Crisis: Masculinity and an Ethic of Care in American Literature

by

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Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of Doctor
of Philosophy in the Department of
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ABSTRACT

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Abstract

This dissertation takes three crisis periods that have occurred throughout American history—times of war, times of disease, and times of apocalypse—and examines how such periods simultaneously provoke what can be called "traditional" masculine responses of toughness, independence, and executive action along with an alternative gender expression contemporary sociologists refer to as caring masculinity. Rather than consider caring masculinity a new phenomenon, *Crisis: Masculinity and an Ethic of Care in American Literature* seeks to establish the extended and underexplored history of manhood's intersection with relational forms of care as expressed in popular literature. By analyzing literary works spanning from the nineteenth century to the twenty-first century, *Crisis* argues that such patterns of practice have existed in many forms, across a variety of situation, and for a long time.

Dedication

To all the people who have cared for me.

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Acknowledgements

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up top. I know we gave a confused look to the guy we walked past on the way to get chicken and waffles who asked if we were brothers, but, all things considered, he was right.

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I write a lot about people caring for other people. Throughout my life, my family has cared for me and about me, and this project is, in a large way, inspired by them. Some of them even made their way into here, like my grandfather, Tony D'Addario, and

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1. Introduction

A curious thing happens in Stephen Crane's oft-anthologized short story, "The Open Boat" (1897). After surviving a shipwreck, a captain, a cook, an oiler, and a correspondent are trapped on a dinghy, hoping to reach shore safely. The circumstances the four men find themselves in calls forth their strength and tenacity, as their dominance of the situation is the only thing preventing them from a watery grave. At least one man, if not two, is always at the oars rowing, even at night. They must conquer the "snarling" (Crane 615) current that animalizes the boat into a "bucking broncho" that must be tamed (614) if they have any hope of surviving the sea that is "flatly indifferent" to their existence (627). When the group sees potential saviors on the shore who misinterpret the gravity of their plight and do not offer assistance, one man in the boat cries out, "I'd like to catch the chump who waved the coat. I feel like soaking him one, just for luck" (623). The crisis situation both calls for and elicits a certain brand of masculinity.

However, the prominent emotion expressed amongst the four men for one another during the entire ordeal is that of camaraderie, that of care. The narrator notes, "[i]t would be difficult to describe the subtle brotherhood of men that was here established on the seas. No one said that it was so. No one mentioned it. But it dwelt in the boat, and each man felt it warm him" (617). Injured from the initial wreck, the captain is unable to row the boat, leaving that job to the other three. Despite his

privileged station, he takes off his overcoat to make a sail to give the oiler and correspondent a chance to rest from rowing (618). When they near the possible salvation of a lighthouse, he tells his rowing crew, "Don't spend yourselves. If we have to run a surf you'll need all your strength, because we'll sure have to swim for it. Take your time" (618), a directive that encourages everyone's safe arrival on shore rather than simply his own.

One night on the boat, the correspondent recalls a poem he learned in school about a soldier who lay dying, a poem that never meant much to him. However, now, "it quaintly came to him as a human, living thing. It was no longer merely a picture of a few throes in the breast of a poet…it was an actuality—stern, mournful, and fine" (626). Amidst his own suffering, the correspondent "was sorry for the soldier of the Legion who lay dying in Algiers" (626). Battling the forces of the sea, near death, and with the hope of reaching the shore dwindling, the correspondent is filled with sympathy, empathy, and understanding. "The Open Boat" presents a compelling model of caring masculinity.

In an influential and widely cited 2016 article published in *Men and Masculinities*, Karla Elliott proposes "a practice-based model of caring masculinities" to help theorize the "emerging" concept in hopes of beginning a serious discussion of how care factors into men's lives (241). While Elliott was not the first scholar to use the term "caring masculinities," her proposal that "caring masculinities can be seen as masculine

identities that exclude domination and embrace the…interdependent qualities of care identified by feminist theorists of care" (252) not only helped begin a discussion but prompted serious intellectual debate over the possibility of feminist care theory and masculinity harmoniously coexisting.[1] Elliot posits that caring masculinity can be considered "one of the next, positive steps toward engaging men in gender equality" (244). If individuals can maintain masculine identities yet relinquish the destructive attributes of such identities by embracing the interpersonal, intimate responsibilities of care, they can elide the physical and emotional tolls associated with certain lauded expressions of masculinity.[2]

While Elliott's article is helpful for orienting scholars towards the notion of caring masculinity as an expression of manhood, its claim that caring masculinity is an *emerging concept* is quite peculiar. While the nomenclature may be a recent formulation, the patterns of practice, at least from an American literature perspective, have existed in many forms, across a variety of situations, and for a long time.

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[1] Elliott acknowledges Scambor et al.'s "Men and Gender Equality: European Insights" (2014) as one article that has used the term "caring masculinities" prior to her. According to Google Scholar, Elliott's article has been cited in over 650 texts since its publication in 2016. Some responses to Elliott are discussed in chapter three of this dissertation, "The Beginning of the End or The End of the Beginning: Apocalypse Part I."

[2] The physical and emotional tolls of adhering to traditional Western masculine ideals include "violence (against others and self), high-risk behavior, lack of self-care, poor health, and impoverished relationships" (Elliott 246). Additionally, Niall Hanlon notes that men who do not live up to the ideals of "domineering masculinity" (61) are "encourage[d]…to feel shame[ful] and inadequate," so they "deny their needs for intimacy and interdependence and feelings of vulnerability" (64).

1.1 Masculinity: Continual Crisis

Though the past decade has prompted the greatest focus on transgender issues ever seen in American history, it has also witnessed the rise of a reactionary interest in a return to "traditional masculine values." For some, like the self-proclaimed misogynist and founder of Hustler's University, Andrew Tate, that means adopting an "alpha male" mindset. Tate, who was arrested on charges of organized crime, human trafficking, and rape in late-December of 2022, not only claimed that he is "absolutely a misogynist," but that "[t]here's no way you can be rooted in reality and not be sexist" (qtd. in Radford). For others, like the Proud Boys organization, it means advocating for a return to traditional male/female roles. According to the group's *Stations of the Congregation*, a script for meet-ups, members are called to toast "the entrepreneurs who risk everything to improve our lives" and "the housewives that create human life, shape it, and build the communities in which we live" (*PROUD* 3). At this crossroads of patriarchal masculinity and yearnings for allyship and transcendence of gender's binaristic markings, the United States is in the midst of a masculinity crisis.

While the precise details of our particular historical moment may be unique, the "crisis of masculinity" is far from new. In fact, John MacInnes asserts that arguments about masculinity being in crisis have already become "a cliché" by the time he wrote *The End of Masculinity*—which was published a quarter century ago in 1998. The decade began with the widespread popularity of mythopoetic men's texts like Robert Bly's *Iron*

John: A Book About Men (1990) and Sam Keen's *Fire in the Belly: On Being a Man* (1991).[3] The popularity of these and similar texts is not to be understated. R.W. Connell felt compelled to write *Masculinities*, one of the foundational texts in the study of men and masculinities, as a response to the "deeply confused texts" of the mythopoetic men's movement based in pop psychology (13). If we are to consider the beginning of the 1990's the mainstream emergence of masculinity-in-crisis thinking that has only proliferated over the past 30-plus years, then I have lived my entire life in crisis.

Studies in American cultural history have extended the crisis of masculinity back even further. In *Manhood in America*, Michael Kimmel traces the history of the American man through "moments of crisis when masculinity was seen as threatened and people worked hard to try and salvage, revitalize, and resurrect it" (7). Kimmel's analysis begins with the birth of the United States in 1776, where he argues that the conception of the self-made man (e.g. Ben Franklin) needed to contend with that of the heroic artisan (e.g. Paul Revere) and genteel patriarch (e.g. Thomas Jefferson, John Adams, James Madison) as competing interpretations of *true* manhood (13-15). While the crisis may not have been constant, one way to interpret American cultural history, according to Kimmel, is as the history of masculinity in crisis. Thus, we have all lived decades of our lives in crisis.

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[3] *Iron John* spent 62 weeks on the *New York Times* bestseller list, and *Fire in the Belly* spent 29 weeks.

Rather than add to the long and ever-growing oeuvre of masculinity-in-crisis scholarship, this project inverts the formulation; instead of examining the conflicts and confusions surrounding competing conceptions of manhood, I am interested in how external emergencies invariably intertwine with different expressions of masculinity. In the chapters that follow, I focus on how the largescale crises that have occurred throughout American history—times of war, times of disease, and times of apocalypse—serve as backdrops for different forms of masculine expression. While these times of personal and societal vulnerability provoke a "traditional" masculine reaction of toughness, independence, and executive action—a visible and, perhaps, even expected response—they simultaneously elicit behaviors and attitudes that run counter to gender expectations. Such critical moments engender tenderness and intimacy, the caring masculinity Elliott describes.

One of the most difficult and complex parts of writing about caring masculinity is establishing "masculinity" in the first place. Many texts that explore expressions of masculinity define it through a series of negations. The first, and perhaps most obvious, of these negations is that masculinity is not simply behavior performed by biological males. David Buchbinder distills the notion quite lucidly, stating that "there is no *necessary* connection between the morphology of sex (male or female) and the combination of behavior and attitude that we call gender (masculinity or femininity)" (25). Invoking Judith Butler, he continues, noting that "one does not act in a masculine

or feminine manner *because* one is male or female; rather, one acts in such a manner *in order to be seen (by oneself as well as by others) as* male or female" (55). If masculinity is not biological, it is also not simply the sex role of men. Sex Role Theory contains ambiguities "between the role as a descriptor and the role as explanatory" of masculinity, resulting in a conflation of the nature of masculinity with its explanation (Haywood et al. 20). Furthermore, masculinity is not "reducible to a list of masculine character traits" (Jordan 5) that somehow denote an individual as masculine or un-masculine. Additionally, masculinity is not a monolith. One reason Connell's *Masculinities* serves as a foundational text for the study of men and masculinity is because it clearly establishes plurality in gender expression, highlighting both "diversity in masculinities" and "relations of alliance, dominance and subordination" between them (37).

For the purposes of this study, masculinities are "configurations of practices generated in particular situations in a changing structure of relationships" (81). They are the amalgamation of attitudes, behaviors, attributes, and modes of being prescribed for men. While the individuals and characters I focus on in the ensuing chapters are male, their associations with masculinity are not generated from that fact. Rather, their interactions with different expressions of caring masculinity stem from their conflicts with understandings of their own masculinity, their overt identification as *men* (not just "male"), and/or their negotiations through environments heavily coded masculine that force at least a cursory comparison of how they measure up.

1.2 Description of Chapters

In my second chapter, I examine the promise that joining the military proves and provides true manhood juxtaposed with the reality of wounds, injury, and death that ultimately renders this promise pointless. Beginning with Walt Whitman's Civil War journal, *Memoranda During the War* (1876), I explore how empathetic male caring can exist in the wartime context, how the lived experience of war illuminates the limitations of preconceived assumptions about masculinity, and how wartime's insistence on traditional masculinity itself is what makes possible a caring alternative once the warrior mindset breaks down. With Whitman's journal as a foundation, I then shift focus to today's veterans with combat-induced post-traumatic stress disorder, analyzing how contemporary psychologists advocate for reframing PTSD care as a masculine endeavor that takes strength and fearlessness. I argue that Ernest Hemingway, a wounded veteran himself, identifies the problem with conflating a post-combat return to normalcy with an adherence to normative masculinity in the short story "Soldier's Home" (1925). To offer an alternative solution, I look to "Home," by George Saunders (2011), and *Home*, by Toni Morrison (2012), for both texts reframe the conception of a warrior to include care-receiving which enables healing.

My analysis turns to the AIDS crisis in my third chapter. I examine how widespread metaphorical thinking about AIDS—to use Susan Sontag's formulation of illness as metaphor—equated a diagnosis with inherent weakness. This historical

premise factors into Tony Kushner's *Angels in America* (1991, 1992) and Matthew Lopez's contemporary follow-up *The Inheritance* (2018), two plays that emphasize the performativity of gender in their content and the performance of gender in their standing as theatrical productions. I argue that both texts make the case that caring for the sick creates personal and communal bonds that offer hope for a more positive future, for both individuals and the gay community. By focusing on the fortitude required to bear the burden of care, both plays demonstrate how one can redefine strength in non-physical ways. In the case of *Angels*, strength comes from a reclamation of intimacy and a dedication to visibility. For *The Inheritance*, strength ensues from a return to the sense of community that was vital during the AIDS crisis and a commitment to fostering cross-generational bonds with both past and future generations of gay men.

My fourth chapter begins to address the father/child relationship as a response to foundational sociological work on caring masculinity. While some scholars consider fatherhood the paradigmatic example of manhood's intersection with care, others argue that it reifies domination rather than rejects it. To explore how fatherhood can truly embrace a caring relation, I turn to an historical American apocalyptic event: the displacement of indigenous tribes from their homelands. I examine the relationship between Chingachgook and Uncas in James Fenimore Cooper's *The Last of the Mohicans* (1826) that is marked by unmitigated outward violence and inward tenderness to demonstrate what it means to care in the face of an inalterable doom. Because Native

Americans have already negotiated versions of apocalypse like the one that Cooper depicts, I examine the Anishinaabe interpretation of temporality known as spiraling time to establish a framework for how groups or individuals can involve the past and the future in the decision-making process of the present.

In my final chapter, I continue with the apocalyptic backdrop but turn to the speculative, future apocalypse. I argue that the unnamed father in *The Road* (2006), by Cormac McCarthy, demonstrates a type of fatherhood that maintains the traditionally male characteristics of protection and provision yet integrates the relationality and tenderness often associated with motherhood and femininity. This approach to parenting that I call post-apocalyptic fatherhood adapts the spiraling time mindset of Indigenous ontology to attend to a child's needs in the present while concurrently valuing the child's personhood to ensure an emotional and spiritual survival in the future. By recognizing the importance of past and future versions of one's child, I argue, fathers can express a type of caring masculinity that does not slip into the domineering or dictatorial mode cautioned against by sociological investigations of fathers who perform primary care work.

By examining these three common crisis periods that have occurred throughout American history, I seek to demonstrate how caring masculinity emerges during circumstances and situations where traditional forms of manhood that embrace independence and control are more evident and even anticipated. In addition to

subverting expectations, such moments of caring masculinity destabilize the hegemony of traditional manhood through their focus on empathetic responsibility. My hope is to contribute to the growing body of scholarship focused on expressions of masculinity in American literature but not through a lens of place, period, or race/ethnicity.[4] While this project takes an interdisciplinary approach that incorporates sociology, psychology, and history, I maintain that literature occupies a privileged liminal space that reflects and refracts American culture, most especially when it addresses disaster periods. Literary study offers a unique vantage point to explore this dual emergence of manhood.

[4] See Sally Robinson's *Marked Men: White Masculinity in Crisis* (2000), Jeffrey Leak's *Racial Myths and Masculinity in African American Literature* (2005), Ken Parille's *Boys at Home: Discipline, Masculinity, and "The Boy-Problem" in Nineteenth-Century American Literature* (2009), Lydia Cooper's *Masculinities in Literature of the American West* (2016), and Viday Ravi's *Masculinity and Place in American Literature Since 1950* (2019) for examples of analyses of masculinity in American literature oriented around place, period, and race/ethnicity.

2. Giving Pain and Receiving Care: Wartime

> "war…has within it a large element of the symbolic and is ultimately… based on a simple and startling blend of the real and the fictional"
> — Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain*

2.1 An Introduction to War

Immediately after graduating from Yonkers High School in 1945, my grandfather's brother volunteered to serve in the U.S. Navy. He served for eleven months and received his honorable discharge. Because he served for less than a year, he was eligible to be drafted to Korea, which he was. After basic training at Fort McClellan in Alabama, his outfit was shipped to Korea and immediately sent to the front lines. An enemy explosive detonated near the company headquarters where he was serving as a clerk. Somehow, he walked away with only scratches from flying debris. He received another honorable discharge in 1954.

On February 6, 1951, my grandfather received notice to report for a physical examination on Whitehall Street in Manhattan. It was his 21st birthday. On Valentine's Day, he was sworn in and was one of about 75 Yonkers boys sent to Fort Devens, Massachusetts, though his final destination was Camp Rucker, Alabama. There, he was assigned to I Company, 3rd Battalion, 164th Infantry Regiment. After eight weeks of basic training, most of his Company were sent to Korea. My grandfather, however, was the starting second baseman for the 164th baseball team. When it came time to send the boys overseas, the Colonel said that his starters and pitchers stayed. That was his

championship team, and they were not going to Korea.[1] During the winter, he was the starting guard for the Camp Rucker basketball team and eventually became the player coach. Again, his superiors said he was not to go overseas. The team was in second place when he received his honorable discharge on Valentine's Day, 1953. Thus, my grandfather served for two years in the army, made Staff Sergeant, and was sent home without leaving the country. As he says, athletics saved his life. One brother narrowly evaded death on the front lines. Having both over there would have been tempting fate.

I have heard these stories told and retold many times in many contexts throughout my life. The details have never changed. Despite the layers of removal from both combat and me, they are the most personal accounts of wartime that I have experienced, since I both had and elected the option not to serve in the military. Still, they were not my first exposure to war. Before I was old enough to hear these stories, popular culture weaved another narrative about war that, even as a young child, I understood.

One of my earliest cohesive memories is a day I spent with my father near the end of 1995. We went to see *Toy Story*. It was a big day for me, as it was my first time in a movie theater. Seeing Andy's toys come to life captivated me; to my two-year-old brain, it was one of the greatest things in the entire world. Of course, then, I was taken aback

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[1] After making it through the first round of cuts for the team and hearing a rumor that the 164th was heading to Korea in the coming weeks, my grandfather got a three-day pass and missed the second round of try-outs. An irate Colonel told his Captain that if Private D'Addario failed to attend the next try-out, both he and the Captain would be on the next boat to Korea.

when Andy's mom inadvertently stepped on one of the green army men during their reconnaissance mission at Andy's birthday party. The trampled soldier pleads for the rest to continue without him. Sarge, voiced by R. Lee Ermey, hop-runs back to him, exclaiming "A good soldier never leaves a man behind," and delivers him to the medic in the base of the potted plant where they have set up their camp, all while narrowly avoiding a bouncing ball coming down the hallway (*Toy Story*). At that moment, I had no idea who R. Lee Ermey was, what a soldier did, or what it meant to leave a man behind. But, for whatever reason, that line in particular stuck with me for a very long time.

In my early life, war and the experience of the soldier were always mediated through notions of brotherhood, and, growing up with two younger brothers, I had a strong sense of what that meant from a young age. Consider *Saving Private Ryan* and *Band of Brothers*. I never saw either growing up (as I was far too young to watch graphic war reenactments), but the titles alone instilled in me a sense of camaraderie. Soldiers saved each other. Soldiers were brothers. According to Billy Joel's "Goodnight Saigon," a favorite of my mother's, soldiers promised to go down together. Film, television, music—whenever war was involved, it seemed like soldiers, above all else, cared for one another.

This picture of the soldier started to change, as so much else did, after September 11, 2001. When the United States sent troops to Afghanistan and Iraq, it was described to

me as going to fight the terrorists who were the bad guys. The soldiers had to be strong, or else the terrorists would win. I was ten years old when Saddam Hussein was captured. I remember that his grandson, who was around my age, was killed in the lead-up. It felt weird to me, but it was also rationalized as okay because it was not on purpose, and it meant we were close to finding him. Around that point, in my mind, the Army took precedence over the individual soldiers. The Army was on a mission to rid the world of terrorists; the individual soldiers had to be brave and fearless to carry out that mission, even if it meant killing a kid. It was not the particular soldier's fault, but he had to be tough enough to do whatever necessary.

