret as a metaphor for the wisdom that one is able to attain when rejecting the material world, and it might be seen, to some extent, as an analogy to the blank eyes of the billboard in *The Valley of Ashes*, a symbol of the spiritual omnipresence and power of God. Nevertheless, in the case of *The Great Gatsby*, these eyes work as a synecdoche of a God who is the spectator of the actions of a society that has already lost faith and love; a God that mirrors a society that has become blinded and that has forgotten their deity forever, moving irrevocably towards perdition; and a God whose blank gaze seems to lament the corruption of the world. In fact, "this grotesque image, reappearing throughout the story, eventually becomes a symbol of what God has become in the modern world, an all seeing deity – indifferent, faceless, blank" (Bicknell 558).

While Tiresias is one of the most important and powerful elements depicted in the story that Eliot tells in his poem, the eyes of T.J. Eckleburg are also a pervasive element throughout Fitzgerald's novel. Yet it is the character of George Wilson who is entranced by those eyes, last seen in the novel by Wilson himself and Michaelis: "Standing behind him, Michaelis saw with a shock that he was looking at the eyes of Doctor T.J. Eckleburg, which had just emerged, pale and enormous, from the dissolving night" (Fitzgerald 102).

Here, the paleness of the eyes stages the death, not only of Myrtle, but of human civilisation.

He then pronounces the statement "God sees everything" (Fitzgerald 102), pointing with his gaze to the oculist's billboard, since he is becoming aware of Myrtle's infidelity as he recreates his wife's last days with Michaelis. As pathetic as this statement may sound, I see an underlying meaning to this image: what Wilson is doing—as humanity has done since the beginning of time—is clinging to a belief in a higher entity capable of seeing everything and taking any form, a God who consequently appears as observer and judge of his wife's unscrupulous behaviour, but also of the rest of the world, which is gradually crumbling. From Wilson's attitude one can infer precisely the decadence of society; Wilson is aware that humanity has abandoned God and thus abandoned itself, so that, come the day of reckoning, it has been condemned to live in a place where he can no longer find hope or happiness. I believe that Wilson was shocked by her wife's death but mostly by the fact that he thinks of her as an adulteress, a thought that turns into a feeling of guilt and consequent need for self-flagellation that induces him to destroy everything around him. For me, this revelation triggers the end of the plot, marked by death.

Both works, therefore, recreate a dark world, a world in decadence in which the loss of faith makes it impossible for its inhabitants to undergo a hypothetical change or recovery. In *The Waste Land* this image of chaos, this vision of a sterile and rotten land is achieved through the dryness of the soil and the presence of rocks and shadows, emphasizing the infertility of society through the scarcity of water, which is the key in the development of life. In the poem, for instance, the author describes a land where "there is no water" (Eliot 357), and where the reader finds the absence of rain: "Dry sterile thunder without rain" (347). Likewise, Fitzgerald in *The Great Gatsby* is able to convey

this infertility and greyness through the images of ashes, which form "a dumping ground" that resembles a burial ground, as is seen in a passage quoted previously: "This is a valley of ashes—a fantastic farm where ashes grow like wheat"(Fitzgerald 16).

Indeed, the spectrum of colours in Fitzgerald's novel undoubtedly takes on an important relevance and significance, especially here in The Valley of Ashes. In this setting, grey is the dominant colour, a colour we associate with ashes, futility, mourning or poverty. Furthermore, The Valley of Ashes being a kind of ghetto, Fitzgerald consequently attributes to the class that inhabits it—the working class—the colour grey, describing its inhabitants as grey people, plunged into darkness and relegated to the shadows, marginalised and abandoned by the more extravagant classes, who, in contrast, are represented by the colour of gold, of money: yellow.

However, the use of the colour yellow is interesting here. As I have mentioned, yellow is the colour inherent to the ruling classes, but the way in which Fitzgerald introduces hints of this colour in The Valley of Ashes does not seem fortuitous. Firstly, it is no coincidence that the remains of T.J. Eckleburg's spectacles are described as "yellow". Leaving aside the previously discussed deity facet of the billboard, T.J. Eckleburg comes to put the focus on a materialistic aspect in this devastated scenario, and the fact that it has been abandoned in The Valley of Ashes, left in a decaying condition, seems a sign of the decay of an opulent past life and consumerist society that is condemned to disappear.

Additionally, yellow is also the colour of Gatsby's car; in fact, almost everything that belongs to Gatsby is yellow, as if he, with his King Midas touch, is able to turn everything into gold. When Daisy and Gatsby go from East Egg to New York they drive in Tom's blue car, but when they return and, just in front of Wilson's garage, run over Myrtle, who dies instantly because of the brutal impact, they are driving Gatsby's yellow

car. Hence, yellow in this scene, as in certain cultures⁵, acquires the meaning of death, but also of envy: Myrtle escapes from the garage to stop the car thinking that Tom is the driver, clinging to that desperate desire to escape from that terrible place and run away with him. This illuminating image suggests to me that, amidst the ashes, a golden river sweeps through the valley and its people: the flood of money is the cause of destruction.