I did not have a particular understanding of "masculinity" proper until I was in either seventh or eighth grade. I saw how guys acted and how girls acted, understood what guys liked versus what girls liked. But it wasn't until health class and the in-class viewing of *Tough Guise* that masculinity as a concept started to crystallize in my head. While the military was not one of the film's main focus points, toughness and violence were. Bolstered by the film's opening montage—including a voiceover from George C. Scott as General Patton and a military drill synched to the drum hits in Pearl Jam's "Betterman"—and a later segment about body image that discussed the bicep size on G.I. Joe action figures, the connection between masculinity and the military served as an understated yet present motif.

While these anecdotes are personal and reflect my own, non-scholarly introduction to war, I think that they are useful in highlighting at least one strand of how the larger cultural depiction of war from the late 1990s into the 2000s impacted the lives of those who were growing up during that time—chiefly that of a white, middle-class, suburban, male demographic. The connection between war and masculinity was obvious, as was the connection between war and care, yet there seemed to be a dichotomy between the fiction and the reality regarding ideals of brotherhood versus toughness. That division, though, is not as clear-cut as I had once thought. Rather, the caring side of the soldier emerges because of the warrior side.

In this chapter, I cover several intersections between traditional, tough masculinity and an alternative, caring masculinity in the wartime context through a focus on the margins of combat. After briefly sketching how and why wartime encourages traditional masculinity, I will turn to how it also evokes care. Using Walt Whitman's *Memoranda During the War* (1876) as my main point of reference, I seek to demonstrate how the artifice of toughness dissipates when juxtaposed with the reality of wounds, injury, and death. Whitman's text is important because its content and form both demonstrate how war's harsh reality changes established practices and beliefs—of masculinity and Whitman's poetry. From there, I will proceed to more modern and contemporary war stories by Ernest Hemingway, George Saunders, and Toni Morrison. Remaining on the margins of combat involvement, I will focus on fictions about veterans

returning from overseas, their attempts to cope with their service experiences, and their willingness to become care receivers. This section begins with an examination of Iraq and Afghanistan veterans suffering from PTSD and how beliefs about masculinity hinder their ability to receive care in the form of therapy, which has prompted psychologists to recommend recalibrating therapy as a masculine endeavor. However, this solution, as dramatized in Hemingway's "Soldier's Home" (1925), risks a wholesale rejection of care if masculinity is ever called into question. Portraying a different approach, George Saunders's "Home" (2011), and Toni Morrison's *Home* (2012) demonstrate how warrior masculinity might accept care-receiving without necessarily recoding it as "masculine."

2.1.1 A Conclusive Demonstration of Manhood

In sketching an argument for a type of citizenship where a body can earn its vigor by embracing vulnerability, Cynthia Barounis asserts that the typically lauded forms of masculinity are "inherently *prophylactic*" because male bodies are required to be "invulnerable, impenetrable, and impervious to injury" both physically and mentally (Barounis 3). Through this contrast, Barounis questions masculinity's coupling with "mastery, aggression, and self-protection" (6). While the qualities of this masculinity are points of departure for the type of citizenship Barounis champions, they are the exact same qualities that are attributed to and desired in warriors—to be invulnerable, impenetrable, impervious. A traditional masculine expression that emphasizes

toughness and invulnerability makes perfect sense during wartime, as such qualities make the ideal soldier, even though an impervious, impenetrable soldier is an entirely fictitious construct.

Reality versus construction aside, the United States government and culture at large have recognized the allure of achieving the status of a 'real man' by promising some sort of ultimate masculinity through fighting for the country. A notion of masculine glory through battle extends backwards in time to well before the founding of America—look at *The Iliad* for one; however, the United States has long played on the association between the military and masculinity in order to bolster recruitment efforts for various branches of the armed forces, justify political positions, or to glorify the soldier to individuals at home.[2] Traditional masculinity does not inherently benefit the armed forces themselves.[3] Nevertheless, the idea does play on individuals' anxieties of not being manly enough, as American men typically "define their masculinity, not as much in relation to women, but in relation to each other" (Kimmel 5). The opportunity to participate in war helps persuade individuals to enlist in order to demonstrate that "they [are] not 'sissies'" (Phillips 4). They are manly and enlisting proves it, or they somehow "attain masculine status" through the crucible of training and combat (Belkin

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[2] For examples throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, see Figure 1 and Figure 2 as well as Eleanor L. Hannah's "From the Dance Floor to the Rifle Range: The Evolution of Manliness in the National Guards" (2007) Kristin L. Hoganson's *Fighting for American Manhood: How Gender Politics Provoked the Spanish-American and Philippine-American Wars* (2000), Christina Jarvis's *The Male Body at War: American Masculinity during World War II* (2004), and Kathy J. Phillips's *Manipulating Masculinity: War and Gender in Modern British and American Literature* (2006).

[3] Although, promoting this brand of masculinity does enable certain training practices. According to Robert S. Baron, the first stage of intense indoctrination (which aligns with military boot camp) is the softening-up stage that provides stress and disorientation that separates the individual from previous groups or affiliations (240).

42). When we see military service as a proving ground for masculinity, it holds the power to make or unmake a man.

Figure 1: U.S. Navy World War I recruitment poster by Howard Chandler Christy, 1917.

Dennis McGurk et al. refer to the "military indoctrination process" (16) as the basis for the impression of that military service can turn a weakling into a shining

beacon of manhood. They define this process as producing "service members who have internalized the values of the armed services so as to drive individuals to behaviors in defense of the nation that may involve killing or sacrificing oneself, while thinking and problem solving in the presence of complex contingencies" (16). We might see this process as "a redefining of self" that attunes a person's interests from the individual to the collective (27). Concerning masculinity, McGurk references West Point cadets who, "wished that [their] training had been harder" because they hoped "to see themselves transformed into men by the experience" (25)—a hope fraught with the possibility of failure.

Since 2016, all military combat jobs have been open to women. However, this new direction has not diminished the overall masculine character of the military, for women can also attain a masculine status and authority in the military, nor has it discouraged military recruitment efforts from appealing to men.[4] As noted by Hyunyoung Moon, the Army "officially adopted the term 'warrior' as an ideal for its troops" in the early 2000s when it incorporated a set of principles called the "Warrior Ethos" into the "Soldier's Creed"—which must be memorized by all soldiers (181). The "Warrior Ethos" reads as follows: "I will always place the mission first. I will never accept defeat. I will never quit. I will never leave a fallen comrade" ("Warrior Ethos"). Moon argues that the Army's recruitment campaigns of 2018 and 2019—respectively

[4] This was the case even before women were permitted in combat roles. See Jack Halberstam, *Female Masculinity* (1998), Brenda M. Boyle, *Masculinity in Vietnam War Narratives* (2009), and Aaron Belkin, *Bring Me Men* (2012).

titled “Warriors Wanted” and “What’s Your Warrior?”—present true warriors as those who adhere to “the masculine soldier ideal” despite the Army’s apparent attempt to expand the definition of who and what roles qualify one as a warrior (190). Furthermore, Moon asserts, “gender integration policies and broadened roles of women servicemembers” have done little to alter the “firmly planted” impression that “warrior” is synonymous with “masculine” (190).

I find the term “warrior ethos” fitting to describe the brand of masculinity lauded by the military. By promoting attitudes associated with masculinity/hypermasculinity, the military encourages a type of warrior mindset in those who serve that simultaneously encourages bravery, resiliency, and toughness and diminishes vulnerability. However, the invulnerable warrior is and always has been a myth, just as Achilles remains famous for his vulnerable heel. Still, there is another side to serving in the American military, a more human element—a more caring element—and that element has existed for a long time.

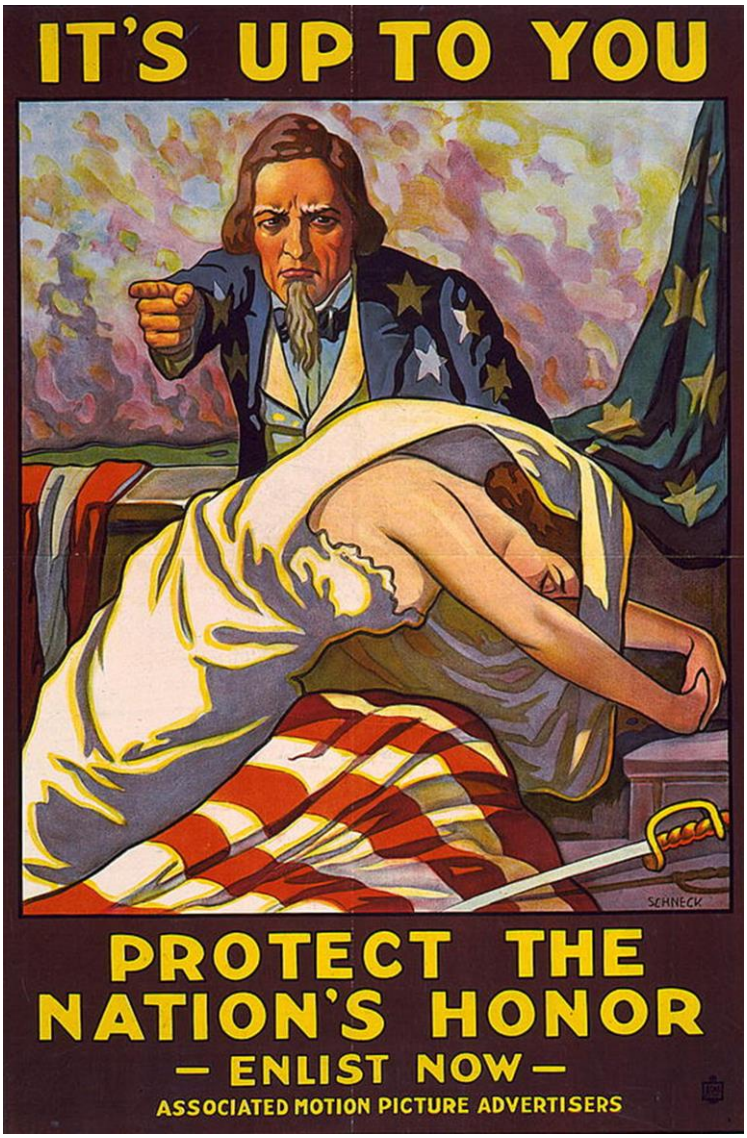

Figure 2: World War I recruitment poster illustrated by Schneck and published by Acme Litho. Co.

2.2 A Memoranda on Men

Describing July 4, 1863 (merely hours after the Union victory at Gettysburg) Walt Whitman writes the following:

I saw the parade about noon, Pennsylvania avenue, from Fifteenth street down toward the Capitol. There were three regiments of infantry…two or three societies of Odd Fellows, a lot of children in barouches, and a squad of policemen….

As I went down the Avenue, saw a big flaring placard on the bulletin board of a newspaper office, announcing 'Glorious Victory for the Union Army!' Meade had fought Lee at Gettysburgh, Pennsylvania, yesterday and day before, and repuls'd him most signally….

I walk'd on to Armory Hospital—took along with me several bottles of blackberry and cherry syrup, good and strong, but innocent. Went through several of the Wards, announc'd to the soldiers the news from Meade, and gave them all a good drink of the syrups with ice water, quite refreshing……Meanwhile the Washington bells are ringing their sundown peals for Fourth of July, and the usual fusillades of boys' pistols, crackers, and guns. (Whitman, *Memoranda* 33)

Several dozen journal entries and jottings like the one above comprise Walt Whitman's *Memoranda During the War*. While offering a seemingly innocuous description of an Independence Day parade, this passage, better than any other, encapsulates the intimate relationship between wartime and the possibilities for masculinity despite its separation from any battlefield or combat engagement.

The first paragraph foregrounds the inherent presence of traditional or hegemonic masculinity by noting three types of stereotypically masculine groups: soldiers, policemen, and the Odd Fellows fraternal organization[5]. These groups of men typify, glorify, and celebrate virtues such as law, order, violence, control, and camaraderie often associated with masculinity. The parade itself takes place in the heart of the Union's federal government—from within view of the White House down to the

[5] The Odd Fellows were one of many fraternal organizations that, according to Michael Kimmel, provided middle class men "with the fellowship, friendship, and solace that they no doubt otherwise missed" in their daily lives by "re-creating the artisanal brotherhood, the masculine parish, and the patriarchal family that had virtually disappeared from men's lives" (172). Their presence here is somewhat surprising, as fraternal organization membership saw a "remarkable increase" after the end of the Civil War (Harwood 617) and peaked around the turn of the 20th century.

Capitol—which serves as another symbolic embodiment of these virtues on a structural level. In the second paragraph, Whitman highlights the glorification of masculine virtue in battle, culminating in a hard-fought and bloody victory at Gettysburg. The newspaper headline announces this triumph to the world, imparting a sort of reverence on the battle by referring to the victory as "Glorious." The third paragraph, though, contains the key juxtaposition to this intermingling of men, masculinity, and war. Outside, pistols and firecrackers explode to celebrate Independence Day (again, more phallic imagery of guns and shooting), but what is Whitman doing? He is walking through a military hospital with sweets for the wounded and dying soldiers to boost their morale. The city, the nation, and the world may see the erupting celebration raging on, but Whitman chooses instead to participate in a small, intimate act of compassion and kindness with those who have lost their vitality and spirits to the conflict. This impulse—a caring impulse—amidst the shooting of guns, the flexing of muscles, and destruction of others in the name of preservation or liberation is my focus.

Walt Whitman's entrance into the Civil War effort was not through soldiering but through searching for his brother who was wounded and sent to a military hospital in Falmouth, Virginia at the end of 1862. These hospitals in and around Washington D.C. are where Whitman stayed for most of the next three years, making over 600 visits to an estimated 80,000 wounded and sick soldiers (100). From the beginning, his involvement in the war effort was alternative in that his self-elected purpose was to

nurture rather than to conquer, to assist rather than to command, to heal rather than to destroy; thus, his journal offers insight into how the link between traditional masculinity and wartime is more artificially constructed than immutably fixed. Through its content as well as its writing, *Memoranda During the War* conveys three major points about masculinity and wartime. First, that empathetic male caring can exist in the wartime context as an alternative to traditional forms of masculinity. Second, that the lived experience of war illuminates the limitations of assumptions and beliefs about these times held prior to such experience including, but not limited to, assumptions of masculinity. And, third, that wartime's insistence on and promise of a traditional masculinity itself is what engenders the possibility for a caring alternative to emerge once the warrior ethos breaks itself down.

Memoranda is an exemplary depiction of how male caring can exist in a positive and empathetic way in the wartime context. While *Memoranda* spotlights Whitman's care for wounded soldiers, it makes the situation that begot this care just as visible. In the text's opening section, Whitman remarks that "Future years will never know the seething hell and the black infernal background of countless minor scenes and interior, (not the few great battles) of the Secession War; and it is best they should not" (6). Even though "it is best they should not," future generations do get a glimpse into the aftermath of the seething hell of battle through Whitman's notes. While his depictions of war's horrors on the body are not as evocative as they are in his poetry, it is hard to

ignore the carnage rendered throughout, such as the "heap of amputated feet, legs, arms, hands, &c., a full load for a one-horse cart" in Falmouth, Virginia on December 21, 1862 (8), the wound of a New York soldier that "was very bad…discharg'd much," and made Whitman "[feel] that he was even then the same as dying" (36), or the rampant cases of "typhoid fever…diarrhoea, catarrhal affections and bronchitis, rheumatism and pneumonia" (82). Through this pervasive and underlying horror—and Whitman's empathy for those experiencing it—care can emerge.

While Whitman never actually served as a nurse, per se, his role during the Civil War was very similar. Throughout his tenure, Whitman assisted in the physical aspects of nursing, such as "washing and dressing wounds" (and was occasionally the only individual whom certain soldiers wanted to perform these duties) (54). More significantly, though, Whitman embodied and expressed the caring function of nursing, providing the wounded with the moral and emotional support necessary for what would now be considered holistic healing. While doctors and nurses worked hard to save the lives of their patients who had a hope of surviving, once death became "certain and evident," "the surgeon abandon[ed] the patient" because they could not afford to waste time that could be better spent working to save other lives (45). While Whitman understood the medical staff's prerogative to abandon the ostensible lost causes, he also recognized the injustice of letting young men die alone, "without the presence of kith or kin," and sought to serve in this capacity (44). For certain wounded soldiers, this would

mean giving "some little gift, such as oranges, apples sweet crackers, figs, &c" (11) or small sums of money "to raise their spirits, and show them that somebody cared for them, and practically felt a fatherly or brotherly interest in them" (64). For others, gifts were not able to warm their spirits that "hunger[ed] and thirst[ed] for affection" (54). In these cases, Whitman offered his time, serving as a friendly face and confidant, which often included "[writing] all sorts of letters" for these soldiers, "including love letters, very tender ones" (14). These self-imposed duties extended to witnessing patients' deaths.

Whitman was a comforting presence and, oftentimes, the only person who could be considered a friend to those dying in the army hospitals, untold miles away from family and loved ones. In these cases, his final responsibility was to inform families about their sons' passings. While the army would take care of sending official death notices to families, Whitman would send letters about the boys (for many casualties were no more than 25 years old) as individuals. One such example is the letter he sent to Frank H. Irwin's mother, writing: "I thought perhaps a few words, though from a stranger, about your son, from one who was with him at the last, might be worth while" (91). Regardless of the particulars, Whitman claimed that he would "do what [he could]" for each soldier in need in order to provide them with some sort of happiness or brightness in a situation that oftentimes lacked all traces of both (10).

These examples are just a sampling of Whitman's behavior pattern throughout the *Memoranda* that points to an alternative masculinity in wartime through nursing that ran counter to the images of tough, tenacious soldiers. Kaitlyn Smith argues that Whitman's efforts exemplify queer family making that Civil War nursing helped engender during a time when men and women occupied separate spheres.[6] For Smith, Civil War nurses like Whitman and Louisa May Alcott blurred the binary lines of motherhood and fatherhood by "re-envision[ing] the family not as a patriarchal, nuclear unit, but rather as a network that includes and relies upon queerness, brokenness, and the selfhood of all its members" (183). While their individual efforts contributed to this radical reconceptualization, the Civil War as an historical moment "forced a confrontation with the limitations of the patriarchal family" (183). Essentially, by disrupting the 'normal' nuclear family, the Civil War exposed both the cult of true womanhood—where being a woman was defined as a composite of familial roles—and the separate spheres ideology as historically constructed rather than naturally occurring.[7] The war's casualty rate left mothers without sons, daughters without fathers, wives without husbands, young women without potential suitors, and a generation of men "physically and psychologically incapable of performing nineteenth-century

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[6]According to Carl Degler, most Americans during the mid-19th century accepted the notion that women were the "moral superior of the husband, though his legal and social inferior" (8). Michael Kimmel notes that this divide was evident in the split between public and private, with the former being man's domain and the latter being woman's (36).

[7] Vivian R. Pollak claims that Whitman himself resisted the cult of domesticity in his poetry, such as in the 1855 version of *Leaves of Grass* where he "unanxiously [notes] the presence of women workers" but refuses to specify where they are working, thus "[carving] out a more fluid liminal space which obscures the distinction between public and private spheres" (436).

masculinity" (Smith 184). Whereas Smith's analysis offers a starting point for understanding Whitman's role as queering of the norm, we can take this analysis further by taking a step back to consider the depth of nuance Whitman embodies. What is one to make of those who perform perceived masculine roles in feminine spaces, perceived feminine roles in masculine spaces, *and* roles that oscillate between both? This question leads to the core of Whitman's role during the Civil War, for his presence embodied several layers of gendered disruption nestled within one another.

Prior to the Civil War, the majority of nurses were men, as nursing was not so much an occupation but a duty taken up by patients who were unable to afford the price of their treatment (similar to washing dishes at a restaurant to pay for a meal); combat nurses were recuperating soldiers (Wardrop 30). The Civil War's great need for *man*-power on the battlefield resulted in a nursing shift where the job went from a conscripted service to an official role largely filled by women. This transition from mother/wife/sister to nurse worked not only due to a lack of able and available men but due to the period's perceived gendered traits—after all, women were domestic nurses almost exclusively. Prevailing wisdom of the separate spheres ideology and the cult of true womanhood dictated that the "true woman's place was unquestionably by her own fireside—as daughter, sister, but most of all as wife and mother" (Welter 162). When family members became sick, the wife and mother was "expected to dispense comfort" through her "higher qualities of patience, mercy and gentleness" as the household's

nurse (163). While this type of nursing included administering ointments and remedies for a variety of ailments, it focused on providing whatever kind of soothing comfort possible. When the nation needed nurses, women 'naturally' filled the role because of their perceived aptitude at providing care and comfort.[8] By taking on the nurse's job during the Civil War, Whitman created an interestingly gendered enclave in the occupation that was partially a reclamation of an earlier operating model, partially an inversion of prevailing gendered characteristics in nurses, and partially something new entirely, as he had no previous nursing or combat experience.

Whitman's recalibration of gender-based trends was not limited to nursing itself, for, in addition to serving as a nurse, Whitman documented this experience—hence the *Memoranda*. While Civil War journals were by no means taboo for men, the Civil War *nursing* narrative market was dominated by women. Entries in this genre included but were not limited to: *Hospital Sketches* by Louisa May Alcott, *Three Weeks at Gettysburg* by Georgeanna Woolsey, *Notes of Hospital Life* published anonymously, *Nurse and Spy in the Union Army* by Sarah Emma Edmond, *Hospital Pencillings* by Elvira Powers, *Three Years in Field Hospitals of the Army of the Potomac* by Anna Morris Holstein, *In Hospital and Camp* by Sophronia Bucklin, and *Hospital Days* by Jane Stuart Woolsey, all published by 1870 (Wardrop 26). Thus, Whitman was a man occupying the space of a woman (i.e. nursing)

[8] According to Whitman himself, "few or no young ladies…answer the practical requirements of nurses for soldiers. Middle-aged or healthy and good condition'd elderly women, mothers of children, are always best" because "the magnetic touch of hands, the expressive features of the mother, the silent soothing of her presence, her words, her knowledge and privileges arrived at only through having had children, are precious and final qualifications" (*Memoranda* 71).

that was previously that of men prior to the war, performing duties of care associated with mothers in an environment far from the home, while infusing this care with the breadwinner ideology of the father through bestowing gifts and money, and then documenting the experience. [9] Ultimately, Whitman, like Alcott's semi-autobiographical protagonist Tribulation Periwinkle, subverts gender expectations "not by replacing the father with the mother, but by being at once both father and mother, leader and servant" (Smith 189). This amalgamation highlights the artificiality of gendered traits and modes of being into a binary system which, one, offers an entry point into understanding alternative masculinities[10] and, two, highlights how gender does not simply dictate whom or what one must be—or how one must act—even in situations and scenarios that seemingly call for and require an adherence to certain gender stereotypes.

Based on these actions and attributes, Whitman functions as a disruptor of codes. If hegemonic masculinity is "understood as the pattern of practice (i.e., things done, not just a set of role expectations or an identity) that allowed men's dominance over women to continue," (Connell and Messerschmidt 832) an interweaving of the perceived masculine with the perceived feminine is anything but hegemonic. Combine this duality

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[9] While the term "breadwinner" was used to describe an individual "who supports himself and those dependent upon him by his earnings" as early as 1821 ("bread-winner"), the responsible family man's goal during this time was to "fill his station with dignity, and to be useful to his fellow beings" (Greene 43), which is quite difference from the contemporary notion that being a breadwinner somehow absolves an individual of all other caring responsibilities.
[10] According to Aishih Wehbe-Herrera, "alternative masculinities are noncompliant…with hegemonic masculinity ideals, and most importantly, involve a level of gender awareness and profeminist consciousness that influence men's life choices and their self-understanding in more gender-equal terms" (176). The existence of alternative masculinities to a hegemonically dominant norm inherently implies that masculinity is not a monolith, as argued by R.W. Connell in *Masculinities* (1995). Thus, the spectrum of gender has different levels both horizontally and vertically.

with Whitman's impulse to offer and receive tenderness, affection, and vulnerability in the military context, and we can see how he not only disrupts hegemonic norms but offers a true example of how the disruption generates healing and compassion.

Whitman's deviation from traditional or hegemonic masculinity in the wartime context, while seemingly subversive, may not be all that uncommon, though common sense and assumption may presume otherwise. In *Bring Me Men*, Aaron Belkin argues that, despite scholarly insistence that "the achievement of masculine status requires warriors to disavow, and even crush, any unmasculine aspects of themselves," the period between the Spanish-American War and the events of 9/11 demonstrates that "the production of masculine warriors has required those who embody masculinity to enter into intimate relationships with femininity, queerness and other unmasculine foils, not just to disavow them" (4). Even earlier than and in anticipation of Belkin's focus, Whitman is one such force that enabled *and* encouraged Civil War soldiers to embody intimacy, closeness, tenderness, and affection. On one hand, Whitman himself embodies an alternative masculinity in the military context. However, his larger function as a disruptor figure applies to how he actively encouraged what Belkin calls an 'unmasculine' response from the soldiers he cared for during his nursing tenure. In this symbiotic way—both from and towards Whitman—*Memoranda*'s content offers a concrete example of empathetic caring of men, between men in a purportedly hyper-masculinized context that does not allow for such expressions of tenderness.

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Whitman's overall approach and tone in *Memoranda* is a clear departure from *Leaves of Grass* which contributes to its empathetic function. If "Song of Myself" is a celebration of Whitman's self that may also be the reader's self, then *Memoranda* is a song that minimizes the prevalence, influence, and significance of that self.[11] This is quite paradoxical, considering that the text stemmed from Whitman's personal journal. Content-wise, Whitman's earlier stylistic flourishes are largely absent from *Memoranda*, a piece that thrives on understatement and deferred action. Take, for example, the segment titled 'A New York Soldier,' where Whitman writes: "The wound was very bad; discharg'd much. Then the diarrhoea had prostrated him, and I felt that he was even then the same as dying. He behaved very manly and affectionate. The kiss I gave him as I was about leaving he return'd fourfold" (Whitman, *Memoranda* 36). Notwithstanding offering and accepting the kiss, this passage reads much more like Hemingway than Whitman with simple declarative statements and a preference for "very" over more playful adverbs. In his introduction to *Memoranda*, Peter Coviello highlights this passage as a place where Whitman's writing employs "the most studiously reserved and matter-of-fact description" to capture the soldier's suffering (xxxvi). By rendering the soldier's pain in a plain and clear manner, Whitman does not reduce it to a caricature or evoke pity from the reader by portraying a dramatic description of suffering. However, he also refuses to make the passage rhetorically and stylistically complex in a way that would distract the

[11] The 1860 version of "Song of Myself," the last version to be published prior to the Civil War, was simply titled "Walt Whitman," making the 'self' of its later title less-than-ambiguous.

reader from the soldier's agony, which would make the passage more about Whitman's poetic skill rather than the New York Soldier. Here, as he does throughout the *Memoranda*, Whitman allows the facts of the matters at hand speak for themselves—a sort of addition through the subtraction of the stylist. While the *Memoranda* may be Whitman's journal, the way that he presents its contents make it the collective story of others rather than a solitary song.

It is not that Whitman is simply unable to flex his poetic muscle during this time, as if it had been sapped away somehow. One can simply look at his description of Washington at night on Oct. 20 to see some of Whitman's recognizable poetic stylings as found in "Song of Myself," such as word creation through suffixation and multiple layers of repetition, evident here in the "rebukefully strong" image of the Patent Office and "[t]he sky, the planets, the constellations all so bright, so calm, so expressively silent, so soothing after those Hospital scenes" (Whitman, *Memoranda* 47). These techniques, according to James Perrin Warren, contribute to Whitman's "experimental spirit" and "persistent innovation" in his poetry (693)**.** With *Memoranda*, though, the entire situation calls for a different type of representation, and the poetic techniques—or lack thereof—that Whitman employs in *Memoranda* mirror the text's content in their open and empathetic effect. Referring to Whitman as "an observer not typically unobtrusive," Coviello claims that the poet shows restraint throughout *Memoranda*, allowing "the most grisly or horrific" events of the war "to speak for themselves" in a way that "points to a kind of humility…that is for Whitman uncharacteristic enough to be surprising and, at moments, singularly moving" (xxvii). Through this method of representation, Whitman

offers a patchwork that preserves the integrity of the war's horrors and destruction (on both the personal and national level) without softening its impact or drawing attention away from it and towards himself. In this way, the action found in the text complements Whitman's approach to delivering it by exuding deference and empathy rather than bombast and hubris.

Memoranda disrupts other assumptions about Whitman's writing and his poetic enterprise, for the text demonstrates how the lived wartime experience revealed insufficiencies in preconceived notions. Both Peter Coviello and Mark Feldman identify a change in Whitman's poetics as mediated through *Memoranda*'s events, though they reach opposite conclusions about it. According to Coviello's intro, Whitman believed that his poetry "would circulate among the masses of anonymous readers and conjure among them flashes of recognition, tenderness, and affection, instilling a sensation of binding intimacy and far-flung mutual belonging" with a nationality rooted in "the sense of passionate connectedness that…would join together even citizens as dispersed and as disparate as America's" (xv). Whitman referred to this vision himself in the preface to the first edition of *Leaves of Grass* in 1855, calling the "United States themselves…essentially the greatest poem" (iii). Like Percy Bysshe Shelley before him, Whitman claimed that the poet is the true legislator of the people—the "common referee" and the "arbiter of the diverse" (iv). As that poet, Whitman himself would simultaneously absorb and be absorbed by the United States.

Vestiges of this mission can be found throughout his pre-Civil War poetry, such as number 20 of the "Chants Democratic and Native American" found in the 1860

version of *Leaves of Grass*.[12] Whitman highlights the "American mouth-songs" sung by a wide range of laborers, including the mason, boatman, shoemaker, and the young wife (Whitman, *Leaves* 192 [1860]). Each song is different, yet, through the act of singing, each of these individuals shares a bond with the others. The content itself then mirrors his larger goal: using poetry to shape and sharpen the American people that compose the great poem of the United States.

From Coviello's perspective, Whitman's on-the-ground experiences detailed in *Memoranda* also function as extensions of this poetic vision, as he expresses affection, tenderness, and recognition, all while fostering the connection he hoped his poetry would generate. In a sense, he became a living embodiment of the symbolic nation he sought to produce. This is not to imply that the literalization of Whitman's metaphor through his war experience was somehow seamless or without alteration, for the text is fraught with Whitman's "mounting doubts and self-reproaches" in response to the atrocities he witnesses both first and second-hand (Coviello xlvi). Even though Whitman believed in his mission, there were times that he doubted that he "[did] much good" (Whitman *Memoranda* 10). While poetry can be reproduced and distributed easily, there was only one Whitman and thousands of wounded soldiers. While one may be able to form a nation out of the American people through poetry, *Memoranda* is a sobering reminder that such unity has limits.

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[12] This segment was edited and retitled as "I Hear America Singing" in the 1867 version of *Leaves of Grass*.

Feldman, like Coviello, notes that Whitman's poetics "[depend] on the fluid circulation of…linked states and concepts" between text, nation, and body, for "the body is a text and the nation is a body" and "the text is a body and the body is a nation" (4). Through this layered metaphor, Whitman was able to explore the "irreconcilable multitudes" of the "complicated and contradictory" individual body to prompt reflection on the multitudes that combined to form the national body of the United States (3). The Civil War, however, disrupted this fluidity through deforming and mutilating individual bodies which "in turn, de-formed and unsettled the poetic forms and formulas that Whitman had relied on," nullifying "much of the body's metaphoric potential of which Whitman's earlier poetry took such spectacular advantage" (4). In other words, the wounded bodies of soldiers disrupted the smooth analogical interplay between the inherent unity of a body and the unity of a nation. Where Coviello sees the literalization of what were once metaphorical as an extension and validation of metaphor itself, Feldman sees it as an "explicit [sign] that Whitman's democratic poetics was failing him" (Feldman 11). From this perspective, in order for Whitman's poetic vision to continue, he needed to make sense of the war in a new way that registered it as traumatic—on the personal and national levels—which resulted in a more fragmented style in *Memoranda* and, later, *Specimen Days*.

Regardless of whether it stemmed from his poetic vision or demonstrated its failure, the key conclusion to draw is that Whitman's wartime experience resulted in a different form of poetics, making *Memoranda* a "simultaneous deformation, and

painstaking reassembly, of an idea of America" (Coviello xvii).[13] The limits of Whitman's overarching vision for poetry were laid bare due to the tangible reality he experienced in the hospital rooms and hallways he occupied for three years, and it was through this reality that he (re)discovered "the latent character of the American people" through their openness to caring (Davis 423). This particular example of Whitman's position as a poet functions as a synecdoche for how war alters expectations and assumptions for masculinity.

The shift also has wider-reaching implications since the Civil War resulted in a large-scale social transformation after its conclusion. Michael Kimmel highlights three "coincident processes [that] shifted the terrain upon which manhood had been traditionally grounded": increased industrialization, the rapid closing of the frontier, and the proliferation of former slaves, immigrants, and women in the public sphere (53). The first and second of these processes posed problems for two ways of life that could lead to self-worth as a man—namely the artisan and the frontiersman. With the rise of wage labor and the decline of lands to settle, opportunities for self-making diminished. As for the changing face of the public sphere, masculinity could no longer de-facto exclude blacks or immigrants.[14] While any one of these processes could destabilize interpretations

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[13] According to James Perrin Warren, scholars have long recognized the Civil War as a turning point in Whitman's poetic style as well, with the "idea that there is stylistic and thematic continuity between the poems of 1855-1865 and those of Whitman's last twenty-seven years [remaining] a minority view throughout the twentieth century" (695). However, Warren cautions that the lack of stylistic continuity should not automatically receive a value judgment of inferiority, a point that I think is well taken.

[14] There are many parallels regarding race/ethnicity and masculinity following the Civil War and similar struggles after WWII. When masculinity is "solidified and defined in relation to…racialized 'others,'" the emergence of these others into the public sphere reveals white masculinity's "insecurities" (Jarvis 155). These insecurities, in both post-war cases, resulted in racial backlash and violence that attempted to control, contain, and limit the expansion of manhood's 'legitimacy' to other races/ethnicities through Jim Crow laws.

of masculinity, the combination of all three resulted in "the meanings of manhood [becoming] once again uncertain" (53). Just as Whitman had to reinterpret his poetic vision after the war because its foundation was no longer secure, the Civil War threw American culture's sense of what it means to be a real man into flux by simultaneously adding and eliminating players, possibilities, and opportunities for manhood. Additionally, the symbolic defeat of the Southern patriarch of old at the hands of the Northern industrialist ensured that American men of the second half of the nineteenth century "would ground their identities in the shifting sands of the marketplace" (52). By no means were the attainment or expression of manhood somehow simple or guaranteed prior to the Civil War. However, the conflict reconfigured the seemingly 'traditional' grounds for masculine expression. Far from somehow 'solving' the question of masculinity, the Civil War complicated it, rendering the preconceived notions of masculinity (warrior or otherwise) uncertain.

In *Memoranda*, Whitman offers readers the vocabulary to articulate this destabilization of masculinity through a warrior ethos. In the first of about a dozen notes, Whitman confesses the following: "As I have look'd over the proof-sheets of the preceding Memoranda, I have once or twice fear'd that my little tract would prove, at best, but a batch of convulsively written reminiscences. […] The War itself with the temper of society preceding it, can indeed be best described by that very word, *Convulsiveness*" (Whitman, *Memoranda* 105). Mark Feldman highlights the significance of Whitman's own emphasis on convulsiveness by viewing it as a central theme to the *Memoranda* as a whole. He notes that while the word is often used metaphorically to

describe political unrest, “the word itself contains contradictory and divisive ideas. The prefix *con*- means together, while the Latin verb *vellare* means to pull or tear. For Whitman the war had this contradictory double valence of pulling the nation apart and bringing it together into a more lasting union based on adhesiveness” (Feldman 1-2). Adhesiveness here seems to contain its own duality in definition, meaning a quality of stickiness (i.e. a joining together) and tendency to remain in memory (i.e. the trauma of war encouraging a lasting union to avoid a future repeat). According to Feldman, Whitman attempted to preserve this overall interpretation of the War in his writing of the *Memoranda*, crafting a text that accurately captured it but purposefully did not aestheticize it, romanticize it, or spectacularize it. The double valence of convulsiveness also applies to masculinity in wartime, for wartime’s engendering of masculinity is convulsive in that it promises and encourages traditional masculine characteristics and pursuits (the *con*- prefix) before revealing their falsities and limits (the *vellare*) that then exposes their insufficiencies and encourages an alternative.

Wartime offers both a promise of attaining or proving traditional masculinity while also encouraging it. From a common sense standpoint, it seems logical that the nation would operate in this manner. For one, war is violent, and it inspires a pugnacious attitude to assure victory. Secondly, America goes to war against enemies that are painted as an ultimate evil. Take the following sentence: the enemy hates us, our way of life, democracy as we know it, and seeks to impose tyranny. That sentence describes the justification for every modern war in American history. Of course, each war has much more nuance, but, when the nation needs soldiers, a mobilized home front, and

widespread support, these nuances fade away because they complicate the more persuasive narrative that pits good versus evil. When your opponent is purely evil, entering war with a focus on care, as opposed to a focus on victory, would be foolish.[15] However, soldiers witness firsthand the faults, gaps, and weaknesses in the warrior ethos. With *Memoranda During the War* as one example, traditional masculinity often dies in war, as its promise is a lie; toughness and strength do not guarantee safety. Humans are not impenetrable; masculinity is not a shield.[16] Additionally, though, humans need love, care, and affection. Military training ostensibly conditions individuals to ignore these impulses in the name of duty and following orders, but they can only be ignored or suppressed for so long.[17] When the stakes shift and a wounded soldier no longer needs to embrace traditional masculinity—for, to whom must one perform gender on his deathbed? —its artificiality becomes that much more apparent. This breaking point, the point where one realizes that traditional masculinity is not some sort of panacea or protective fortress, is what allows a caring masculinity to emerge. Of course, this break does not always happen at a specific moment or even at all for some servicemembers. However, for those who are wounded and have the realization that a warrior masculinity is less a promise and more a rhetorical construction, an alternative can, and often does, emerge.

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[15] Of course, this is not to diminish the care work that American servicemembers have and continue to perform in warzones. However, in war declaration rhetoric, the impetus to vanquish the enemy outweighs any impulse to care.
[16] See "March 27, 1865—A Yankee Antique" in *Memoranda*.
[17] John Fox and Bob Pease argue that "military training, culture and practices are said to exaggerate certain masculine features…change the balance of identity and 'make a man'…[by] stripping away of aspects of other relationships comprising identity and intensifying the influence of ideas of masculinity" (21). I think this description conveys my point here nicely.

2.3 Life After Wartime: Veterans, Post-Traumatic Stress, and the Framing of Care

> "…even if life does eventually return to some semblance of normality,
> it will not be the same normal as the one…experienced before…."
> — Slavoj Žižek

If war throughout the 19th, 20th, and 21st centuries continues to mobilize traditional masculinity as a necessity for participation, where does that leave soldiers who require care but cannot reconcile it with the warrior ethos that they embodied in their service? To explore this issue about masculinity and the necessity of care-receiving, I want to focus on the individuals who ostensibly need it most—those returning home with PTSD or other types of combat related mental distress. While the term "Post-traumatic stress disorder" was not an officially recognized term until its initial publication in the third edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* in 1980 (236), its symptoms are far from new.