When referring to the tone and point of view of *The Waste Land*, Bicknell states that “the prevailing tone of the poem is brooding, haunted, elegiac” (557), and so is the tone of the depiction of *The Valley of Ashes*, and to a certain degree, the whole novel. Both works offer a pessimistic message about humanity but also a pastoral view of the world⁶

Extrapolated to *The Great Gatsby*, the echo of this pessimistic tone is perceptible through Nick Carraway's perspective and abjection, since he simultaneously feels at ease in a familiar environment, and yet he does never fit in. Towards the end of the story, after all that has happened, Nick longs in a realistic sense for what his home once was: "that's my middle-west, not the wheat or the prairies or the lost Swede towns but the thrilling, returning trains of my youth" (Fitzgerald 112). Furthermore, as Janet Giltrow and David Stouck sustain in Harold Bloom's edited book, Nick dreams "of a harmonious life from which are eliminated the complexities of social ills (greed, poverty, and wars) and natural process (change, decay and death)" (100). Thus, when he observes *The Valley of Ashes* at the beginning, he sees in a way that the world is transforming, a society—including his own family—moving indifferently towards a spiritual emptiness and ruin that he

⁵ Historically, yellow skin has been associated with paleness, black death and liver diseases.

⁶ Pastoral, “not to evoke Theocritus's idyllic landscape, Schiller's maturing child, or Empson's social encounter of courtier and rustic, but to suggest another representative anecdote, that of the abject memoirist” (Giltrow and Stouck 100).

understands at the end of the story; perhaps *The Valley of Ashes* was once a prosperous place where people found harmony and happiness, but it is no longer so.

The location and atmosphere of the poem and the novel are also crucial: Eliot presumably uses London as the setting for his *Waste Land*, and Fitzgerald situates his *Valley of Ashes* between Long Island and New York. While it is true that these scenarios transcend the purely physical and become embedded in people's consciousness and collective vision of the world, they are somehow geographically confined, since they appear adjacent to real places that are easily identifiable. This, for me, is important, as the reader might infer these images as a warning and consequently understand that our world and all those places that we know are susceptible to the threats of the uncontrolled consumerism.

The Valley of Ashes depicts an eternal dichotomy, since it is a place between two dimensions, opulence and poverty, happiness, and sadness, but, most importantly, it is also a scenario between two real places. It is, therefore, a place destroyed by humankind's own action and inaction, where men and women have poured out their miseries. To some extent, this setting recreates the panorama of the world devastated by the dangerous, relentless advance of the materialism inherent in the frenzy of "the roaring twenties" and the jazz age, in the United States, as well as the desolation following the Great War, in Europe.

While the Great War and the crisis of the 1920s influenced the tone of these modernist works, their (post)apocalypticism also draws on deeper reasons. As Teresa Heffernan indicates, "for many modernists, the idea of History as a collective and forward-moving process is displaced by the sense of a loss of purpose and a fear that there is no overall direction" (59), and this is precisely the idea upon which post-apocalyptic culture is based. In fact, the recent "unprecedented proliferation of these apocalyptic

scenarios recalls Benjamin's prediction that man might come to enjoy the spectacle of his own destruction as an aesthetic pleasure" (Heffernan 151), and idea that might have had its precedent at the beginning of the twentieth century, which "begins with a sense of exhaustion and frustration with the end as revelation" (150).

The Road, Cormac McCarthy's post-apocalyptic novel, in a way captures that lack of faith in society and the decay of the world that modernism anticipated at the beginning of the 20th century. The desolate landscape enveloping the entire narrative conjures up a scenario similar to that described by Eliot or Fitzgerald in their respective works. In his review of the novel for *The New York Times*, William Kennedy explains that "color in the world—except for fire and blood—exists mainly in memory or dream. Fire and firestorms have consumed forests and cities, and from the fall of ashes and soot everything is gray, the river water black." In addition to this utter degradation of the landscape, which has become a flaming wasteland—an inferno like the one described by Dante in *The Divine Comedy*—, McCarthy's novel is strongly marked by the absence of human life, by the image of death, staged on the roadside, littered with corpses, evoking the ashen men of *The Valley of Ashes* or Eliot's *Hollow Men*.

The long concrete sweeps of the interstate exchanges like the ruins of a vast funhouse against the distant murk. He carried the revolver in his belt at the front and wore his parka unzipped. The mummied dead everywhere. The flesh cloven along the bones, the ligaments dried to tug and taut as wires. Shriveled and drawn like latter bogfolk, their faces boiled to sheeting, the yellow palings of their teeth. They were discalced to a man like pilgrims of some common order for all their shoes were long since stolen. (McCarthy 23-24).

Despite this obvious parallel, McCarthy's novel differs from the works of Fitzgerald and Eliot in that the former does not allude to any specific location for the events in the story: the characters in *The Road*, father and son, carry a "tattered oil company roadmap" (McCarthy 43), but no place names are referred to, except for a sign announcing "see Rocky City" (20). Paradoxically, perhaps in this case the author does not want to allude to any specific location in order to achieve precisely the same effect as the two modernist classics, to allow any reader to identify themselves with the characters and the story, as a process that transcends the purely personal level and acquires a planetary dimension. An introspective process that might allow anyone to leave the wasteland to find their promised land.

2. FROM THE WASTELAND TO THE PROMISED LAND

If there is one feature shared by *The Road*, *The Great Gatsby* and *The Waste Land*, it is their dynamic nature. Far from being “static,” these three works, whose diegesis situates the reader in uncertain and unstable scenarios, stage a journey. However, this must not be considered a journey exclusively in a physical sense, but a journey that entails an introspective process that the hero undergoes in the novels—or the poetic voice, in the case of *The Waste Land*—, providing a pessimistic sense of uprootedness and alienation in a fragmented world.