Whitman himself highlighted the insidious intrusions of combat recollections on the veteran. In the 1865 version of *Drum-Taps*, Whitman included the relatively short poem titled "The Veteran's Vision."[18] The speaker begins by sketching the domestic scene where he finds himself, with his "wife at [his] side slumbering," his infant child sleeping not far away, and the war "long over" (Whitman, "Veteran's" 55). As he "wake[s] from sleep," the veteran is overtaken by an intense flashback. This vision

[18] "The Veteran's Vision" was added to the 1867 version of *Leaves of Grass*. Subsequently, it was retitled "The Artilleryman's Vision" and included in the "Drum-Taps" cluster of future versions of *Leaves*. Edits to the poem after its initial publication were minor.

commands his senses as he "hear[s] the sounds of the different missiles," "see[s] the shells exploding," and "breathe[s] the suffocating smoke" all while witnessing cannon fire, rifle shots, cavalry charges, and chaos erupting around him (55). Despite a "devilish exultation" that the veteran feels in response to the cannon fire, the vision is not sterilized or romanticized, as he sees "[t]he falling, dying" and "the wounded, dripping/and red" (56). The poem ends not with the veteran snapping out of his vision and back to the peace and comfort of his domestic life but with the veteran still inside of this flashback that "[pressed] upon [him]," leaving his fate ambiguous (55). Thus, as explored by Whitman in 1865, the conclusion of combat does not result in a return to normalcy—in any sense—for the now-veteran.

Saying that PTSD in veterans is an issue of masculinity would reduce a serious affliction to a matter debated by academics far removed from its daily trials. However, a growing body of research has linked PTSD in veterans to attitudes towards traditional masculinity that are intensified by the military. While masculinity may not cause PTSD, its manifestations hinder individuals from seeking a diagnosis and receiving help. In 2014, Matthew Jakupcak et al. published a study linking emotional toughness to PTSD in veterans, defining toughness through responses to questions about how soldiers ought to express or refrain from expressing their problems and fears. The authors found that "greater endorsement of emotional toughness was associated with increased likelihood for a positive screen for PTSD and depression; for each 1-SD increase in toughness,

veterans were nearly 3 times more likely to screen positive for PTSD" (102).[19] While these findings are alarming, the study also found that the veterans who suffer from PTSD symptoms but believe in higher levels of emotional toughness "may be especially avoidant of" therapy that includes discussing events that involve feelings of vulnerability, helplessness, or fear (103).[20]

Rebecca Blais and Matthew Jakupcak (both of whom were authors of this study about toughness and PTSD) contributed to another study in 2014 about PTSD in the military and anticipated enacted stigma (AES), defined as "an individual's belief that others will react in a hostile or discriminatory manner if they seek help for psychological distress" (Blais et al. 116). In this study, the authors found that "higher PTSD symptoms [such as emotional numbing and interpersonal detachment]…are negatively associated with the likelihood of seeking support," which means that "distressed service members who may most benefit from support are least likely to seek support" (118). Additionally, "[h]igher AES was associated with lower likelihood of support seeking" (118).[21]

Finally, a study by Heath et al. in 2017 looked at the relation between restrictive emotionality (RE)—defined by J.M. O'Neil as "restrictions and fears about expressing one's feelings" (qtd. in Heath et al. 193)—and military servicemen who experience

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[19] This is not to say that a belief in emotional toughness causes PTSD. Rather, emotional toughness can "exacerbate emotional distress and delay treatment-seeking for mental health concerns" (Jakupcak et. al 100).
[20] The authors surmise that men who endorse "traditional male gender ideologies may be drawn to military service, in which endorsement of emotional toughness is further reinforced" (Jakupcak et al. 100). Thus, the cycle of PTSD in veterans may be self-perpetuating.
[21] Similar to the previous article, this one notes that "AES may be related to military culture or male gender norms that equate vulnerability or support seeking with weakness" (Blais et al. 118).

mental health concerns. With the hypothesis that a combination of masculinity and military culture (both of which promote RE) in a high-distress environment may create a "perfect storm" for help-seeking stigma (194)[22], the authors found that "both RE and distress were uniquely associated with higher levels of [help-seeking] stigma in this sample of men who have served in the military. Thus, military men who may be in need of services may also be the most likely to experience stigma associated with seeking mental health service" (195).

The combined findings from these three studies convey the notion that vets who endorse emotional toughness are more likely to screen positive for PTSD, and those who have a higher anticipated stigma of suffering from PTSD have a lower likelihood of seeking support. [23] An even greater resistance to seeking support is found in individuals who fear expressing their emotions. All three articles note that the traits and attitudes that negatively contribute to PTSD in veterans (toughness, AES, and RE) are prevalent in normative versions of masculinity in the populace as a whole. The toughness endorsed and promoted by the military exacerbates PTSD symptoms, while the hesitancies to express emotions and vulnerabilities associated with traditional forms of masculinity and bolstered by the combat environment hamper these individuals from seeking

[22] In a study by Vogel and Heath (both of whom are authors of this article) from 2016, it was determined that help-seeking stigma "is considered an important barrier for…men" to reaching out to mental health services (Heath et al. 193). Thus, men in general already experience a greater level of help-seeking stigma independent of the military environment.

[23] For additional studies that identify barriers to mental health care in the military, see Hom et al. "A systematic review of help-seeking and mental health service utilization among military service members" (2017). The authors identify 57 studies written between 2004 and 2015 that "[examine] barriers to help-seeking and mental health service use among military service members (62).

support. Indeed, the military creates the perfect storm for individuals not only to develop PTSD but to keep their struggles to themselves.

As bleak as this sounds, some scholars and researchers have offered suggestions based on these and similar findings to make therapy for combat related mental afflictions more palatable for suffering veterans. These suggestions favor changing perception rather than changing the process, altering the attitudes rather than altering the therapy itself. For example, Blais et al. advocate "[c]ampaigns promoting access to mental health care" that address "service members' perceptions that people will react negatively to them if they seek help," such as the slogan that "It takes the strength and courage of a warrior to ask for help" (118). Shields et al. further this argument by claiming that "veterans who experience lingering effects of trauma or other mental health challenges may begin to narrate their symptoms and any mental health diagnosis as 'failure' or weakness—a fall from masculine grace" (217). Through an examination of 15 veterans' narratives about their engagements with mental health treatment post-deployment, the authors of this study found four common themes relating to masculinity, including a sense of personal failure associated with a mental health diagnosis, a desire for a sense of belonging in a community, a reframing of emotion into suitable masculine terms, and a redefinition of care as active rather than passive (219-222). Based on these themes, the authors claim that the large-scale hesitancy in veterans to seek care for their mental afflictions is rooted in notions of how men should act rather

than an aversion to the therapy itself. With these themes and the underlying conclusion in mind, the authors offer three suggestions: altering language to make care more "culturally appropriate" for the warrior ethos, recasting therapy as "proof of compliance" to military masculinity, and denoting participants as active rather than "passive recipient[s] of care" (223). Through these suggestions, the authors of this study believe that veterans will both find the help they need and will be more willing to seek it.

Well before PTSD was a defined and named condition, Ernest Hemingway dramatized the experience in a way that reveals some flaws in the recommendations offered by these contemporary studies. For the most part, Hemingway's *In Our Time* (1925) focuses on the life of Nick Adams from childhood to his military service in WWI, culminating with his process of making peace with his war experiences in "Big Two-Hearted River." As part of the "our" in *In Our Time*, "Soldier's Home" breaks away from the Adams saga, offering a protagonist in Harold Krebs who faces the same problem with returning to civilian life but from a different perspective with different results. Instead of finding catharsis, Krebs is ignored. He "came back much too late" for the people in his Kansas home to care about his return (Hemingway, *In Our* 69). Once Krebs "felt the need to talk" about his war experiences, "no one wanted to hear about it," including his parents (69). His mother's "attention always wandered" when she asked him to tell her about the war, and his father "was noncommittal" (70). Instead of

listening to their son, Krebs's parents believe that the best thing for him is to have "a definite aim in life" by getting married and starting a career like Charley Simmons (75). Through this belief, they appeal to a normative masculinity as a way to assuage Harold's wartime baggage; they transform the care-receiving process into a masculinity-affirming process as recommended by Blais and Duncan.

Through this setup, the text poses and explores three problems regarding achieving catharsis only through an adherence to traditional masculinity. First is that, for Krebs to achieve such an ideal at home, he must occupy a paradoxical space that requires childlike behavior. If he wants to go out in the evenings to meet young women, he needs his father's permission to use the family car. At the breakfast table, his mother talks to him like a child, reminding her "dear boy" (75) not to "muss up the paper" before his father gets a chance to read it (73). When she gets upset, Krebs refers to her as "Mummy" and says he will "try and be a good boy for [her]" (76). Essentially, Krebs must embrace infantilization to arrive at the form of manhood his parents seek. While scholars like Milton Cohen would argue that this paradox demonstrates the "lies…[and] game-playing rituals" endemic to Krebs's hometown—in contrast to the "remarkably 'positive'" and "uncomplicated" masculine pursuits afforded to Krebs by his combat experience (163)—the contradictions and mixed messages of masculinity are far from a civilian-exclusive issue for Krebs. He wrestled with them during his time overseas when he and his fellow soldiers oscillated between boasting about constantly needing a

woman and claiming, "girls mean nothing" (Hemingway, *In Our* 71).[24] This contradiction begs the question about which is the more masculine position: needing a girl (signaling virility but also dependence on another) or not thinking about girls ever (signaling an independent stoicism but also an implied asexuality or homosexuality). Both at home and in the military, then, the path to being a real man remains murky and paradoxical.

The second problem the story explores is how advocating a normative masculinity enables it to continue unchallenged. Krebs enjoys the solitude of reading and the dark of the pool hall—both of which point to a more private and contemplative life than that of the husband/careerman. Since this lifestyle deviates from the expected masculinity of young men in this town, Krebs's parents attempt to force him to 'become a man' through a process that can only be considered a distortion of care.[25] Mr. and Mrs. Krebs never attempt to understand their son's needs, for they continue to advocate a lifestyle for him that he is incapable of handling at the moment. Similarly, regarding the question of needing girls in the army, Krebs claims that "you did not have to think about it" because when you really needed a girl, you simply got one (72). In effect, any interrogation of what *actually* makes one a 'real man' is stifled because the decision-

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[24] In *Bring Me Men*, Aaron Belkin makes a convincing argument that military masculinity, in both its formation and practice, is full of contradictions, mixed messages, and seemingly incompatible dualities, ultimately claiming that "the ideal of American military masculinity is premised on a simultaneous renunciation and embrace of the unmasculine" (33).

[25] According to Nel Noddings, "Whatever the one-caring actually does is enhanced or diminished, made meaningful or meaningless, in the attitude conveyed to the cared-for" (61). Other care theorists like Joan Tronto take issue with this argument about care being a dyad but recognize that care, at its core, is about relationships.

making process lies beyond the soldier and in the hands of the army itself to determine what is normal— just like how Mr. and Mrs. Krebs determine that a job and a girlfriend are the best things for their son. Rather than interrogate this form of masculinity, using it as part of the healing process simply assumes that it is somehow natural as opposed to constructed and, perhaps, flawed.

Finally, Krebs's eventual fate demonstrates the consequences of hinging post-combat decompression on masculinity. Psychological recommendations assume that altering care to comply with the warrior ethos makes it palatable. What happens if that masculinity is questioned? In the story, Krebs does not simply accept the norms of masculinity that his parents, peers, and town advocate. Both his time in the army and his time at home as a veteran demonstrate for Krebs how masculinity is fraught with contradictions and no easy answers.[26] For someone who tries to "keep his life from being complicated" Krebs's understanding of manhood only gets more muddled as he is pushed to embrace it (76). Unable to reconcile masculinity and care, Krebs's only option is to flee, for the supposed solution simply breeds further confusion. Thus, if the 'acceptable' conduit for care is a questionable masculinity, a rejection of that masculinity risks an ensuing rejection of care.

Writing in a post-PTSD-defined world, George Saunders and Toni Morrison both take Hemingway's recognition of this disconnect one step further by acknowledging the

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[26] One of the story's most common motifs is the practice of lying. The construction of 'true' masculinity may be another lie present.

failure of the warrior ethos in relation to care and then proposing a solution that runs counter to the psychologists' recommendation to recast care to fit this worldview. Instead of enabling the warrior ethos by adjusting veteran care, this alternative solution interrogates military masculinity itself, positing that it is the component requiring change. In each text, the association between care-receiving and femininity, childhood, weakness, and the like exacerbates the anxiety to receive care. Only when each story's protagonist recognizes the lies of the warrior ethos and moves past them can he begin to progress towards healing. In these cases, recalibrating masculinity enables care which, in turn, can enable healing.

2.3.1 You Sent Me, Now Bring Me Back

In "Home," George Saunders pits recently returned veteran Mike against a society that does not endorse or praise the warrior ethos, personal demons of memories of his actions during deployment in the Middle East, and his own combat induced mental distress.[27] The plot consists of a string of episodes where Mike and his interpretation of masculinity are rendered impotent, culminating in Mike's recognition that he needs help and needs to change. While Mike's unmanning at home is explicit through his encounters with his family, the text implies that the warrior ethos failed

[27] "Home" was originally published in *The New Yorker* in 2011. It was later released in Saunders's *Tenth of December* collection in 2013. All citations here are in reference to the latter publication.

Mike overseas as well, demonstrating that this version of masculinity contributed to his mental distress and is a problem rather than a solution.

Part of Mike's conflict upon his return home is how he is disregarded by those who do not want to deal with him. The text employs repetition to great effect, and one of the most overt repetitions is the phrase "Thank you for your service." Mike's mother's landlord (Saunders 180, 181), employees at an electronics store (184), the sheriff (189), and his brother-in law Ryan's father (194) all thank Mike for his service. However, rather than coming off as a sincere expression of gratitude for the horrors and suffering Mike endured, "the thanks comes across as shallow, disconnected," and patronizing (Richtel). None of the individuals who thank Mike for his service show any interest in either him or his experiences; they simply use the phrase to address them and disregard them. Denied a voice, Mike symbolically embodies the childhood that he lived prior to serving in the military—the childhood in the same town, house, and circumstances he returns to after the war.[28]

In addition to being disregarded by those he encounters, Mike realizes that he has been unmanned quite literally, as a new man has replaced him in all his relationships. Harris, his mother's latest boyfriend, continuously inserts himself into

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[28] The text specifically points to masculinity, femininity, and childhood through Harris and Mike's mother's conversation about Renee's baby. Harris, in a whirl, is not sure if the child is a boy or a girl. Harris cites the child's name (Martney), its green outfit, its elfish appearance, and their gift of a toy boat as too ambiguous to denote its gender (Saunders 174). This episode points to the association between gender expression and infantilization as well as an underlying need to have conclusive evidence of one's gender through certain characteristics. Both connect back to Mike who seeks to demonstrate his masculinity through dominance and toughness but suffers from infantilization at home.

Mike's life as if he were a source of authority and wisdom. When Mike first returns home, Harris asks Mike's mother "How long's he staying?" as if Mike's presence both intrudes upon his property and Mike himself is incapable of answering (Saunders 171). Multiple times, Harris asks Mike about "the worst thing [he] ever did" while serving because telling him about it would be "[g]ood for the soul" (191). Far from serving as a confidant, Harris functions as both a replacement father figure and an obstacle between Mike and his mother. Mike's most agonizing example of emasculation through dispossession, though, is his now ex-wife Joy and her new husband Evan, whose relationship developed while Mike was overseas. Evan has literally replaced Mike as the man of the house, preventing Mike from entering to visit his two children and now ex-wife. Though Mike served as a protector and provider prior to deployment, his return finds him as a son without a father, a husband without a wife, and a father without children.

Mike's version of masculinity—the more traditional, tough, military masculinity—seems to suffer the same displacement that Mike does. In some instances, this traditional masculinity has been rendered powerless, such as the scene where Mike attempts to intimidate his mother's landlord into letting her stay in the house through physical force; the landlord simply calls the sheriff and a moving company. Elsewhere in the text, a New Age masculinity replaces any trace of traditional or military masculinity, such as the electronics store that features male employees bringing shoppers espresso

and cookies as they browse (184). Mike's description of his encounter with Evan, though, epitomizes the combination of traditional masculinity's displacement and neutering. When Evan tells Mike how difficult it was for him and Joy to acknowledge their feelings for each other while also acknowledging that Joy's then-current husband was serving in the military, Mike starts to feel "like a chump" (187). He equates it to "being held down by a bunch of guys so another guy could come over and put his New Age fist up [his] ass while explaining that having his fist up [Mike's] ass was far from his first choice and was actually making him feel conflicted" (187).[29] In this situation, Evan renders Mike completely vulnerable and powerless by expressing his emotions and avoiding confrontation. Mike, the tough, violent veteran, has no response. He simply takes Evan's verbal fisting and leaves. If hegemonic masculinity's hierarchy of different masculinities is to be believed, this story depicts a world where, back home, a sensitive version subordinates military manhood.

Though the world and relationships Mike returns to after his service consistently disarm the warrior ethos by resisting the toughness and dominance Mike attempts to impose, it is not the first time that this version of masculinity has failed him. Recalling a pond cleaning job he performed in high school, Mike relays that each time he brought his rake to the gunk, he ripped open the swollen bellies of dozens of tadpoles. When he

[29] Interestingly, penetration and cleanliness, both of Belkin's chief examples of the military's mixed messages about masculinity in *Bring Me Men*, are all over this text. In addition to Mike feeling like Evan sticks his New Age fist up his ass in this scene, Mike's mother refers to her cursing habit as being a "potty mouth" multiple times (170). In reference to leaving Mike's mom, Harris says that "Alberto showed his ass" (170). Mike surmises that, as his children grow up with their mother and Evan, he will "[skulk] around like some unclean suspect uncle" (188).

tried to save them, he realized that doing so only "torture[d] them worse," yet he persisted because the only way to rationalize the unintended carnage "was to keep doing it, over and over" (200). He concludes his recollection and analysis by claiming "Years later, at Al-Raz, it was a familiar feeling" (200). While Mike's dubious actions at Al-Raz that haunt his return home are never explicitly revealed, they lie in the space between the two poles of being a warrior: protecting those entrusted to you and destroying those opposed. Evidently, Mike initially sought to protect at Al-Raz, but this protection turned into violence that he normalized to himself by refusing to stop.

As a man and as a warrior, Mike consistently experiences mixed messages that leave him in a liminal space between how men should act and how far is too far. The fineness of the line is only emphasized by the military as a whole, as Mike both receives a Silver Star and is court-martialed for his battlefield actions.[30] Further complicating things is how, despite the court-martial, Mike is "cleared…of that [charge]" (191). Like Krebs, Mike's understanding of masculinity is less of an anchor that he can grab ahold of in times of uncertainty and more of a confounding presence.

The story's conclusion indicates that this confounding presence of warrior masculinity is precisely what Mike needs to part with to address his struggles. As much as Mike wants to find fault in the New Age man, it proves difficult for him. Ryan is not a

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[30] According to the U.S. Department of Defense, Silver Stars are awarded for "gallantry in action" either "against an enemy of the United States" or "in military operations involving conflict with an opposing foreign force" ("Description of Medals").

hitter like his mother initially believes but an active, present, and sensitive father. Evan is not quite a "selfish-dick" (187), but a man who expresses his emotions and tries to mitigate conflict. Perhaps due to the influence of these other characters who are not as bad as Mike initially assumes or perhaps because Mike's life experiences have not quite brought him to a point of no return, he has a revelation in the story's closing paragraphs. Seemingly at a breaking point, Mike returns to Evan and Joy's house intending to make them and his two children "be sorry for what had happened to [him]" (201). When he sees that his mother, sister, Harris, Ryan, and Ryan's parents are there as well, "the coming disaster [expands] to include the deaths of all present" (201). However, something "[softens] in [him]" when he sees how weak his mother looks (201). Upon witnessing her vulnerability, Mike's mindset changes from murderous rage to docility, and he recognizes that he needs these people; these "nutty fuckers" are his only chance to be brought back from the edge he nearly falls from (201). He realizes that he cannot heal on his own, and tenacity, dominance, and destruction will not solve anything.

Mike's seemingly abrupt change of heart at the end of the story is an epiphany, not a surrender. Recognizing his own caring impulse towards his mother, Mike creates a dichotomy between violence/dominance/power and care; the two impulses are juxtaposed with one another rather than synthesized in some sort of shoehorned fashion. For the first time, Mike resists embodying the 'tough-guy,' and, in doing so, sees its incompatibility with the path forward towards making peace with his haunting

wartime experience. It is hard to imagine Mike becoming like Ryan or Evan, but it is not hard to imagine him shifting his hardline stance on masculinity in favor of relationality and openness—for both his own sake and that of those around him. Mike's future may be ambiguous, but this culminating moment where he recognizes care as necessary offers the possibility for growth and healing.

2.3.2 Here Stands A Man

Where Saunders's "Home" culminates with a recognition that the warrior ethos needs to change to accept relational forms of care rather than reject them, Toni Morrison's *Home* illustrates a complete journey from that ethos steeped in traditional masculinity to a caring alternative in its depiction of protagonist Frank "Smart" Money's journey back to his hometown of Lotus, Georgia.[31] Like "Soldier's Home" and "Home," *Home* is a story where the returned veteran must reckon with the empty promises of traditional masculinity. Unlike these other texts, though, trauma around masculinity is much more important to Frank's growth, leading him to find and embrace a suitable form of care and a suitable interpretation of manhood.

The novella opens with Frank recalling a scene from his childhood where he and his sister Cee sneak into a fenced off field to watch several horses fighting with one another. As Frank repeats several times, the horses stick out in his memory for how they "stood like men," noting his awe at their beauty and brutality (Morrison 3). As Frank

[31] Published in 2012 and set during the 1950s, *Home* functions as a bridge between "Soldier's Home" (published and set in post-WWI America) and "Home" (published and set in contemporary America).

and his sister begin to leave, they observe a group of white men pick up a dead black body from a wheelbarrow, throw it into a ditch, and hastily bury it. From the outset, the novel links masculinity and trauma for Frank. On a basic level, the fighting horses *stood* like men when they reared back on their hind legs. However, they stood like *men* because of their strength and power. The simile implies that, even at a young age, Frank has a notion of what makes a man: authority, strength, brutality, dominance. The proximity of these two events seems to have a lasting impression; the "deep black" horse is the victor in the conflict with the rust-colored horse (4), but the black man, disgraced by the jabs of the spades pushing him into the ground, lacks any sort of power. While Frank does not know anything about the dead man at this point, the juxtaposition of the dead black man with the awesome, victorious black horse implies that survival, when it comes to blackness, requires traditional masculine strength.

It is worth noting that Frank's impression of masculinity does allow for a type of care from the very beginning. He believes that he must fill the role of protector for his sister, which he attempts to do as they both lie in the grass hiding from the group of men. Frank seeks to fill this role for Cee throughout the text from childhood (attacking the pervert watching her play baseball, teaching her which berries are poisonous, saving her from their grandmother Lenore's wrath) to adulthood (rescuing her from Dr. Beau). While protection-as-care is not an illegitimate form of care work, Joan Tronto argues that men often benefit from a "protection pass" (72) that seemingly absolves them of any

other caring duties that are interpreted as "more feminized" (79). Protection is "presumed to be individualistic" which detracts from relationality's importance to care work (94). Essentially, the protector role allows an individual to look out for another's best interest one-dimensionally without a reciprocal recognition of the other. When this type of care is yoked to masculinity, it reinforces notions of strength, toughness, and dominance, all of which deny empathy and openness.

The other set of traumas that affect Frank throughout the text occur during his military service in Korea, but, instead of shaping or reenforcing his interpretation of masculinity, these traumas interrogate it. The first two of these events revealed to readers are the deaths of Mike Durham and Abraham "Stuff" Stone, Frank's 'homeboys' from Lotus who also served in Korea. Frank's belief in the masculine protector role fails him in both of these cases. For Mike, Frank "fought off the birds" that sought to attack his wounded friend and "held on to him, talked to him for an hour" to keep him awake (103); regardless, "he died anyway" (103). For Stuff, Frank retrieved his severed arm blown off by enemy explosives and "stanched the blood" oozing from the remaining stump, but, like Mike, "[h]e died anyway" (103). Despite his best efforts, being the protector—the only type of man that Frank knows how to be—is not enough to save his homeboys.[32]

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[32] Clearly, Frank cares deeply for Mike and Stuff, and their deaths should not be construed as some sort of failure to care. Rather, the effects of their deaths on Frank and his eventual journey to come to peace with his war experiences emphasize that the problem with the warrior ethos is not an absence of care but a rejection of all forms of vulnerability.

The third traumatic event that Frank experiences in Korea happens first chronologically, but Frank's shame causes him to lie about it to the narrator. Initially, Frank relays a story of a young girl who often scavenged for scraps near his post. He claims that one day, as his relief guard approached her, she touched his crotch and said something that sounded like "Yum-yum" (95). Horrified and possibly tempted, the guard shoots and kills her. Later, in a first-person account of his memory to the narrator, Frank comes clean. He admits, "*I shot the Korean girl in her face. I am the one she touched*" (133). In his confession, Frank also admits a crisis of masculinity prompted by his actions, questioning "*How could I let her live after she took me down to a place I didn't know was in me? How could I like myself, even be myself if I surrendered to that place where I unzip my fly and let her taste me right then and there?* […] *What type of man is that?*" (134).[33] Just like his repression of the dead body in the novella's opening scene, Frank tries to dissociate himself from this memory and distract himself from having to face the truth of his actions. He admits that he emphasizes his grief about his friends' deaths as part of a coping mechanism to mask his shame for this incident but doing so does not provide him any solace.

These three events in Korea instill an uncertainty in Frank regarding his interpretation of masculinity, for it fails him in these trying moments when it is put to

[33] While it is difficult to tell exactly when Frank speaks to the narrator in relation to the action occurring in the third-person sections, in the novella's organization Frank's confession takes place in the chapter immediately following Cee's recovery and immediately preceding his inquiry into the burial he witnessed as a child.

the test. Just as significant in each case, though, is Frank's loss of control. With the deaths of his friends, no amount of protection or assistance can save their lives. With the young girl, his immediate instinct is to shoot her to snuff out temptation instead of restraining himself. According to John Fox and Bob Pease, trauma directly affects one's sense of masculinity precisely because it impacts one's sense of control. Initially, Frank spirals downward into alcoholism, recklessness, and a desire to reclaim his masculinity by rescuing Cee from Dr. Beau. However, Fox and Pease also argue that "[t]he experience of trauma is the regaining of this human wisdom of confronting the illusions of comprehensive mastery and of traditional masculinities" (28). If one can recognize that trauma as a loss of control exposes a "failure in the model of manhood, and not in the man" (29), then that individual can use past traumatic experiences as points of growth and understanding. In *Home*, Frank mirrors this process. His journey throughout the text is about coming to peace with his past which ensues from his reinterpretation of masculinity and what it means to be a man.

Unlike Krebs or Mike, this journey to an alternative conception of manhood for Frank has an additional layer due to his status as a black man in 1950s America, for the traditional masculinity he endorses is, at its core, a "hegemonic white view of masculinity" (Harack 380). Throughout Frank's journey, his race impinges his ability to fully participate in American society and causes multiple roadblocks on his trip to Georgia including being placed in a mental asylum and getting patted down by police

officers. As Reverend John Locke tells Frank, even though Jim Crow is over, "[c]ustom is just as real as law and can be just as dangerous" (Morrison 19). Part of these dangers are internal as well, for Frank's status as a "traumatized black veteran is the epitome of the already fragmented black individual" (Ramírez 137). Part of Frank's quest, then, is to reach the wholeness of community that has the power to repair the fragmented self and reject the "model of rampant individualism" associated with the "white, hegemonic, male ideologies of progress" (Harack 372). These struggles highlight Frank's quest not just to understand what it means to be a man but what it means to be a black man.[34]

As a counter to the prejudice he faces, a consistent refrain on Frank's cross-country odyssey is the willingness of those whom he encounters to offer their assistance. In fact, "the sustenance and solidarity" of individuals with whom he has no prior relation prove invaluable to his otherwise "impossible" task of travelling from Seattle to Georgia (Ibarrola 115). From Jean Locke's sandwiches to Reverend Maynard's list of rooming houses and hotels in Chicago that will not reject a black man to Billy Watson's gifts of clothes and a place to stay, Frank witnesses the compassion of care and experiences the role of care-receiver. Just as significant as these caring acts are Frank's own opportunities to deviate from the role of violent protector. If opening himself to receive care is Frank's first step to changing his views of masculinity, his nonviolent

[34] For more on this racial quest, see Cucarella-Ramon, "Any Man's Blues': Expsing the Crisis of African-American Masculinity in the Delusion of a Post-Racial United States in Toni Morrison's *Home*" (2017) and Harack, "Shifting Masculinities and Evolving Feminine Power: Progressive Gender Roles in Toni Morrison's *Home*" (2016).

interaction with Dr. Beau—who is guilty of performing eugenics experiments that bring Cee to the brink of death—functions as his second step. While "[t]houghts of violence…[rush] through Frank" (Morrison 109) as he prepares himself to retrieve Cee, he confronts the doctor with a "quiet, even serene, face" (111). With the help of Sarah, Cee's coworker and friend, Frank simply scoops up his sister with "[n]o violence. No harm" to anyone (112). Reflecting on the relative ease with which he accomplished his task, Frank feels that "not having to beat up the enemy to get what he wanted was somehow superior—sort of, well, smart" (114). While he still functions as the protector in Cee's rescue, the nonviolence of the situation is not lost on Frank as a completely valid way to operate.

Upon his arrival in Lotus with the severely wounded Cee, Frank experiences a type of care that runs completely counter to his belief in protection. Led by Ethel Fordham, the women of Lotus take Cee away from Frank and into their guardianship. Frank is excluded from the recovery process because the women "[believe] his maleness would worsen her condition" (119). Frank's only understanding of care is to protect others from harm. Yet, to recover from Dr. Beau's torture, Cee needs the care of "country women who loved mean" (121). This tough love begins by disregarding sympathy and "[handling] sickness as though it were an affront" (121). As her wounds begin to heal, Cee is reintegrated into the community of women through embroidering and quilting. Finally, she is privy to "the demanding love of Ethel Fordham" which strengthens her to

as full of a recovery as possible (125). This three-step process of poignant action, community building, and love upends Franks entire understanding of what it means to care for another. Despite Cee's permanent infertility due to the doctor's experiments, the country women save her life because they understand that protective care is not helpful in this situation. Cee's recovery as well as her newfound strength and self-assuredness due to the process prompt Frank to recalibrate his belief in the possibilities of care.

The culminating moment of Frank's inner journey is a marriage of masculinity and care proper that simultaneously allows him to make peace with a past trauma while also providing him the opportunity to move forward and heal from his war experiences. After over a decade of repressing his memory, Frank inquires about the burial he and his sister witnessed as children. The men of Lotus reveal that the building on the farm held "men-treated-like-dog fights"— one-on-one battles to the death for sport (138). According to Fish Eye Anderson, ten to fifteen years prior, a boy named Jerome came to Lotus after being forced to fight his own father with a switchblade in one such deathmatch where "[o]ne of them had to die or they both would [be killed]" (138). While Jerome initially refused to strike, his father insisted, telling him "Obey me, son, this one last time" (139). Suffering much anguish, Jerome then took his father's life to save his own. After hearing this story, Frank gathers some tools, a piece of wood, Cee, and the quilt she had been stitching. The two of them return to the field, dig up the skeleton of the man they saw buried years ago, bring the remains to the riverside, and give him a

proper grave, burying him vertically under a bay tree. Frank labels the grave with a wooden marker that reads "Here Stands A Man" (145).

While neither Frank nor the narrator offer much commentary during this concluding episode to the novella, Frank's actions demonstrate a new understanding of care and masculinity that intertwines both. The bones that Frank buries are the remains of an individual who gave up his own life out of love for his son. He could not protect, so he gave himself completely for another. For these reasons, as Frank recognizes by the text's end, this individual is a man. Of course, this understanding of masculinity is very different from Frank's prevailing interpretation up until this point in the text. Similarly, though, Cee's recovery shows that there are different types of care from those assumed by gendered expectations. Despite assumptions, having children is not the only type of care for women. Cee cannot bear children, but she can "know the truth, accept it, and keep on quilting" finding community in Lotus outside of an individual family unit (132). For Frank, being a strong, rough, violent protector is not the only valid type of care for men. While the horses in the opening scene stood *like* men, it was only imitation. Jerome's father *is* a man, and Frank recognizes it by the novella's end.

By altering his perception of masculinity and the possibilities for manhood, Frank can begin to make peace with his own war experiences that were crises of masculinity prompted by his belief in the warrior ethos. A masculinity that demands an individual to always be in control, always hold a dominant position, never succumb to

weakness, and not need anything from anyone is not a true masculinity because such demands are impossible to satisfy. Frank's new conception of masculinity by the text's end sets him on a path to be open with what he did in Korea and make peace. While the novella's ending is not a perfect one where all of Frank's problems are somehow solved, it shows him burying his traumas—and that is a burying of coming-to-peace-with rather than a burying of repressing. Open to other expressions of care and masculinity, Frank, alongside Cee, finally has an emotional and spiritual place that he can call home.

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Reframing care to fit into the warrior ethos by making it a masculine endeavor seems wrong. Such a process simply enables a belief in military hyper-masculinity to persist even though care itself rejects that worldview and the association between military service and a tenacious manhood is a construct that clashes with reality. I do not think Blais, Shields, and their colleagues are incorrect in claiming that perception needs to change in order for servicemembers to accept the care that they need. However, instead of changing the perception of care to that of a manly endeavor, we need to change the perception that care has no place in the warrior ethos. The warrior archetype itself may enable care to emerge in a convulsive manner, but further identification with this archetype does not empower soldiers to open themselves to the assistance and affection that they, like all humans, require. If we can shift focus to the problems of military masculinity, veterans who need care will not be as hesitant to receive it and will

require less persuasion that it would somehow diminish their standing as men. Additionally, though, changing the overall connotation of a warrior in the American military to account for care will alleviate the disconnect between the image of the impervious soldier and the harsh reality that soldiers often face when sent to the front lines of combat, as Whitman captured over 150 years ago.

If the "Warrior Ethos" passage of the "Soldier's Creed" itself accounts for an acceptable type of surrender to the mission at hand and actively encourages brotherhood amongst soldiers by never leaving fallen comrades behind, such a foundation is already laid. The first steps to a solution simply require a shift of emphasis to the principles/values behind *these* aspects of warriorhood deemed not only tolerable but necessary. A caregiver and a care-receiver can both be warriors. And, if care can exist during times of war, imagine the possibilities during times of peace.

3. Weak, Strong, Sick, Well: Disease

"Do you know anybody who has AIDS?"

"Magic Johnson."

"He has HIV, not AIDS."

"Okay."

"And I mean personally. Do *you* know anybody who has AIDS?"

"No."

"Do you know anybody who knows anybody who has AIDS?"

I thought for a moment and replied with another no.

"See? I'm telling you. AIDS doesn't exist."

As a high school student in the late 2000s into the early 2010s, I learned quite a lot about the dangers of AIDS, the way the human immunodeficiency virus spread, and the uncurable nature of the "disease." However, the AIDS crisis was hard to grasp for my peers and me because it took place largely before we were born and had its moment in film, television, and popular media while we were toddlers. It wasn't until I was in graduate school that I had a conversation with a friend who told me that his uncle had—and died from complications due to—AIDS.

The reason my generation knew so few people with AIDS is not because it was the grand conspiracy that my high school classmate insisted upon, but because any relatives or family friends who contracted it were most likely dead, and—in places like

the small upstate New York community where I grew up— dying from AIDS still had a certain stigma attached to it. Susan Sontag contends that "societies need to have one illness which becomes identified with evil, and attaches blame to its 'victims'" (Sontag, *AIDS* 16). Despite the panics associated with West Nile Virus, SARS, Bird Flu, Mad Cow Disease, Swine Flu, Ebola, Zika Virus, COVID-19, and the like, for some people, AIDS is still *that* illness long after the American public health crisis associated with it has ended.

According to data from the CDC, 82.64% of all Americans with AIDS between 1981 and 2000 were male ("HIV and AIDS"). While infection rates have decreased greatly over the ensuing decades, men remain more likely to develop AIDS than women; in 2019, five times more men than women were diagnosed with new cases of HIV ("U.S. Statistics"). Because AIDS is so closely associated with men in general, gay men in particular, and male bodies at large, the disease invites interrogations into our conception of manhood, as it creates a localized version of the conflict with masculine gender expectations that this dissertation explores.[1] If men are traditionally strong and victims of AIDS are weak, AIDS becomes *representative* of an afflicted individual's masculinity.

To some extent, that is now an historical formulation. But it is one that factors into the plots of both Tony Kushner's *Angels in America* (1991, 1992) and Matthew

[1] As Susan Sontag rightly notes, AIDS is technically not an illness or disease at all but a medical condition "whose consequences are a spectrum of illnesses" (Sontag, *AIDS* 16). I refer to AIDS as a disease throughout this chapter for brevity and consistency, though I recognize this important distinction.

Lopez's *The Inheritance* (2018). The 30-year gap in setting between the two plays results in two different scenarios in how AIDS figures as the kind of metaphor Susan Sontag discusses. Amidst a backdrop of large-scale societal neglect for AIDS sufferers, Kushner's play dramatizes personal abandonment of those suffering from AIDS in conjunction with other characters—like the notorious Roy Cohn—who refuse even to acknowledge their own disease. In Lopez's work, the absorption of gay culture into American culture at large has eroded one foundation of the gay community which, in turn, has contributed to contemporary amnesia of the AIDS crisis. Despite these differences, both texts make the case that caring for the sick creates personal and communal bonds that offer hope for a more positive future—for individuals and the gay community itself. By focusing on the fortitude required to bear the burden of care, both plays offer a powerful commentary about how one can redefine strength in non-physical ways and undo gender expectations regarding intimacy.

3.1 We Won't Die Secret Deaths Anymore

When a disease is treated as a representation of some deeper evil or personal failing, the afflicted individual is forced to endure a moral punishment in addition to the physical and emotional effects of the illness itself; thus argues Susan Sontag in *Illness as Metaphor*. When it comes to modern diseases "awash in significance" (Sontag, *Illness* 58) like tuberculosis or cancer, "the romantic idea that the disease expresses the character is invariably extended to assert that the character causes the disease" (46). Not only does

metaphorical thinking imbue these illnesses with unwarranted significance, but it also implies that, somehow, the disease emerges from the spirit rather than the body.

A breast cancer patient herself at the time of writing, Sontag asserts that "illness is *not* a metaphor, and…the most truthful way of regarding illness…is one most purified of, most resistant to, metaphoric thinking" (3). Though Sontag's critics and detractors have argued that metaphorical language about illness is helpful and her writing on the subject is not,[2] I think it is hard to argue that little good comes from giving a disease an "invariably…moralistic [meaning]" beyond its actual prognosis (58). And yet, Sontag felt compelled to write *Illness as Metaphor* during her cancer treatment as a necessary response to the myriad metaphors likening illness to the symbolic that she herself experienced. As the public's attention shifted from cancer to AIDS over the next decade, Sontag penned a companion essay because, while the disease in question changed, the practice of elevating its significance to a moral level persisted.

AIDS and Its Metaphors as a title alludes to an important difference between how cancer and AIDS configure in the popular imagination: the metaphors associated with AIDS are taken as given or understood. Certain diseases, such as cancer and tuberculosis, gradually adopted a symbolic character, but, for AIDS, "one should hardly be surprised that many want to view [it] metaphorically—as plague-like, a moral judgment on society" (Sontag, *AIDS* 60). Part of the reason, Sontag notes, is that AIDS as

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[2] For one, Camille Paglia calls *Illness as Metaphor* "clumsy and ponderous" and *AIDS and its Metaphors* a "wobbly essay" that is an act of "catch-up" after twenty years of silence on gay issues since the Stonewall riots (353).

a disease "foster[s] ominous fantasies" about marking "both individual and social vulnerabilities" (66). Such fantasies of vulnerability manifested publicly in President Reagan's rhetoric about its spread "through the length and breadth of our society" (qtd. in Sontag, *AIDS* 66) and scientific explanations of its prognosis that described it as a military invader advancing "single-mindedly" (18).