Perhaps the most illustrative example of this process is *The Road*. As its title indicates, McCarthy's novel tells the story of two people, a father and son, who are forced to set out on a journey from a land destroyed by an unknown cause to another place where they will find the longed-for salvation, following a long, long road on which they will have to face constant dangers and where they will encounter the most grotesque miseries of humanity.

According to Steven Frye, “McCarthy’s novels involve characters who journey into landscapes that are simultaneously geographical and psychic, typological and mythic, objectively physical and intensely personal” (116), and, indeed, this pattern is followed in *The Road*. While the novel tells the reader about the odyssey that a father and son have to face in order to escape a post-apocalyptic scenario, it also emphasises the efforts of a father to preserve his son's life and spirit. “My job is to take care of you,” the man tells the child; “I was appointed to do that by God. I will kill anyone who touches you.” (McCarthy 27). Even so, Clive Sinclair writes that “the father depends upon his son almost as much as his son depends upon him,” Moreover, “when flooded by despair and

weakness he sees the boy standing there in the road looking back at him from some unimaginable future, glowing in that waste like a tabernacle" (Sinclair).

Nevertheless, despite the protagonist's responsibility to his child, he has been unable to avoid personal decay. In my opinion, this decay is both physical and mental; this tiredness might be understood literally as well as metaphorically. The man's mental fatigue is illustrated by an early acknowledgment that he "hadn't kept a calendar for years" (McCarthy 5), which might make the reader think about how ephemeral life is, but also his inability to keep a record of the days passing demonstrates how far the man has fallen since society dissolved around him.

In addition to this, the man has passed his psychological fatigue onto his son, revealed by his realisation that "we don't work on your [his son's reading and writing] lessons anymore" (6). However, the boy endures all these setbacks and is still capable of maintaining child-like innocence, something almost divine in the wasteland that is the novel's setting. The boy's innocence is best displayed in his frequent pleas to his father to help those they come across. The most powerful example of these pleas is his demand that they help the man who steals everything from them at the end of the novel. His naivety is not born of ignorance here, as he tells his father that "(he) is the one" who has to worry about their survival (16). For me, this implicitly suggests that the new generations should be aware of their responsibilities for and to a society on the verge of collapse.

Furthermore, as Alan Noble claims, the previous quotation tells the reader that the man believes he has a "God-given duty to care for his son and that his son is a living sign of God's presence" (96). This reading of the text would thus explain the father's absolute insistence that the boy survive, no matter what the cost, as he believes he is protecting one of the few links God has to the hellscape that is *The Road's* world. This reason is

further reinforced with Noble's argument that the father is a mirror for Abraham in the biblical story of The Binding of Isaac (96)⁷. Consequently, the father's belief in a better life for his son demonstrates how, despite the breakdown of society, there is still a place for optimism and goodness.

Why is the relationship between the father figure and the son so important in the novel? This choice of characters, in my opinion, is not fortuitous. This powerful image, a father and son walking a long way to reach salvation, is somehow reminiscent of a divine figure and his incarnation on earth. In my opinion, it also symbolises in some way the Biblical Exodus. Furthermore, as Aitor Ibarrola-Armendariz explains, "one could even argue that this is a reversed story of the conquest of the American West since, like the earlier pioneers, these two characters face an inhospitable land and all kinds of cruel enemies" (3). Personally, I interpret it as an mixture of both theories: on the one hand, this story implies an allusion to the history of America, although not in a strictly physical sense, and, on the other, it might be also seen as a possible metaphor for the fate of humankind, as depicted in the Bible⁸.

It is not for nothing that the child is a recurring figure in American literature, as the conception of American identity is historically linked to the figure of a pure and innocent child. This is observable in those works that built the tradition of American literature in the 19th century, such as *The Scarlet Letter*, and, years later, *Huckleberry Finn*. Metaphorically, America has been conceived as a child who, guided by God—or a father figure—overcomes all adversities and leaves behind the sins of his parents until he transcends and becomes a man in this new promised land. Thus, if the child survives, in

⁷. Alan Noble writes that the "father's confidence that his son will have a life worth living for reveals that Abraham's absurd faith (that God would not require him to sacrifice Isaac, but would if he did) is at work in the man" (96).

⁸ The story told in the Book of Revelation: the Apocalypse.

a way the essence that is to be preserved survives, including the virtues –but also the faults that one hopes to correct. This image is reminiscent of the Puritans’ belief that the Old World they left behind was a doomed land and the New World, by contrast, was the promised land where their souls would transcend the mortal world. Arguably, this is conjured up by the dependence between the father figure and the son, perhaps representing Europe and the New World respectively, observable in this novel.

However, this novel can also be read as a parable that would explain the collapse of the modern world. Perhaps McCarthy wants to offer a critique of the failure of the American dream, which is an echo of the failure of Europe, historically conceived of as the “father” of America by the Western canon: Europe's problems have been echoed in America, so the past (the father) and the present (the son) are intertwined and mutually dependent. By offering us a post-apocalyptic scenario, McCarthy would try to project into the future what has already happened in the past, so that we understand that this is an inexorable cycle: the mistakes we think we have corrected in the past actually have never been corrected and they could occur again.