Early in its history, AIDS was largely spread by sexual intimacy and promiscuity associated with homosexuality and was therefore considered—in some quarters—"deviant" and delinquent, indulgent and perverse, with no place in proper society (25). As Richard Rodriguez puts it quite bluntly in "Late Victorians," homosexuality was regarded as "a sin against nature" because "[t]he homosexual…[has] no kosher place to stick it" (59). This biological fact resulted in easy blame when a lifestyle marked "with secrets and within secrets" (58) for much of its existence could no longer be consciously ignored by American society. The spread of AIDS thrust its formerly shadowed presence into the public eye. For some, the best way to cope was to cast blame since, for certain segments of society, the individual vulnerabilities associated with AIDS stemmed from the culpability of contracting it. Those living with AIDS were responsible for getting and spreading it, so maybe, according to this line of reasoning, they deserved it.

While I seek to build upon Sontag's insight into how large-scale metaphoric interpretation and assumption about disease elevates it to a moral level, I am mainly interested in how this way of thinking erodes closeness and intimacy. Metaphorical

interpretations of AIDS—interpretations of the disease that enabled and even encouraged a division between those with and those without—infected notions of responsibility and promoted desertion of loved ones. Societal abandonment and an accompanying willful ignorance existed in tandem with personal forms of isolation and abandonment, raising questions of who ought to care for those suffering. Immorality, culpability, and blame were so closely intertwined in the public imagination with actual knowledge of the disease that attempts to combat them through simple denial or avoidance were virtually useless. Rather, a radical stand exposing the falsities and crushing weight of such thinking and its effects needed to be made somewhere. In *Angels in America*, Tony Kushner does just that.

In a review of the award-winning 2017 revival of *Angels in America* directed by Marianne Elliott and starring Andrew Garfield as Prior Walter, Alice Clapie refers to Kushner's play as a "very dense and complex text" that "resists simple summarization" (2). While the seven-to-eight-hour-long play contains numerous plot threads that interweave addiction, infidelity, mental illness, physical illness, homosexuality, the U.S. court system, Judaism, and Mormonism, it centers on Prior Walter's diagnosis with AIDS, his personal struggles with the disease—including his boyfriend Louis's desertion—and his supposed supernatural visitation by angels claiming him as a prophet that culminates in a visit to (and subsequent return from) Heaven.

Despite so much occurring physically and thematically throughout the play, it nonetheless foregrounds the persistent obfuscation of truth with metaphor, establishing the theme in the culminating scene of the first act. Closeted conservative lawyer Roy Cohn's AIDS diagnosis is a pivotal scene because it explicitly presents the stakes of such a diagnosis. Cohn claims that labels like AIDS, homosexual, gay, and lesbian do not "tell you who someone sleeps with" (Kushner 46). Instead, for Roy, these terms denote "clout" and how much influence such individuals possess or lack (46). Roy insists that he has liver cancer because "AIDS is what homosexuals have," and homosexuals are passive, submissive, and weak (47).[3] Roy claims that an AIDS diagnosis *means something* about the afflicted individual—and that something has nothing to do with the virus or the syndrome's prognosis. Instead, it marks the individual as a second-class citizen. While not everyone believes that homosexuality denotes weakness as opposed to strength/power, the Roy Cohn-types do. If an AIDS diagnosis automatically entails assumptions about the constitution of the afflicted, then, as Sontag suggests, metaphorical thinking permeates the understanding of AIDS.

Part of *Angels*'s genius comes from how Roy's interpretation not only factors into the play's plotline but also extends outwards to audience members. The play's most self-evident yet most confounding characteristic is Prior's call to prophethood, his

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[3] Roy's tirade about "homosexuals," "clout," and "AIDS" as words and what they signify highlights metaphor in the same way that Sontag claims she "meant" it in *Illness as Metaphor* (Sontag, *AIDS* 5). Sontag opens the first section of *AIDS and Its Metaphors* by echoing "the earliest and most succinct definition [of metaphor she knows]" which is from Aristotle's *Poetics*: "giving the thing a name that belongs to something else" (5).

interactions with various supernatural visitors and angels, and his ultimate decision to reject the prophecy that he is chosen to spread. Are the angels supposed to represent heterosexuality while humanity represents homosexuality, and the prophecy is AIDS? Are the angels a manifestation of AIDS and Prior's wrestling with the Angel a symbolic fight against the disease? Are the angels even to be taken literally by the audience at all, or are they merely figments of Prior's imagination projected into his reality as a coping mechanism or hallucination? While arguments that support and refute each position have merit, the questions are more important than the answers. Regardless of the angels' meaning (or existence), the responsibility of interpretation is extended to audience members, forcing them to confront and consider metaphor directly, just like how the characters suffering from AIDS must contend with how others interpret it.

Through the trajectory of its action, the play focuses on the theme of abandonment and intimacy's dissolution when confronted with AIDS. On a societal level, individuals who have the power to intervene in the AIDS crisis are largely absent from the play. In the first act, the characters acknowledge American society's attitude towards the AIDS crisis—through a metaphor. Prior tells Louis a story about a lifeboat that had 70 people on it. When the weather got bad and the crew thought it was overcrowded, they "started lifting people up and hurling them into the sea. Until they got the ballast right" (42). Whenever the boat "rode low in the water they'd grab the nearest passenger and throw them into the sea" (42). The boat ultimately reached its

destination with nine people on board. While one interpretation of the parable is the indiscriminate spread of AIDS in New York City, snatching the lives of otherwise healthy and able men "with no warning at all" (42), it also reflects the cold and cruel attitude of those in positions to offer support. Rather than seek a solution to assist the people entrusted to them, these "implacable, unsmiling men" (42) save themselves by willingly disposing of others.

Because the play's action reverberates outward from gay men suffering from the direct or tangential impact of AIDS, its dialogue conveys how these men interpret society's lack of assistance. Louis claims that AIDS shows "the limits of tolerance" and society's undercurrent of "intense, passionate hatred" (94), while Prior claims that society wants to believe that "faggots" are nothing but "a bad dream the real world is having" (158). Both comments underscore the schism between the AIDS-afflicted community and the larger, New York City community that has cordoned it off; AIDS serves as an occasion to further stigmatize "the already stigmatized" (Sontag, *AIDS* 28).

While Louis and Prior are correct, the abandonment AIDS sufferers experienced almost seemed logical—though not excusable—from the outside looking in. If AIDS was believed to be an "imputation of guilt" for transgressive behavior, as Sontag notes (24), it is no wonder that the general public sought to break from and criticize afflicted individuals and communities, for, under this logic, the sick and suffering were the only ones to blame for their dilemma. In a 1980s political climate dominated by hands-off

conservatism and unwavering faith in the free market, nobody—especially the government—believed it had an obligation to step in, for that's just how market forces work.

What could not be reasoned away as easily is the personal abandonment of beloved friends and lovers during the AIDS crisis as rendered in the play. From Prior's initial conversation with Louis about his health, Louis rejects—reality, rationality, and responsibility. He begins by refusing to believe that Prior actually has AIDS as opposed to a burst blood vessel. Shortly thereafter, Louis progresses into questioning the rabbi presiding over his grandmother's burial about what the Holy Writ says about "someone who abandons someone he loves at a time of great need" because that person "has this neo-Hegelian positivist sense of constant historical progress towards happiness or perfection" and cannot "incorporate sickness into his sense of how things are supposed to go" (Kushner 25). While Louis's question is meandering and ridiculous, the sentiment behind it makes sense: how can we understand why bad things like a horrible disease happen? Ultimately, it proved impossible to disavow responsibility for AIDS by blaming the victims; in fact, that point of view enabled the crisis to continue.

As Prior's condition begins to worsen, Louis does not know how to help him (50), cannot muster the resolve to stay with him in the hospital after he goes to sleep (55), and, eventually, decides to move out "to save [him]self" (82)—not from contracting

AIDS but from the pressures and responsibilities of caring for Prior.[4] By turning his musings about the unfairness of life into a justification to evade his responsibilities in caring for his sick boyfriend, Louis creates a divide between himself and Prior during his time of greatest need. By making a conscious decision to abandon his boyfriend, Louis actualizes Prior's worst fear—the fear "[t]hat [Louis will] leave [him]"—which caused Prior to hesitate in telling Louis his diagnosis in the first place (22). As Prior progresses deeper and deeper into the bodily complications engendered by the invasive virus, he must also contend with the mental anguish of abandonment by the one person who is supposed to love and support him.

AIDS, a disease spread through sexual intimacy, ironically dissolves the connections between Prior and Louis and, metaphorically, with greater American society. The intimacy of "close connection or union" becomes impossible out of fear, assumption, and implication; those who need support the most are forced to endure pariah life ("intimacy"). However, *Angels* does not simply dramatize an evaporation of intimacy and leave its characters doomed to suffer alone. After all, it is a "hopeful work" (Kushner x). Consequently, the play champions a reclamation of intimacy by focusing on the fortitude necessary to refuse passivity and to insert oneself into a role of responsibility to care for those in need.

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[4] Performances of the play convey this juxtaposition explicitly by staging a split scene in Act Three of *Millennium Approaches*. Louis complains to Belize about democracy and justice and race and how he is "dying" internally because of what is happening to Prior on one side of the stage (104), while Prior is hooked up to an IV in an outpatient clinic actually dying from his immune system's inability to fight back against pathogens.

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Perhaps surprisingly, the most important character in the play when it comes to illuminating the possibilities of reclaiming intimacy through strength is neither Prior nor Louis but drag queen-turned-nurse Norman Arriaga, better known as Belize. As noted by Framji Minwalla, Belize "is neither the focus of the work nor necessary to the plot" (104), yet he is central to the play's dealings with redemption because his "chief concern is not himself but, rather, the physical and psychological welfare of other people" (105). Belize's first appearance in the play comes when he visits Prior's hospital room on his way to work—a sharp juxtaposition to Louis who is nowhere to be found after hooking up with a stranger in Central Park several nights before. While this brief meeting is merely for Belize to check in on his friend, he brings with him a cream he purchased to soothe Prior's blistered skin (Kushner 62). When Belize rubs the ointment on Prior's back, it is the first time since his condition has become notably "much worse" (49) that anyone purposefully initiates any sort of comforting contact.[5] Comfort is an important word for this scene, for Prior breaks down emotionally as Belize applies the lotion; he cries out, "I want Louis. I want my fucking boyfriend, where the fuck is he? I'm dying, I'm dying, where's Louis?" (63). As Belize cradles Prior in response, the emotional toll of abandonment during illness becomes clear, as do the importance of intimacy in

[5] The only other physical contact Prior receives earlier in *In Vitro* noted through dialogue or stage directions is Louis feeling his head for a temperature and possibly touching his leg to help him stand during the opening scene of panic (Kushner 49).

providing relief and the fortitude necessary to offer it. While Louis is paralyzed by the emotional conundrum of responsibility and obligation, Belize is present, engaged in an embrace, showing Prior that he is not alone.[6]

In scenes like this, Belize exemplifies both the "work" aspect of care and the decision-making required to do it. Feminist care theorists often discuss the notion of a caring obligation. Synthesizing and furthering the work of influential care theorists Martha Fineman, Eva Feder Kittay, and Annette Baier, Daniel Engster notes that humans should care for those in need "because we have implicitly demanded and continue to demand care from others for our own survival and development and the reproduction of society; and because denying others the care they need deprives them of the support necessary to survive and achieve the basic well being that we all implicitly recognize as good" (65). To exist as a moral and ethical individual, one must affirmatively answer the caring imperative because everyone exists in a network of mutual dependency. No man is an island outside the network, for everyone has required, and will in the future require, care provided by others.

What sometimes gets lost in discussions of ethical caring is the immense strength it takes to provide such care, especially when alternative choices exist, such as simply absconding. Joan Tronto aligns the moral quality of responsibility with the

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[6] While Belize's occupation is a nurse, the play does not suggest that such a professional commitment is a necessary requirement for caring. Belize does not show this care for Prior because of his job but because of his dedication to his friend.

second phase of care—caring *for* another—claiming that "[o]nce needs are identified, someone or some group has to take on the burden of meeting those needs" (34). Recognizing that "[a]ssuming responsibility is not yet the same as doing the actual work of care," Tronto assigns the moral quality of competence to *care giving* (35).[7] While this framework is useful for understanding the different stages of how one can care for another and what attributes one must embody to perform such functions, something is missing. In *Angels*, the juxtaposition between Belize and Louis highlights the significant gap between the theoretical outlines of caring and its practice. Fear, distress, and doubt are all realities that obstruct the transition between recognizing another's needs and actually taking steps to provide for them. Where Louis fails to act, Belize makes the conscious choice to care for and provide care—as both an 'official' nurse to Roy and as a friend to Prior—a herculean undertaking in the face of AIDS. In doing so, Belize embodies the strength required to champion intimacy.

Strength through intimacy manifests not only in episodes of one-on-one care but also in Belize's unceasing dedication to building community—even with those whom he hates on a personal level. According to Suzanna Walters, "[o]ne of the positive 'fallouts' of discrimination is the forging of community and the development of a concern for others, activism, [and] a culture of responsibility" (19). However, in the social and

[7] According to Tronto, the five phases of care and their associated qualities are: caring about and attentiveness, caring for and responsibility, care giving and competence, care receiving and responsiveness, and caring with and solidarity (35).

political climate within which the play takes place, "the proximity of suffering does nothing to guarantee the creation of solidarity" (Byttebier 290). As Louis's refusal exemplifies, community-building only exists when one dedicates oneself to pursuing it despite the challenges it brings.

When Roy sees that Belize is his assigned nurse, the first thing he says to him is "Get outta here you…I want a white nurse" (Kushner 151). Even though Belize says that he would "rather suck the pus out of an abscess" than have a conversation with Roy (152), he stops himself from leaving the room when Roy says that he "[doesn't] want to be alone" (153). While the ensuing conversation between the two is contentious and far from cordial, with Roy calling Belize a "butterfingers spook faggot nurse" (155), Belize advises Roy to forego radiation therapy and to use his connections to ensure that he will have access to the experimental drug azidothymidine rather than a placebo. Belize himself does not know why he offers this assistance to Roy and jokingly reasons that it is out of solidarity, from "[o]ne faggot to another" (155). The joke simultaneously masks and underscores a kernel of similarity between them while explicitly verbalizing the homosexuality Roy has tried so hard to obscure. When men suffering from AIDS are abandoned by their government, society, and loved ones, the black drag queen and the racist, conservative Jew become allies when the former understands his responsibility to care for the latter because no one else is willing to accept this call.

Importantly, this alliance is not friendship. Forging communities of care where everyone loves and respects one another would be a wonderful ideal, but it is utopian and impractical. The play consistently reminds the audience of this reality by pitting Belize against Roy and his hateful rhetoric while also delivering intimate moments of hands-on care work and begrudging agreement between the two.[8] This duality is most explicit in Roy's wish for Belize, whom Roy refers to as his "negation," to "wrap [his] arms around [him]" and "[s]queeze the bloody life from [him]" two days before he dies (221). The stage directions during this interaction are telling, as they note that Roy expresses his wish in a "*Confiding, intimate*" manner and his imploring Belize to "Come on" as "*A serious sexual invitation*" (221). While Belize responds that "[e]verything [he] want[s] is in the end of [Roy]" (222), the stage directions note that "*A weight of sadness descends on Belize*" (221) as he hears Roy's request, reinforcing the emotional complexity of the scene. Intermingling desire, revulsion, sexuality, hatred, death, and intimacy, Roy and Belize epitomize the complexities of relationship outside of the utopian ideal of friendship. Building a community can be miserable, but when one has no other options, part of the strength involved is the strength to engage with hatred.[9]

Ultimately, intimacy in the time of AIDS was not only possible but necessary. Clearly, there is a strength associated with the intimacy Belize exemplifies; it is a new

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[8] Not to mention the constant fights and arguments between Belize and Louis as well (see *Millennium Approaches* Act Three, Scene 2 and the Epilogue of *Perestroika* for two examples).

[9] Act 4 of *Perestroika* ends with a reflection of this theme. On his deathbed, Roy tricks the ghost of Ethel Rosenberg into singing to him. Despite her hatred for Roy that "burns acid green" and the pleasure she gets from watching him die, Ethel takes on a mother's care for the man partially responsible for her death (Kushner 253).

type of strength not predicated on dominance, influence, or assent but a strength "on behalf of," the strength of compassion, and the strength to persevere. And, paradoxically in the lens of traditional interpretations of what strength means, o*ne's strength stems from one's willingness to be intimate with another.*

This form of strength was not "new" as in "recently created" but "new" as in "an alternative conception." We have, in fact, seen it before. It is the same strength Walt Whitman displays in *Memoranda During the War*. While Whitman performed nursing functions for wounded soldiers on both sides of the conflict, his more important role was recognizing soldiers' need for moral, emotional, and spiritual support. Whitman's actions emphasized empathy and demonstrated that there is a place for tenderness in a context that seemingly discourages it. *Angels* takes these principles further by emphasizing care's relation to compassion. Though now considered obsolete, compassion's original definition was "Suffering together with another" ("compassion"). Belize shares in the suffering of those afflicted with AIDS by deciding to provide them with necessary comfort, assistance, and closeness when seemingly everyone else refuses to do so.

As important as Belize's dedication to intimate, hands-on care work is, the play does not settle for a limited approach to reclaiming intimacy and reinterpreting strength by only exploring how they can emerge on a personal level. Rather, *Angels* dares to make a stand for the entire gay community. The common theme between larger society

and the angels Prior encounters or generates is that they both encourage stasis for those suffering from AIDS. Society epitomizes "Reagan era…abandonment and indifference to the AIDS plague" (Omer-Sherman 21), and the angels make the same case in Act Two of *Perestroika*, "The Anti-Migratory Epistle." In a sequence that overlays past, present, reality, and altered reality, Prior simultaneously learns and explains the prophecy entrusted to him. For the angels, time itself is a virus since they cannot create or enact change (Kushner 166-169). Fearing the worst for the fabric of Heaven itself, an angel leaves Prior with a drastic message for humanity: "YOU MUST STOP MOVING" (172)—a directive demanding stagnation and a cessation of progress. Prior wrestles with the decision to spread the prophecy or to deny his 'calling' and reject it throughout the rest of the play. The theme resonates not only as a conflict between progress and regression but as a conflict between indifference or undertaking the laborious, active commitment of advocacy on behalf of others.

When he chooses "more life" (279), Prior makes a profound argument about where one draws strength and to what ends to use it. Suzanna Walters argues that "Gay life and identity" were once defined by "problems of invisibility, subliminal coding, double entendres and double lives" (9). Being gay meant living a partially obscured existence out of both necessity and fear. The Angels' call for stasis promotes similar principles of "second-class citizenship" (12)—inaction, silence, and resistance to change in the status quo. Prior's desire to be blessed with more life, even if it means having to

live with AIDS, is an affirmation of action, an affirmation of commitment, and a refusal to succumb to the despair associated with the disease.[10] Refusing to go gently into the dark night becomes radical.

The gravity of Prior's choice to embrace life rather than stasis cannot be understated, for it is the choice to accept reality's unknowns over the tried and true but damaging assumptions about AIDS 'victims': weakness, culpability, shame. No matter how loud Prior proclaims that he wants more life, the declaration itself does not guarantee anything. He makes the choice anyway. Rather than accepting his status as a sick man whom society has written off, he elects to live his life—for as long as he can—publicly. By the play's conclusion, Prior reclaims his condition, offering it as a constant reminder that AIDS is not simply a faceless "moral flaw on the part of gay men" (Mendelsohn 42), but an embodied disease that demands recognition and attention rather than critique and ignorance. According to Prior, individuals with AIDS "won't die secret deaths anymore," for "[t]he time has come" to be acknowledged (Kushner 290). By embracing this position, Prior can live up to the affirmation he faltered in delivering as the Angel was first preparing to crash into his apartment: "I am a gay man and I am used to pressure, to trouble, I am tough and strong" (124).