Therefore, through this road narrative, McCarthy recreates a journey from the past to the future that involves a process of personal self-fulfilment that implicitly echoes the historical dichotomy between the individual freedom versus the collective division, a debate manifest since the emergence of the idea of “nation.” The post-apocalyptic scenario depicted in this story represents both the fragmentation and devastation of the world and the failure of the American dream, featuring people who are trapped in the memory of a glorious past that suddenly becomes a disheartening future. A dilemma which, in a way, is also examined by T.S. Eliot in *The Waste Land*.⁹

⁹ The relationship between modernist poetics and nationalist prerogatives remains an unanalysed component of Eliot’s well-known antiliberalism. For Srila Nayak “*The Waste Land* responds to liberalism’s

The fragmentation of the world as Eliot conceives it (“These fragments I have shored against my ruins...”) is the basis of his experimentalism in the poem. Written as it was in free style, with no specific structure of a rhyme scheme and lacking a specific location of time or space, the poem appears to be detached or fragmented, an amalgamation of large number of points of views, themes and emotions. *The Waste Land* could be seen, then, as a major elucidation of what Eliot sees the modern world has become. For Eliot, Europe and America are communicating vessels in a world that has turned into a chaotic amalgam of nations doomed to failure and consequent destruction because, as mentioned in the previous chapter, the poet starts from the premise that humanity has abandoned God and thus abandoned itself.

From the poem I infer that, for Eliot, both American and European societies have lost their mythical vision, and their inhabitants seem to be blind in a world of appearances as illustrated by Tiresias’ paradox. I understand the poem, therefore, as a warning, a symbol of what the world has become at the turn of the century, but also as a call for humanity to reflect and be able to engage in an introspective process of restoring order; that is, the regenerative cycle that historically some communities have had to undertake, as has happened, for example, after every great war. Looking to the past to eradicate the present, for Eliot, may mean moving towards a definitive salvation and escaping the "wheel" on which we are condemned to live and which, if we do not break free, may precipitate us towards the end of the modern world.

theory of anti-imperial nationalism, a key principle in the Treaty of Versailles” (228), which formed the basis for reconstruction of Europe’s national borders. Therefore, perhaps the poem’s international scope lies in its attention to the changing map of Europe that divides an imperial past from a nationalist present and in a critique of post-war nationalism in Europe that, in effect, amounts to a rejection of the peace treaty’s vision of a new Europe (Nayak 229). In my opinion, Eliot’s rejection of nationalism is evident throughout the poem. Precisely, the famous last stanza of Eliot’s poem powerfully and eloquently captures the alien voices that try to transcend the coercive identities of a post-war world: “London Bridge is falling down falling down falling down/ .../ Shantih shantih shantih (Eliot 426 – 433; see full quotation in chapter 3).

Similarly, Fitzgerald also portrays within his novel the obsession with leaving this fragmented world and moving back to the past, spreading the idea of returning to the longed-for "belle époque". Undoubtedly the main perspective that *The Great Gatsby* captures is the nostalgia for a better time through Jay Gatsby himself. The conception of this character's life and his future is based on what he has lived in a time he misses, as if he had been trapped in it: "Can't repeat the past?" he cried incredulously. "Why of course you can!" (Fitzgerald 70).

He aspired for his life to follow an upward, lineal and frenetic path after meeting Daisy:

His heart beat faster and faster as Daisy's white face came up to his own. He knew that when he kissed this girl, and forever wed his unutterable visions to her perishable breath, his mind would never romp again like the mind of God (Fitzgerald 71).

Nevertheless, this rectilinear image clashes with the spiral in which he eventually finds himself trapped and which causes his whole world to collapse.

Yet what does Gatsby's journey entail? In my opinion, it is nothing more than the project of someone trying to make the American dream real, the dream of a person who aspires to live a life of his own design, and there is no image that illustrates this theory better than Gatsby's diary. Towards the end of the novel, Gatsby's father meets Nick Carraway and shows him a diary in which Gatsby had planned a daily routine that would enable him to achieve success:

Look here, this is a book he had when he was a boy. It just shows you." He opened it at the back cover and turned it around for me to see. On the last fly-leaf was

printed the word SCHEDULE, and the date September 12th, 1906. (Fitzgerald110).

The diary, therefore, confers a theological sense to his story, like a necessary decalogue of commandments that Gatsby imposes on himself to achieve his dream. At the same time, the diary also humanises him, brings him closer to a human sense through the image of an object as simple and tangible as a book. Gatsby is, therefore, divine and earthly, a kind of Adamic hero, and, feeling chosen to succeed in life, he achieves this success through a process of personal self-fulfilment and much sacrifice, like a son of God on earth. In fact, at a certain point, Gatsby saw himself as a child of God:

The truth was that Jay Gatsby, of West Egg, Long Island, sprang from his Platonic conception of himself. He was a son of God—a phrase which, if it means anything, means just that—and he must be about His Father's Business. (Fitzgerald 63)

Gatsby takes the first step in this journey by abandoning his family, shedding the bonds of the past, an image that projects onto him the sense that he was the living reincarnation of Benjamin Franklin¹⁰ or one of the Puritans who disembarked from the Mayflower to prosper in the promised land, to which there is an explicit allusion through Nick himself: "I became aware of the old island here that flowered once for Dutch sailors' eyes—a fresh, green breast of the new world" (Fitzgerald 115). Guided and driven by a mentor, Dan Cody, as in *The Road*, the innocent boy manages to face all the adversities he encounters in the past in order to transcend and become the eternal hero America

¹⁰ According to Guy Reynolds, "Gatsby's own schedule was itself a parody of the self-disciplining that Benjamin Franklin had outlined in *The Autobiography*" (XVI).

needs: in other words, during his process of introspective self-fulfilment he ceases to be Jay Gatz in North Dakota to become The Great Gatsby in West Egg, his promised land.