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[10] Of course, for this pivotal scene to occur in Act Five of *Perestroika*, Prior must first wrestle with the Angel—a trial of strength in the more traditional sense. However, this physical struggle is less about dominance/submission and more about the determination to hold onto something without letting go—as staged beautifully in the 2017 revival of the play. Thematically, it harmonizes with Prior's desire to cling to more life in the face of death even though the struggle itself is rendered more literally.

Angels's length and complexity, as well as its emergence and popularity during the early 1990s, broadened its thematic dedication to a politics of visibility beyond the confines of performance. According to Daniel Mendelsohn's response to the play written a decade after its initial premiere, *Angels* "came as an enraged, seethingly articulate, intellectually ambitious, high-flown response to that stultifying and smug atmosphere of denial, silence, and willful ignorance" (42). Of course, this description applies to the characters of Belize and Prior and the actions they perform within the plot of the play. However, Mendelsohn makes this claim in reference to the play as a cultural object. While *Angels* did not necessarily start a trend, it clearly contributed to a cultural swing towards visibility for AIDS victims and the larger gay community.

Writing in the mid-1990s, Rosemary Hennessy asserts that "[g]ays and lesbians have been more visible than ever in arts and entertainment, despite the industry's still deeply entrenched investment in heteronormativity" (60). To support this claim, Hennessy mentions the production and popularity of *The Crying Game*, *Orlando*, *Philadelphia*, *And the Band Played On*, and *The Normal Heart*, but she begins her list by noting how *Angels in America* won the Pulitzer in 1993 and was nominated for seven Tony Awards (60). Cultural visibility in and of itself does not guarantee meaningful policy change, but it was an important step in "[preparing] the ground for gay civil rights protection" (31). It helped make a citizenship with a history of struggle comprehensible to those on the outside. Through the images and stories of popular

culture, members of marginalized communities "come…to be known by others" (Walters 13). Familiarity breeds recognition, and, through this recognition of another person's inherent humanity, assumptions and metaphors no longer replace truth.

As a piece of advice to Joe Pitt, his protégé and proposed inside man in Washington D.C., Roy Cohn says, "Sometimes a father's love has to be very, very hard, unfair even, cold to make his son grow strong in a world like this. This isn't a good world" (Kushner 59). As Belize and Prior demonstrate, this approach to 'growing strong' is not the only way, nor is this definition of strength its only possible interpretation. Sometimes, showing love and affection and embracing the responsibility to care for others is the way to survive in the world. Sometimes, rejecting the tempting easiness of a laissez-faire approach to suffering is a true expression of strength. *Angels in America* presents a hybrid community of men caring for men and a community caring for itself, of marginalized individuals drawn together by their interactions with AIDS—either directly through contracting the disease or indirectly by showing interest in those who do—and of the bonds formed in resistance to disease. This new conception of strength through embracing intimacy does not have the power to cure either AIDS or the deep-seated misinterpretations of homosexuality, but it serves as a fount of hope for future change. And, through this hope, "The Great Work" can "[Begin]" (290).

3.2 The Past, The Present and The Future All at Once, All in Concert

For a play based on the plot of E.M. Forster's 1910 novel *Howard's End*, Matthew Lopez's *The Inheritance* clearly draws a substantial amount of inspiration from *Angels in America*. Both plays are split into two parts that combine for a seven-hour runtime. Both plays require their majority male actors to double their roles. Both plays explicitly deal with notions of progress for the gay community and the nation as a whole. Both plays incorporate metaphysical interlocutors who shape the action. And, both plays follow the lives of gay men in New York City whose lives are impacted by AIDS.

When viewing *The Inheritance* in the contextual shadow of *Angels*, one nuance becomes apparent immediately: for a play that clearly embraces *Angels*'s influence in its construction, *The Inheritance* is startlingly different. In the mid-2010s, middle-class 30-something-year-old gay men in New York City radiate impeccable taste, culture, and class. From their conversations about string quartets, theatre, and modern art to their Ivy League educations, Eric Glass and his social circle exude amassed cultural capital that borders on the fantastical. While the play's trajectory reveals tragic backstories for several characters, such as Eric's boyfriend Toby Darling and Toby's future love interest Leo, most of the characters live glamorous lives with seemingly no compromises, rubbing shoulders with billionaires, residing in rent-controlled apartments, and working in industries that simultaneously allow them to make lucrative salaries and advocate for

social justice causes.[11] With the development of Truvada—the antiretroviral medication that can prevent HIV in high risk individuals or curtail HIV's progression into AIDS for HIV positive individuals—contracting AIDS is less of a looming angel of death and more of a background concern[12]; as such, the characters are not afraid of embracing and discussing the sexual interactions which occur many times throughout the play. The vibrant, whimsical, sexual, carefree world that *The Inheritance* establishes is a far cry from the New York of the mid-1980s depicted in *Angels*.

Not all the changes and progress that define *The Inheritance* are for the better. For one, Eric laments the loss of "the feeling that being gay was like being a member of a secret club" that he experienced as a young man in the early 2000s (Lopez 85). He goes into more detail about that time, claiming that gay men occupied a "liminal state" where they could simultaneously be "out" while remaining "kinda mysterious and opaque to society" (85). This nostalgic yearning highlights two core principles in how a play about gay men in the late 2010s *must* diverge from the foundational premise and resolution expressed in *Angels*. Queer culture has made large strides in visibility, representation in popular media, and assimilation into American culture, and AIDS no longer ravages an invisible community of gay men to the extent it did in the 1980s. The combination of cultural diffusion and lack of necessary unity to fight back against the impending doom

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[11] Eric, for one, works for his friend Jasper who is a "social justice entrepreneur" (Lopez 26).
[12] Truvada is referred to by name throughout the play, as are its relative ease of use and procurement, conveying the play's own recognition that things have changed since the mid-1980s.

of a plague results in a community of gay men "slowly fading away" (86).[13] What's more, a commitment to visibility is commonplace and has lost its standing as a radical political position for gay men. According to Eric's friend Jasper, "the point of all that work at visibility was to not feel stigmatized. To not have our sexual identities be our primary identities" (83). From this perspective, increased visibility was a success, as demonstrated by the marvelous and fruitful lives of the protagonists.

However, as noted by Suzanna Walters, "[t]o be *seen*…is not necessarily to be *known*" (12), for society may "[embrace] the *images* of gay life" while remaining "reluctant to embrace the *realities* of gay identities and practices in all their messy and challenging confusion" (10). Though visibility contributed to "societal participation" (Lopez 86) for the gay community in some ways—such as marriage equality and the development of HIV-fighting pharmaceuticals—visibility itself is not enough of a platform to combat the numerous problems noted by Eric and his friends that the LGBTQ+ community still faces: growing rates of poverty and addiction, suicide and homelessness among gay youth, and the continued fight for trans rights (89).

In a sense, the problem and the solution in *Angels* have flipped over the 30-or-so-year gap between its action and the action in *The Inheritance*. Gay men no longer constitute an unseen community that must establish visibility to receive recognition and

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[13] In the play, Eric's claim that "all the different facets of queer culture are being stripped for parts" (Lopez 86) is prompted by a discussion of how teenage girls have coopted the term "yasss kween" (which they attribute to *Broad City*) without having the faintest idea about drag culture (85).

progress forward. Rather, there is so much representation and cultural diffusion that the obvious and necessary communal ties among gay men have nearly dissolved.

What have not disappeared, though, are metaphors about AIDS. The play's most explicit use of metaphorical thinking in relation to AIDS comes from Tristan, Eric's physician friend who has been living with HIV for 11 years, during a discussion of politics, Donald Trump, and the allegorical consideration of America as a body.[14] After explaining how HIV compromises a body's T-cells, he connects it back to the present political climate in the United States:

> …if America is a body and its citizenry are its cells and its T-cells are its democracy, then what about [Donald Trump]? Where would he fit in this analogy? You could say that he is HIV. And, like HIV, he's replicating his genetic material from tweet to tweet, from person to person, institution to institution, across the entire nation. Consequently, America is now falling prey to opportunistic infections its immune system had once at least been able to fight: fear, propaganda, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, white nationalism. And so, like any person with untreated HIV, this nation has developed the *American* Immune Deficiency Syndrome. Maybe we should just call it what it is and diagnose it properly: America has AIDS. (171)

While the company who hears Tristan's explanation, including the Trump-supporting Republican Henry Wilcox, considers it "brilliant" (173), this particular scene underscores the complicated reversals and transformations between the historical contexts of *Angels* and *The Inheritance* because of how metaphor and the gay community have simultaneously persisted and changed.

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[14] The America-as-body metaphor that is the springboard for Tristan's America-as-body-suffering-from-AIDS metaphor is clearly inspired by Walt Whitman, though it is not attributed to him. Rather, Eric explains it as something he "always…[used] to think" as a child (Lopez 170).

When Tristan employs AIDS as a metaphor for the contemporary political climate, he conforms to the exact thought process that Sontag criticizes. The disease takes the role of an "enemy" which must be conquered to prevent it from destroying the country and its citizens (Sontag, *AIDS* 11). However, where talk of "invasion" and "pollution" were once attributed to AIDS's contraction and spread (17), AIDS itself has morphed into a symbolic representation for the way dangerous political ideologies proliferate and leave the nation vulnerable to further 'infection.' Where metaphors about AIDS once imbued them with undue moralistic meanings, Tristan's metaphor trivializes the disease's actual character as experienced by gay men in the 1980s and 1990s and contemporary men like Leo—whose job as a sex worker puts him at a high risk and whose poverty prevents him from obtaining regular health screenings or Truvada. Tristan's AIDS metaphor highlights the play's major crux, what David Rooney calls "the lines separating gay men of different generations."

Combine this schism of generations with the dissipation of the contemporary gay community, and you arrive at the precipice of a slippery slope to return to the time where a queer identity only describes a sexual identity and nothing more, to paraphrase Jasper's words.[15] This may sound exaggerated and alarmist, but Eric himself gestures towards this proposition, asking "who are we? And more importantly: who will we

[15] Toby's trajectory into a life of hedonism highlights the possibility of this reversion. He is still a gay man, but the only markers of this identity are the numerous affairs he has with men. Once Toby meets Leo and understands his duty to assist a young, confused, and struggling gay man, he begins to realize that there is more to queer culture.

become?" (Lopez 90). His point is well taken, for what is one to make of an identity that has been cut off from its history of struggles and triumphs and ransacked of its own cultural markers?

To address such questions and their implications, the play once again emulates *Angels* by emphasizing responsibility, community, and the necessary strength to fight for them. Time and again, characters explicitly acknowledge the importance of joining together. From E.M. "Morgan" Forster's famous message of "only connect" lifted from *Howard's End* (Lopez 143) to his parting words in Part 1 to "take care of each other" above all (145), the guiding authorial principle in the crafting of the play's narrative on stage is to forge communal bonds.[16] Within the play's plot, this principle is further developed through individual characters' thoughts and actions, such as Eric's insistence that, "to maintain the health of the American body, we have to maintain a healthy relationship with each other" (170) and Walter Poole's epiphany during the AIDS crisis that true courage does not stem from isolating oneself from the world and its horrors but, rather, from "[flinging] the doors open and [inviting] it in" in order to help the ones suffering the worst (63).

Within each example of characters calling for community, caring for one another gives purpose to those connections. As he exits towards the end of Part 1, Morgan

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[16] *The Inheritance* is framed as a play being written as it proceeds by a group of young men who are guided by Morgan. Morgan and "the lads," as they are often called, speak directly to one another and the "characters" performing the action like Eric, Toby, and their friends. In this way, E.M. Forster is a guiding hand in shaping the fictionalized construction of the play on stage as well as the actual plot and themes of *The Inheritance* as a text.

knows that the other characters must care for Toby in order to save him from the destructive self-isolation he embraces—thus Morgan's final pronouncement to "[t]ake care of [Toby] most especially" (145). Walter's epiphany during the AIDS crisis offers a striking illustration of what one can accomplish when dedicated to providing care for others, as he welcomed dozens of men dying from the complications of AIDS into his home in upstate New York (63). These men, abandoned by their families, friends, and government received love and compassion from Walter in their final days, ultimately dying with at least a sliver of restored dignity.

Much like Walt Whitman during the Civil War, Walter recognized that he could not "do much good" to save or even extend the lives of the sick in his care, yet he knew that he could not leave them to die alone in a heartless and indifferent world (Whitman, *Memoranda* 10). By the end of the play, Eric, as the inherited owner of Walter's home, embodies a similar role "illuminating [a path in life] for others," especially those suffering from broken spirits like Leo (Lopez 290). In this way, the continuity of care at Walter's upstate home bridges the gap between the past, present, and future generations of gay men, resulting in a reclamation of community within and across temporal lines—an inheritance in and of itself.

Communal ties are not only necessary during times of crisis; one of the hallmarks of gay culture that the play tries to emphasize is the significance of cross-generational mentorships in which an older gay man takes a younger one under his wing to show

him what it means to be gay. Importantly, this is not a sexual mentorship but a cultural, emotional, and caring one—a mentorship that helps a young, confused gay man see that such an identity is more than just a sexual identity. For Adam, Eric (along with Toby) seeks to "[fill] in the gaps in [his] cultural education" (46) and offer him the "direction…[a]dvice…[and] wisdom" needed to navigate the confusions and complications of his life. Once Toby and Eric separate, Toby serves a similar role for Leo, showing him important films, bringing him to art exhibits, and funding a trip to The Strand to buy books by authors like James Baldwin and E.M. Forster (187).[17]

While Eric and Toby serve as guides for the Adams and Leos of the world, they also benefit from the wisdom and experiences of their own elders in the gay community. While part of Eric's relationships with Walter and Henry is eating fancy meals and taking luxurious trips, another significant part is learning from both men about responsibilities to others and what it means to love. In a scene that layers a present conversation between Henry and Eric with younger versions of Henry and Walter, Eric witnesses the purity of the love between his two friends when they were beginning their relationship. He then sees how things changed after Walter brought their friend Peter West to their upstate house when he was dying from AIDS to provide him peace and serenity in his final days. Listening to the argument between Walter and Henry, Eric

[17] While Toby's relationship with Leo does start out as a sexual one exclusively and continues to be one alongside their intimate mentorship relationship, they function independently of one another. The sexual relationship does not somehow diminish the importance of the mentorship.

hears Henry's perspective on his responsibility to protect Walter, his two sons, himself, "and no one else" (229). He also hears Walter's position that they have a duty to their friend who would otherwise die alone. While it may initially appear that Henry's perspective embraces the same cold, dismissive stance that the characters in *Angels in America* needed to reject, his rationale for it makes sense. He watched dozens upon dozens of other gay men die from a disease that seemingly could not be stopped, and he had a responsibility to those closest to him to keep them out of harm's way. If Walter purposely brought men with AIDS into their upstate home to care for them, he also brought the risk of being one blood droplet away from his own death sentence.

Yet, the real lesson Eric learns from Henry's mindset is in understanding the regret that Henry has for his ensuing actions. He claims that he distanced himself from Walter after this incident because Walter's contraction of HIV seemed an inevitability; loving Walter less would help "[protect himself] from the pain of losing [him]" (231). The irony of the situation is that Walter eventually dies from cancer, and it hurts Henry worse than he feared because he did not love him the way he should have while he was still alive. This profound lesson in upholding responsibility to the larger community to which you belong *while also* maintaining commitments to those closest to you ultimately shapes Eric into the person he becomes by the play's end: "a teacher, a mentor, and eventually a wise old man to so many who encountered him" (290). Though the play wraps up quickly once it arrives at this point, Eric's journey of self-discovery culminates

with a marriage of Walter's dedication to the gay community and Henry's devotion to his most intimate friends.

Through the repetition of mentoring and teaching within and across generations, the play makes the case that the gay community *does* have a cultural marker that its members can be proud of despite the apparent diffusion of gay culture into American culture: that marker is care. The bonds that connect people all stem from a place of care for other gay men. While such an emphasis may seem like an obscure marker for full membership in a community, *The Inheritance* is not alone in this call. A caring citizenship is the end goal of Joan Tronto's argument in *Caring Democracy*. Tronto claims that "what it means to be a citizen in a democracy is to care for citizens and to care for democracy itself" (x). If we replace the word "democracy" with "gay community," we have *The Inheritance*'s resolution for fragmentation and dissolution amongst gay men; they must care for other members of this community as well as the community itself. Gay men have a responsibility to one another—a responsibility to offer "perspective" on what it means to be gay in contemporary America and how one can negotiate the persistent trials of existence within this identity (Lopez 51). However, they also have a responsibility to remember the battles previous generations fought (such as the AIDS crisis and Stonewall riots) because these conflicts and the courageous responses by individuals like Walter Poole are the only reason the present can exist in its current capacity. Henry's charge that "THERE ARE NO GAY MEN MY AGE" (174)

comes as one of the play's most sobering lines because it reminds both the characters and the audience that the lack of external and, to some extent, internal care for the gay community at large resulted in an extermination of nearly an entire generation.[18] Through making care a pillar of membership in new communities, Eric, Walter, and *The Inheritance* as a whole offer an alternative perspective on how to ensure that community persists, no matter how different the future may look from the present.

By mirroring *Angels*'s solution in a more contemporary version of crisis in the gay community—an identity crisis engendered from the fallout of the AIDS crisis—*The Inheritance* reiterates the notion that care not only constitutes membership in the community of gay men but in manhood more generally. Even though *The Inheritance* does not put as much of an emphasis on strength as its theatrical forefather, the play still acknowledges its relation to the care work it supports. Late in the play's final act, Eric explicitly acknowledges that he "want[s] to stop running from the things that frighten [him]," so he dedicates the rest of his life to putting his pain "to some use" and "learn[ing] from it" (288), a clear echo of Prior Walter's redefinition of strength through choosing life**.** This position also echoes Walter Poole's realization from when he cared for and comforted Peter as he died from AIDS over 30 years earlier, claiming that he "had no idea [he] had such strength" to perform these tasks (62). In reaching back to

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[18] This idea of a generation lost to AIDS is an echo of the end of Part 1 Act 1, which concludes with an explanation of what it was like to live during the AIDS crisis through an extended listing of friends and acquaintances who were dead and dying from AIDS. The listing is reminiscent of the genealogies of Genesis 5 and 11, but, instead of each individual begetting life to others, each individual is dying.

connect with the past generation of gay theater, *The Inheritance* forges the same type of transtemporal community it demands of its characters—extending a hand backwards to assist with understanding the present and to contribute to an even better future.

Beyond the confines of *The Inheritance* and its resonances of *Angels in America*, a belief in men's caring, supporting, and guiding other men in an empathetic and intimate way is the same ethos detailed, as we have seen and will see, by Walt Whitman and Ernest Hemingway and Toni Morrison and Cormac McCarthy. While different crises rock different masculinities—gay manhood, black manhood, fatherhood—caring for those suffering and taking up the burdens of providing support for those who are lost or abandoned affirms masculinity's strength but disrupts the slippage into domination.

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On February 20, 2020, various publications including the *New York Times* and *Variety* announced that, despite being a strong contender for the Tony Awards, *The Inheritance*'s run on Broadway was coming to a close on March 15th due to box office struggles and mixed reviews. On March 12, 2020, The Broadway League announced a month-long suspension of all Broadway shows under the direction of Governor Andrew Cuomo "in support of the health and well-being of the theatregoing public, as well as those who work in the theatre industry" ("Broadway Theatres"). *The Inheritance*'s last four performances were cancelled. The initially proposed monthlong suspension ended up lasting 510 days, and the entire world became intimately familiar with COVID-19.

Ironically—or, maybe, fittingly—a play concerned with the lasting impacts of one disease was cut off by another.