Nevertheless, his project, which is apparently successful for a time, falls apart when his past re-emerges in the future. Daisy, the green light, who for Gatsby had represented everything he wanted, motivating him to follow his own path despite the social distance and the war, understands better than he does that, although the past may have been great, it is ephemeral and has already happened before their eyes; it is something that cannot be changed, as she tells him: "Oh, you want too much!" she cried to Gatsby. "I love you now—isn't that enough? I can't help what's past" (Fitzgerald 84), despite Gatsby's insistence on fixing everything — "I'm going to fix everything just the way it was before," he said, nodding determinedly. "She'll see"— (71).

The society that Gatsby considered fit for him to reign in and that has allowed him to climb the social ladder is already crumbling, corrupted by the advanced of materialism, as Nick realises towards the end. Arguably, Nick's voice acts as a communicating vessel that echoes Gatsby's own conscience. Like Eliot, Fitzgerald presents, by means of the metaphor of the green light—"Gatsby believed in the green light, the orgastic future that year by year recedes before us" (115)—a glorious time in which Gatsby, in his innocence, remains watching it, reaching out for it with his own hand after so much waiting: "I thought of Gatsby's wonder when he first picked out the green light at the end of Daisy's dock. He had come a long way to this blue lawn and his dream must have seemed so close that he could hardly fail to grasp it" (115). Meanwhile, his present is driving itself irretrievably towards its own collapse. Thus, the failure of Gatsby's dream is thus a reverberation of the failure of the American dream when taken to excess, the fragmentation of society that we can see in the contrast between New York, West Egg or The Valley Of Ashes.

However, not only is this transformation appreciable in Gatsby, but also in Nick. To understand the beginning of the novel, it is necessary to understand the process of change that Nick has undergone in the story; in other words, it is necessary to understand what happens in the end to Nick himself, which in turn is a consequence of what happens to Gatsby. Nick projects his story into the future to tell us what has happened in the past, and he is who he is in the future because his past still affects him and haunts him. The story of his past is a consequence of the future and vice versa; the past and the future are so closely related that it is impossible for one not to impinge on the other. While Nick's life has also been a spiral, however, towards the end he sheds his blindness and sympathises with Gatsby despite his excesses, for his excesses are typical of someone who lives a naïve life and whose incorporation into the highest social stratum is the cause of his disaster. In contrast, Nick condemns characters like his own cousin and her husband, the real originators of the corruption of a society that has abandoned its principles to the detriment of money.

Therefore, Fitzgerald, through the figure of Nick and Gatsby could be warning us and criticising society's inoperativeness and passivity in the face of this endemic failure of a damaged system that directs all our lives and which will again lead us to failure if we do nothing to remedy it, by falling into a cyclical routine that to some extent echoes the motif of the wheel in *The Waste Land*: "So we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past" (115).

3. DEATH IN THE WASTELAND: A NEW BEGINNING

The Dantesque description of Eliot's wasteland, the symbolism of The Valley of Ashes and the post-apocalyptic setting in *The Road* have already been discussed. Contrary to what we would expect, it is not any exogenous force that these modernist and post-modernist authors seem to blame for the decay and fragmentation of the world, but precisely human beings and the relentless advance of ruinous values guided by capitalism and dehumanizing technologies.

In his poem, Eliot resorts to myth and allegories to explain that humankind seems to have done away with ourselves. One of the clearest glimpses in which water is present is through the myth of the Fisher King.¹¹ Eliot writes: "Out of this stony rubbish / Son of man, You cannot say, or guess, for you know only / A heap of broken images, where the sun beats / and the dead tree gives no shelter, the cricket no relief, and the dry stone no sound of water" (20-24). The stony rubbish he describes is the wreckage of fallen buildings after countless bombings, and even the memories of soldiers were scattered and broken as a result of the trauma following the war. This, for me, is again illustrated in the following lines: "Musing upon the king my brother's wreck / and on the king my father's death before him/ White bodies naked on the low damp ground and bones cast in a little low dry garret / rattled by the rat's foot only, year to year" (Eliot 191-195).

For Eliot, the world, therefore, seems to be destroying itself in the same way that society has become sick, short of life, short of nature, short of water: governments have driven the world to war because capitalist Europe as a whole society is dying. I note this parallel throughout the poem, in the sense that Eliot creates a vision of a world whose

¹¹ Fisher King is a prominent figure in Arthurian legend, whose story is connected to ancient fertility rituals, linking the king's health to that of his land.

natural landscape is being destroyed as well as whose inhabitants have surrendered to the relentless advance of dehumanization; Eliot's wasteland is conceived as a place where people were disillusioned with their lives, their governments, and where they "no longer had the same whole-hearted appreciation of technology after watching as new weaponry ended countless lives in mere heartbeats" (Templeton 530).

The war and its consequences are the focal point of Eliot's poem: for him, the world is no longer the place people dreamed of. The image of the typist is a metaphor for the dehumanization that industrial processes fostered at the beginning of the century, but another image that depicts the tiring daily life after the war can also be found in the following lines from "A Game of Chess":

He'll want to know what you done with that money he gave you

To get yourself some teeth. He did, I was there.

You have them all out, Lil, and get a nice set,

He said, I swear, I can't bear to look at you.

And no more can't I, I said, and think of poor Albert,

He's been in the army four years, he wants a good time,

And if you don't give it him, there's others will, I said. (Eliot 139-145).

From this excerpt, I have interpreted that, for the author, Europe's society is depressed, impoverished and ageing as a result of the Great War. Every new day is a day closer to death, not only in the logical sense, but also in the sense that such a depressing life without hope or love gradually kills those who live it.

By the same token, Eliot embodies the theory that consumerism and ethnocentrism destroy human beings because at the same time the natural world is also being destroyed; in other words, human beings become ill because they lose their connection to nature. From the poem's symbolism, I have noticed an unmistakable link between the material world and nature, in which the destruction of one is echoed in the other. Evidence of this can also be found in "A Game of Chess". For instance, "The Chair she sat in, like a burnished throne / Glowed on the marble, where the glass Held up by standards wrought with fruited vines (77-79)" would represent, as Thomas Baby states, "how the organic life-giving nature has turned into inorganic lifeless objects" (4), and in my opinion would also prove that, for Eliot, the industrialization and inherent corruption of society is closed connected with the apocalypse of nature.

Earlier I mentioned the scarcity of water as one of the characteristics of *The Wasteland's* infertility, although water is precisely a recurring theme throughout the poem whose symbolism is related not only to the destruction of nature, but also to the illness of human beings. For me, it seems to me no coincidence that the title of the IV section of the poem is precisely "Death By Water", whose lines tell the story of Phlebas, a young and handsome sailor who was drowned after leading a boring business career. The story tells that he was caught in a whirlpool and passed through various stages, and this sailor could represent the modern man, because he has no desire for spiritual values, which, for Eliot, would cause the inevitable decay of modern civilization. Furthermore, in the story of Phlebas, water is a purifying element in a metaphorical sense, since the sailor dies "drowned" by his own greed, and therefore water exercises a purifying power, removing the evils of the world (greed). This illustrates a process that Eliot is concerned with: the possibility of rebirth, or impossibility, in the case of Phlebas, since the modern man, due to his lack of values and awareness of the world, would be unable to achieve salvation.

Evidently, for Eliot death seems necessary to achieve a complete catharsis. For the poet, humanity dies at the hand of mechanical and dehumanizing industrialization, although he still conceives the opportunity to save ourselves: society must “reset” itself, die to be born again, and this should be an introspective process. Nevertheless, I believe that, when he wrote *The Waste Land*, Eliot still believed in the possibility of liberating the world from self-destruction. The continuous recourse to Christian mythology and imagery suggests to me that Eliot aspires to a community that can still be saved, a community that must recover faith and religion—the Holy Grail he depicts in the poem—in order to rise again from the ashes, like the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

What is fundamental to understanding my thesis is the fact that the author deals with the relation between the grandeur of the past civilizations and the wasted reality of the present, which provides comparative flashbacks throughout history and time, almost in a circular, cyclical motion. Modern citizens, in Eliot’s poem, adopt a careless behaviour towards salvation and accept their own boredom. They follow mechanized movements, where “each man fixed his eyes before his feet” (Eliot 65), as the passage of the typist in “The Fire Sermon” –the unnamed typist is an archetype used to represent all women in the industrialized society–, or the treatment of the seasons illustrate: although April is the month in which the world blooms again, it is also “the cruellest month” (1), since it marks the beginning of a new cycle that will end in death. No one can escape from this circular march that burns every inhabitant into a cog, and, as Viorica Patea writes in her notes to Eliot’s *The Waste Land*, “they are composed of mechanical links in a dehumanized chain. They are lifeless puppets moving in circles, doomed to an empty reiteration of the same routine” (110).

This, for me, bears a certain similarity and even parallelism with the process of change in the natural world, the continual passing of the seasons, but also with the

Christian tradition, with the image of Christ's sacrifice, a tradition from which Eliot draws in composing his poem. Eliot himself in his notes on *The Waste Land* explains that the poem is based heavily on *The Golden Bough* by Sir James Frazer, whose central figure, The Fisher King, as the last stanza seems to illustrate, gives up his hope that someone will complete the quest for the Grail; that is, Eliot draws on myth as a religious parable to guide humanity:

I sat upon the shore

Fishing, with the arid plain behind me

Shall I at least set my lands in order?

London Bridge is falling down falling down falling down

Poi s'ascose nel foco che gli affina

Quando fiam uti chelidon—O swallow swallow

Le Prince d'Aquitaine à la tour abolie

These fragments I have shored against my ruins

Why then Ile fit you. Hieronymo's mad againe.

Datta. Dayadhvam. Damyata.

Shantih shantih shantih (424-434)

In this sequence, the aridity of the earth would represent the death of human beings, since throughout the poem Eliot refers frequently to baptisms and to rivers - both "life-givers," in either spiritual or physical ways, the alternation of languages would illustrate the impossibility of modern humans to communicate and understand himself in

a fragmented world, while the last lines would reinforce this idea that salvation, human rebirth is only possible through an individual process in which he "kills", removes the evils that have caused his own destruction: "Datta. Dayadhvam. Damyata" could be translated as "to give, to be compassionate and to exercise control"; that is, for the fragmented world to share again, to remain united and find harmony with nature, themes that McCarthy also develops in *The Road*.

In the novel, again, we find constant images of a grotesque world, where death is present. This is a world whose recent destruction, although the cause is not specified in any case, seems to have been brought about by humanity itself, or, at least, affected by it. This is evident in "the clocks stopped at 1:17. A long shear of light and, then a series of low concussions" (McCarthy 45); according to Terry Gifford, it seems that "a single event has taken place associated with a long blinding flash of light and subsequent distant explosions", which suggests that this apocalypse might have been caused by a nuclear accident.

In *The Road* the connection between the concept of the wasteland, the disappearance of nature intrinsically connected to human corruption and depravity is rather obvious, yet there is a significant difference between McCarthy's and Eliot's works. While *The Waste Land* presents a world in ignition, a chaotic, fragmented and dark world prior to the apocalypse that the Great War has initiated, *The Road* draws a post-apocalyptic scenario, a world where chaos has given birth to a new scenario where the surviving community has to reinvent itself to be reborn from its own ashes; in other words, the latter could echo the repercussions anticipated by the former, in the same way that the post-apocalyptic genre has drunk from the sources of modernism (Heffernan 60).

McCarthy presents in his novel a heartless world in which nature is affected by human actions, however, the devastating consequences in our planet are not explicitly

illustrated, quite the contrary: the absence of humanity and life are linked precisely to the absence of nature. An example of this feature could be the following passage: “They set out through the dark woods. There was a moon somewhere beyond the ashen overcast and they could just make out the trees. They staggered on like drunks. If they find us they’ll kill us, wont they Papa” (McCarthy 97).

This atmosphere flooded by a cloud of ashes, the landscape in which only dark trees are visible - I suspect they have burned and therefore died - might somehow take the reader back to "The Valley of Ashes", or to the barren landscapes of *The Wasteland*, and, as Gifford suggests, “the woods are without the aesthetic of Nature; they are a denatured environment in a narrative driven by a focus upon the survival of the human protagonists” and “the only significance of the moon in this passage is as a function of survival”. Moreover, I think it is possible that McCarthy may have avoided making profound allusions to nature in the same way that he has avoided openly pronouncing on what has caused the catastrophe, since the lack of information produces concern in the reader, opening up an ecocritical personal reflection that, in these times, has become more urgent than ever.

Nevertheless, as in *The Waste Land*, not all hope seems to be lost, and, again, the theological component is incorporated into the narrative. This is explored through the figures of the father and son, whose namelessness may suggest a connection between the biblical father figure and son. In my view, their anonymity might also indicate that this situation is extrapolated to anyone in the context McCarthy proposes, focusing only on the fact that two distinct and markedly different generations converge on this road: the generation of causation and the generation of change.

Despite the constant dangers they face, as Carla Sánchez suggests, "the boy also inspires his father to hope for the possibility of a communal rebirth", and "he acts almost

like a messiah." The father never stops praising the boy in the same way that the boy never stops being kind to others, even if it means putting himself in danger. This happens because "the boy sees life as something more precious than an endless struggle to survive" and therefore "he clearly lives for and in expectation of something better" (Sánchez). Therefore, my conclusion is that the father represents a generation that has lost itself and is entrusted to be reborn in a future generation willing to regain unity in a fragmented world, a generation of which the boy stands as a prophetic figure, as a holy grail, as Ely says when describing his hair as "golden chalice. Good to house a God" (McCarthy 56).

It is precisely this idea that triggers the father's desire to preserve his son. In fact, the gradual deterioration of the father's health could be a metaphor for the health of humanity and the planet. However, as arduous as it is, he never ceases to care for his son and, before he dies, instead of inciting him to suicide, he tries to give him strength and faith, giving meaning to his sacrifice, the sacrifice of his generation. Perhaps he has understood that if his son lives and the seed of an uncorrupted generation is preserved, it is possible that the world can once again experience a new cycle of redemption, so that humanity may be reborn, transformed into a new society based on common welfare and forgiveness, as Eliot also dreamed of.

In the last novel, *The Great Gatsby*, I also perceive this idea of a nature subject to the advance of capitalism and industrialization. While it is true that the grotesque of the world is observed in *The Valley of Ashes*, the absence of nature could produce the same effect on the reader, as happens in *The Road*. Fitzgerald's story is set in the most modern metropolis of the time, a lavish place where there is only luxury and no room for organic life; even the outskirts of the city are corrupted at the whim of people according to the aesthetics of the moment. Gatsby nonchalantly drives his car through the woods of West Egg, takes over the beach with his hydroplane, and sends an army of gardeners to Nick's

house to fix it up. In addition, his constant partying is a scene of material waste, and illustrates the indifference to the consequences of consumerism for both humans and the natural world, which is manipulated through ever more powerful technology:

Every Friday five crates of oranges and lemons arrived from a fruiterer in New York—every Monday these same oranges and lemons left his back door in a pyramid of pulpless halves. There was a machine in the kitchen which could extract the juice of two hundred oranges in half an hour, if a little button was pressed two hundred times by a butler's thumb (Fitzgerald 26).

Similarly, *The Valley of Ashes* can also stand for those places whose nature has been devastated by industrialization, places where the presence of the train has totally changed the physiognomy of the place, an idea that reminds me of the pastoral motto "The Machine in the Garden", coined by Leo Marx. In this case, not only has technology intruded on nature, but it is the cause of its destruction, and it seems to me no coincidence that precisely the climax of the novel, Myrtle's death, is caused by a modern artefact such as a car.

The absence of nature accompanies the non-existence of human values and feelings. Daisy and Tom Buchanan would represent that buoyant and unscrupulous social stratum, Nick and his dull life as a bond salesman would be, for me, a metaphor for the mechanic nature of certain jobs—like the typist in *The Wasteland*—, while Gatsby is the image of the corruption of the "American dream," dragged into an immoral and eccentric life by his naivety, but also by his greed. However, I must return to Gatsby's notebook again to clarify the latter. When Gatsby dies and Nick reads Gatsby's own purposes as a child, he finds not only an innocent child, but also an ambitious child: a child willing to

change everything for the better. Gatsby's death, as well as what happens afterwards, has an immediate effect on Nick's mind, for at that moment he seems to realize that the world is falling apart and something has to change; yet the boy who was once Gatsby fascinates Nick. Perhaps Fitzgerald, like McCarthy in *The Road*, suggests that the key to change lies precisely in the younger generation, in those who begin their lives or are willing to change the current situation. Thus, while the child Gatsby, the God-sent boy, tries to change his world, the older Gatsby is dragged back again and again to relive what he has lived through, caught in a maelstrom of appearances and insincerities from which he does not seek to emerge, and which ultimately destroys him.

In Fitzgerald's novel death is present in different ways. Arguably, the author seems to sacrifice his central character as an exemplifying parable with certain theological connotations. "After Nick's act of erasure," Bicknell states, "Gatsby's elusiveness, corruption are forgotten; in the next moment, a moment in which vanished trees appear and the whispers of a lost continent become intelligible, a new vision of Gatsby's significance is revealed" (136). Therefore, it seems that Gatsby's death is a catharsis for Nick Carraway; as it allows Nick to be reborn, to wake up as a different person and see the world through a different prism.

Finally, Gatsby's death could be connected to the story of Phlebas the sailor in *The Waste Land* (Death By Water) not only in the sense that both die in the water, but that both have led immoral lives whose excesses have taken their toll. Like the water in *The Waste Land*, Gatsby's pool becomes his own tomb, purifying the sins of humankind, whose lack of morality and values, whose dehumanization, has ended up destroying the world, an idea that, I argue, Fitzgerald, Eliot and McCarthy all attempted to develop in their respective works.

CONCLUSIONS

One of the main conclusions I draw from my analysis is the observable parallelism between *The Waste Land* and *The Great Gatsby* in relation to how Eliot and Fitzgerald conceive of the world in the 1920s. Both authors stress the Great War as a cause of the fragmentation of the world, but they also emphasise the fact that the development of the capitalist system has caused another kind of social fragmentation, that between classes. This type of difference is not only evident in the nature of the work that each class is destined to carry out, but also in their style of life: one full of hardship and the other full of vices.

In relation to this, I have noticed that McCarthy, without specifying the real cause, draws a scenario where human impassivity in the face of the inevitable advance of capitalism and the excesses it entails. This leads to a catastrophe that ends the world as it was conceived, not only physically level, but also in a figurative dimension. In my opinion, Eliot's *The Waste Land* is embodied in Fitzgerald's *The Valley of Ashes*, but can also be seen in McCarthy's novel, as all three works present contexts in which humanity is dragged into chaos and consequent self-destruction. In fact, the post-apocalyptic setting in which *The Road* takes place is the outcome of the failure of human society as a collective. Yet this pessimistic message is not new: McCarthy's road is *The Valley of Ashes*, it is Eliot's wasteland., and that is the result of the failure of society as a collective.

Additionally, I have observed that through the process of change depicted in these three works, human beings experience an existential crisis, and this pessimism is reflected in two interconnected aspects: on the one hand, in the disillusionment conveyed regarding the fate of humankind, and, on the other hand, in the authors' choice of the most grotesque scenarios, where life and nature seem to be corrupted.

Likewise, in any of these cases, the relationship between the human manipulation of the natural environment and the death of nature has been present since humankind obtained the necessary power to control it and has felt its legitimate master. Moreover, the theories developed in this thesis not only bear a parallelism with what has been historically observed but can also serve as a metaphor—and a caveat—for what is currently happening in our world. Perhaps it has been the result of human manipulation, perhaps it has been nature's response as a punishment for our excesses, whatever the case may be, the consequences of the current pandemic are devastating: they have made society "die," at least as we conceived it as recently as a year ago.

While the emphasis in these works is placed on what has gone wrong, these three authors also argue whether or not that society is capable of reversing the situation. For me, Eliot, Fitzgerald and McCarthy see the possibility of "rebirth" in the future if the new generations learn from the mistakes of the past. Therefore, perhaps the implicit message is to encourage the new generations to be aware of the situation in order to reverse it. After all, only if we understand the causes and assume the consequences, can we be reborn as a new society.

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