A pessimist may choose to interpret this connection as an omen that disease can never be eradicated and the functional elimination of one will simply beget another. After all, a conspiracy theory catapulted to the national level by journalist Tom Curtis's March 1992 *Rolling Stone* article "The Origin of AIDS: A Startling New Theory Attempts to Answer the Question 'Was it an Act of God or an Act of Man?'" proposed that Dr. Hilary Koprowski's polio vaccine trials in the former Belgian Congo in the late 1950s were responsible for HIV's jump from a simian virus to a human virus (59). Prior to polio, Spanish Flu, diphtheria, cholera, and smallpox all shook the American continent on epidemic levels. In some ways, the history of America is the history of illness, disease, and panic.

However, the inevitability of disease may offer occasions for growth. Over the past three years, scientists have looked back at the historical treatment of those suffering with AIDS in order to implement effective COVID-19 containment measures that also encourage stigma reduction (Logie and Turan 2003).[19] Even more recently, due to the success of the mRNA COVID-19 vaccines, Moderna has begun the trial process for two new vaccines using the same mRNA platform; this time, to prevent HIV (Rosenberg).

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[19] See Logie and Turan, "How Do We Balance Tensions Between COVID-19 Public Health Responses and Stigma Mitigation? Learning from HIV Research" for analysis of four possible sources of stigma prompted by COVID mitigation efforts and ways to avoid these tensions.

Forwards and backwards, major crises of disease in American history impact one another and how we understand them. Rather than panic and schism, disease has the potential to inspire all types of connections: scientific, communal, and personal.

By eroding intimacy and forcing the afflicted into a state of solitude, self-dependence, and stoicism, AIDS initially sounded like a disease that fosters a traditional masculinity of sorts in those who contract it. However, this type of thinking itself—that diseases mean more than bodily infection—is the wrong way to consider things. Perhaps, as we continue into the post-COVID pandemic future, we can also choose to remember that disease is no metaphor and to care for others, especially those suffering. Even in the face of diseases that encourage physical separation to prevent their spread, recognizing our responsibility to maintain a presence—as difficult as it may be—is the first step towards demonstrating true strength.

4. The Beginning of the End or The End of The Beginning: Apocalypse Part I

In 2016, approximately 7% of fathers identified as "stay-at-home dads"—an increase of 75% since 1989 (Livingston and Parker). In the same year, stay-at-home dads comprised 17% of all stay-at-home parents—a jump from only 10% in 1989 (Livingston and Parker). With the premise that "[c]are begets care" (255), Karla Elliott highlights men who perform care work like active parenting as examples of individuals who have rejected domineering forms of masculinity in favor of "affective, relational, nondominating," and caring forms (254). Andrea Doucet's *Do Men Mother? Fathering, Care, and Domestic Responsibility* finds that fathers "are actively reconstructing masculinities" through embracing "aspects of traditional feminine characteristics" (231); while men may not mother, per se, fathers transform conceptions of manhood when they perform hands-on care work which enables them to "create new forms of masculinity," focused on caregiving rather than breadwinning (233).

Further explorations into the intersections of care and masculinity push back on this optimistic conclusion. Sarah C. Hunter, Damien W. Riggs, and Martha Augoustinos argue that "the ideas surrounding a caring masculinity are better understood as a broadening of hegemonic masculinity to include roles more traditionally undertaken by women," which frames the practice of caregiving through fatherhood as an insidious metastasizing of hegemony in gender rather than a departure from it (6). A study by

Daniel B. Eisen and Liann Yamashita reports similar findings to this conclusion, noting that, "by appropriating characteristics that have historically been used to subordinate women," such as performing care work (816), guys "see themselves as progressive, caring men who reject current conceptualizations of masculinity while maintaining a system that propels them toward power and prestige" (818). From these perspectives, instead of providing an alternative construction of manhood, caring masculinity simply reinscribes the qualities it supposedly rejects.

Ana Jordan echoes these claims with her own extended study of fathers' rights groups. Recognizing that her findings do not "necessarily cast doubt on the potential" of a positive relationship between care and manhood, she nevertheless states that they "illustrate some of the difficulties with disentangling 'positive' forms of caring masculinity given that caring masculinity is currently frequently expressed in ways that are far from ideal in feminist terms and may *incorporate* rather than *reject* domination" (Jordan 36).

The guiding question behind the next two chapter is, how can fatherhood positively embody caring attributes *without* devolving into the domineering mode that scholars like Hunter, Eisen, and Jordan have appropriately recognized and criticized? To answer this question, I turn to the end and what comes after, the ultimate crisis: the apocalypse. Initially, I examine an American apocalyptic event (or series of events) that has already occurred: the displacement and eradication of indigenous tribes across the

continent. Using James Fenimore Cooper's *The Last of the Mohicans* (1826)—a text with its own fraught relationship to the Native Americans it depicts—as an entry point, I explore how an historical moment of apocalypse can inform an understanding of fatherhood's care in the face of an inalterable doom. Because Native Americans have already negotiated versions of apocalypse like the one that Cooper depicts, I examine the Indigenous interpretation of temporality known as spiraling time in conjunction with this historical moment of eschaton in order to establish a framework for how groups or individuals can involve the past and the future in the decision-making process of the present. This alternative conception of time proves to be particularly useful in the contemporary moment, for many environmental scholars believe that the planet is hurtling towards an irreversible, global change of apocalyptic proportions.

4.1 Apocalypse Then

Leslie Fiedler pronounced James Fenimore Cooper "a writer for children, more specifically for boys" due to his penchant throughout the Leatherstocking Tales for male protagonists who go on adventures and escape from both danger and civilization by retreating to the woods (181). For Fiedler, such features link Cooper's work to texts like *Gulliver's Travels*, *Robinson Crusoe*, and *Oliver Twist*. An additional characteristic of *The Last of the Mohicans* he neglects is the sheer amount of violent conflict the novel contains.

In the woods, Indians could be lurking anywhere, and thus, so could a swift and bloody death. Fierce skirmishes abound, including instances of Hawkeye shooting

Magua (Cooper 43), the Iroquois shooting David Gamut (66), and the Mohicans shooting the Hurons (111). When the noise from Gamut's colt risks the group's safety as night falls on the woods, Uncas shoots it with an arrow before Chingachgook slits its throat and disposes of it in the river, with the animal "gasping audibly for breath with its ebbing life" (47). The climaxes of both parts of the novel center on violent death—the first half culminating with the massacre at Fort William Henry that features a Huron "[dashing] the head of [an] infant against a rock" and a "flow of blood [that] might be likened to the outbreaking of a torrent" (176) and the second half with the killings of Cora, Uncas, and Magua.

While violent encounters in the woods are one of Cooper's most common motifs, Chingachgook and Uncas—two of the novel's heroes and representations of the "good Indian"—commit some of the most brutal acts. John McWilliams addresses the paradox, noting that readers "are asked to admire Chingachgook, but also to wonder whether he is not acting in needlessly brutal ways" (58). Chingachgook takes pride in tormenting his enemies, telling Hawkeye after a fight with the Iroquois that "the great snake of the Mohicans has coiled himself in their wigwams, and has poisoned their triumph with the wailings of children, whose fathers have not returned!" (Cooper 77).[1] Chingachgook is the one who engages in hand-to-hand combat with Magua, stabs him, and immediately

[1] Chingachgook's name translates to "Big Serpent"; he is named such for "[striking] his enemies when they least expect him" (Cooper 57).

goes to scalp his slain enemies after Magua escapes (114). Uncas, "the image of Indian nobility" (Martin 62) who shows tenderness to the Munro girls throughout the text, is just as vicious as his father in battle, shattering the skulls of enemies with his tomahawk and seeking carnage "like a hungry lion" (Cooper 112). He shows pride in claiming the scalp of a cowardly Oneida who attempts to snipe Chingachgook, triumphantly displaying it before Heyward (196) despite being the ostensible noble savage. While such actions may comport with Delaware and Huron standards of combat, they can nonetheless shake the reader as deeply as they do Heyward.

The novel's brutality generally and the violence committed by Chingachgook and Uncas particularly notwithstanding, a key moment of departure occurs between father and son during a seeming moment of calm. After Uncas disposes of the sniper and the rest of the group retires to sleep, the two Mohicans find themselves alone and seek to take advantage of the respite: "Casting off, at once, the grave and austere demeanour of an Indian chief, Chingachgook commenced speaking to his son in the soft and playful tones of affection. Uncas gladly met the familiar air of his father, and…a complete change was effected in the manner of [the] two" (199-200). Cooper continues describing the interaction, noting how "[t]he eyes of the father followed the plastic and ingenious movements of the son with open delight, and he never failed to smile in reply to the other's contagious, but low laughter" (200). When they finally get a moment to

themselves after repeated altercations, escapes, and near-death moments, Chingachgook and Uncas spend it not as chief and noble warrior but as father and son.

Closely examining any of the Native American characters in *The Last of the Mohicans* is inherently tricky because decades of criticism about Cooper and his work demonstrate his own troubled understanding of the peoples he represented. Some scholars, like Richard Slotkin, believe that Cooper "never loves his Indians so much as when he is watching them disappear, and that for him…the only good Indians were dead" (xxv). Others, like James F. Beard, are more forgiving in their assessment of Cooper, acknowledging how he sought out the available resources at his disposal (such as Indian chiefs with whom he conducted interviews) to portray sentiments towards removal legislation accurately (Peck 8). Whether Cooper's rendering of the tribes in *Mohicans* is racist caricature, embellished elegy, or a sincere but flawed attempt at American mythmaking, the fact remains that he puts the moments of "deepest human feeling in the book" (McWilliams 56) between Uncas and Chingachgook rather than Duncan and Alice, Uncas and Cora, or even Munro and his daughters. While it may seem surprising when juxtaposed with the text's savagery, the tender, intimate moment between Chingachgook and Uncas does not diminish their standing or make them appear weak. It reads as a natural bond between loving father and son.

Uncas and his father are unaware of it as they spend time together mid-way through the novel, but they are both hurtling towards apocalypse. Cooper, however, is

keenly aware of their fates—the novel's title gives it away before the reader opens the text—and the plot progresses to the ultimate lamentation of a bygone era in American history. The novel's conclusion inverts the typical progression of fatherhood by depicting a father witness his son's death, which renders the snapshot of playful affection between father and son all the more significant because "the Mohicans see their claim on the future collapse forever" at the "moment of apparent renewal" (Martin 63). Chingachgook survives, but the possibility of any future for the Mohicans is snuffed out with "absolute finality" (63). The fictionalized account of the end of the Mohicans then serves as the genesis point of current events for Cooper's contemporary readers.

In his text-closing speech, Tamenund alludes to the presumably inevitable decline of Native Americans at the hands of "[t]he pale-faces" who are "masters of the earth" (Cooper 350). While Tamenund seemingly mourns the tragic end of not only the Mohicans but "the time of the red-men," his rhetoric offers a glimmer of hope for the future (350). The complete antepenultimate line of his lamentation notes, "The pale-faces are masters of the earth, and the time of the red-men has not *yet come again*" (350; emphasis mine). While the pale-faces may be masters of the earth presently, it is not destined to be that way perpetually; the time of the red-men will come again. The end has arrived, but they will endure—and the love from Chingachgook for Uncas and Uncas for Chingachgook just may be a symptom of how.

4.2 Post-Apocalypse Now

In *After the End*, James Berger claims that "[i]t is not *inevitability* that gives a[n] historical event an apocalyptic character. It is its ability to obliterate existing narratives, to initiate a new history that takes the form of an ominous and symptomatic aftermath" (21). Cooper's framing of Uncas's tragic end seems inevitable from an historical standpoint, as it foretells the ensuing inevitable demise of Native Americans as the dominant peoples of the American continent. However, this inescapable condition becomes an example of real-life apocalypse in United States history because it marked a new chapter for Native Americans that exists in a continuum from Cooper's fictionalized history to the reality of the present day.

Signed into law on May 28, 1830, the Indian Removal Act allowed the President to pronounce "so much of any territory belonging to the United States, west of the river Mississippi… to be divided into a suitable number of districts, for the reception of such tribes or nations of Indians as may choose to exchange the lands where they now reside, and remove there" (United States 411-412). While the removal of American Indians from southeastern states was not initially forced, tribes were encouraged to make deals with the federal government for the promise of larger areas of land and sovereignty west of the Mississippi. Eventually, the "as may choose" aspect of the Act became compulsory, leading to forced removal such as the Trail of Tears, the most well-known and arguably

most egregious contribution to the 'vanishing' of Native Americans from the collective minds and consciousnesses of white/European-Americans.

Though the Indian Removal Act and its fallout occurred after the publication of *Mohicans* in 1826, they were the culmination of a long chain of events that stoked widespread beliefs that the presence of indigenous peoples in America was inevitably coming to an end. Between 1814 and 1824, future president Andrew Jackson helped negotiate nine separate treaties that resulted in the trading of Native-settled lands in the east for unoccupied lands in western territories (Moser), including the so-called Jackson Purchase of southwestern Kentucky and western Tennessee from the Chickasaw tribe in 1818 (Semmer). Thus, a seemingly constant refrain over this ten-year period was the acquisition of Native lands by the United States, a process which only continued after *Mohicans* was published and became a success throughout the U.S. and Europe.

While the colonizing impulse for land ownership motivated Jackson as synecdoche for the federal government, ownership as such was not the chief detriment for tribes that experienced relocation; the stakes were much higher. Kyle Powys Whyte argues that, contemporarily, "some indigenous peoples already inhabit what [their] ancestors would have likely characterized as a dystopian future" because indigenous groups can no longer "relate locally to many of the plants and animals that are significant to them culturally and spiritually" ("Our Ancestors'" 207). Settler colonial campaigns like those during the first half of the 19th century not only "dramatically

changed ecosystems," but they "obstructed indigenous peoples' capacities to adapt to the changes…through removal and containment on reservations" (209). An apocalypse is not only eschaton, the divine ending of the world outright, but also "catastrophes that resemble the imagined final ending, that can be interpreted as eschaton, as an end of something, a way of life or thinking" (Berger 5). Dozens of indigenous tribes in the eastern United States underwent an apocalyptic moment through warfare, exodus, and containment far from the land that was once home.

The social and political reverberations from these apocalypses have been varied and widespread, but these events have received renewed interest in light of the current historical epoch of the Anthropocene—the age of human activity transforming the world. Humanity's influence on the planet has revealed that the ecological system "believed, or at least imagined and hoped, to be stable and self-correcting" is actually "unstable and even prone to collapse" because of human choices (Purdy 17). More importantly, many scholars view the near future (if not the present) as a "period of irreversible destabilization of the global climate system—an impending climate crisis" that will, best-case scenario, alter life as we know it on a global scale and, worst-case, result in the extinction of humanity (Whyte, "Indigenous" 225).[2] Environmental scholars such as Candis Callison seek to approach discussions of climate change through the

[2] Some scholars argue that, on a planetary scale, the extinction of humanity is actually the best-case scenario for Earth enduring.

experiences of "those [Indigenous peoples] who have endured a century of immense cultural, political and environmental changes" not only because tribes were severed from the environments important to them but because their experience of life in contemporary America is post-apocalyptic (42), a fate soon to be shared by humanity at large. The precipice of the cataclysmic chasm that humanity currently faces may not be as horrific for Indigenous peoples because they have experienced it before and have endured; they merely must do so again. In fact, at the conclusion of his sprawling, Pulitzer Prize winning novel, *The Overstory*, Richard Powers inserts four unnamed Native American characters into the story—the first Indigenous peoples in nearly 500 pages. For a novel that insists that "[w]e need…to become indigenous again," (Powers 339), it is only at the edge of environmental apocalypse when actual Indigenous Americans appear, prepared to survive once again due to their understanding of nature, what it provides, and what humanity at large has done to it. While some scholars of climate crisis might view such an ending as overly sentimental, it nevertheless reifies a contemporary faith in the Indigenous as stewards of nature, capable of providing a type of care for and receiving a type of care from the non-human natural world.[3]

Whyte argues that part of the reason that Indigenous peoples can negotiate devastating scenarios is because many tribes perceive time in variously non-linear fashions. While he notes different examples, he focuses on the Anishinaabe perspective

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[3] See Jedediah Purdy's "Thinking Like a Mountain" (2017) for more on sentimentality in nature writing.

of "a spiraling temporality…in which it makes sense to consider ourselves as living alongside future and past relatives simultaneously as we walk through life" ("Indigenous" 228-229). He claims that this form of spiraling time often involves counterfactual dialogues where individuals "speculate on how [their] ancestors and…future generations would interpret today's situations and what recommendations they would make…as guidance for…individual and collective actions" (229). Though individuals cannot literally converse with non-present family members, treating such dialogues as actual conversations with imagined responses from past or future relatives highlights how an individual's life exists in the present in contact with past lives and with those in the future. Far from a conservative return to 'the old ways,' counterfactual dialogues of spiraling time encourage individuals to understand the decision-making of past generations not to excuse past mistakes but to help recognize them in the hopes of learning lessons that can then be passed on to future generations (238). In the face of apocalypse, spiraling time is an "intergenerational dialogue that unfolds through finding and empowering those protagonists who can inspire and guide us through the ancestral dystopias we continue to endure" (233).

In *Mohicans*, neither Chingachgook nor Uncas performs counterfactual dialogues to influence their decision-making. However, an intergenerational philosophy does seem to impact how the Mohicans think and act throughout the text. Uncas, the last great warrior of the Mohicans, rises to lead the Delawares against Magua because his

lineage focuses its eyes "on the rising, and not toward the setting sun" (Cooper 311). While there is no hope of revitalizing the Mohican tribe because there are no Mohican women left, Cooper dangles a hope for the futurity of the bloodline by "keeping that possibility [of a marriage between Uncas and Cora] open through the novel" (Armstrong and Tennenhouse 226). In Michael Mann's 1992 epic historical drama, the most recent film adaptation of the novel, Hawkeye "looks and acts more like Uncas" than Chingachgook, for the film shifts him from the elder Indian's companion to his adopted son (Torgovnick 145). Because Mann not only aligns Hawkeye with Uncas as brothers but conflates their characteristics compared to their depiction in the novel, the film pairs Uncas with Alice and Hawkeye with Cora. Though Uncas still dies in the end (along with Alice), the film establishes "a subversive logic according to which [Chingachgook is] not really the last Mohican at all," for adopted son Hawkeye "actually counts as a Mohican too" (149). While Hawkeye's and Cora's future children will be white and expressly not Mohicans, they will inherit a deep-seated respect for and knowledge of Mohican beliefs and customs. Even if the Mohicans themselves are doomed, their spirit as stewards of nature will persist beyond this apocalyptic moment, just as Cooper's fiction has persisted in contemporary culture.[4]

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[4] For more on contemporary depictions of the inheritance of Indian spiritual values by white Americans, see "New American Indian/ New American White" in Marianna Torgovnick's *Primitive Passions* (1997).

Though these largescale iterations of the past/present/future continuum are significant in the novel, the microcosm of care between Chingachgook and Uncas best signifies the goals of a spiraling temporality. Father and son face apocalypse together. When an unalterable doom hovers on the horizon, they maintain commitments to love one another and respect one another. As the apocalyptic moment nears and the Delawares prepare for war with the Hurons, Chingachgook does not seek to protect Uncas from what he seeks to do and what needs to be done.[5] In fact, Chingachgook, while maintaining a position of reverence and authority, becomes deferential to Uncas's command of the 200-plus Delaware warriors. This reversal of roles where the son becomes a father-like figure and the father himself recognizes the son's ability to function independently are symptoms of how fatherhood may persist after apocalypse.

Still, while present, the indigenous approach to facing eschaton is not Cooper's chief focus. Instead, *The Last of the Mohicans* sets the stage for American national identity by crafting two futures: "one, opening out unto a different America…the other, harking back to a pre-history that had already passed…into legend" (Armstrong and Tennenhouse 240). By delineating the origin point of an American identity at the moment of destruction for indigenous peoples, Cooper makes apocalypse part of the American story. Since history has progressed to the point where collapse is once again

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[5] Contrast this mindset with that of the father of Francis Lawrence's 2007 post-apocalyptic film *I Am Legend*, where virologist and father Robert Neville cannot yield control of a protector/savior role and, ultimately, does not survive into the future he enables. Though the original ending of the film does see Neville survive, his savior-complex throughout the film engendered by his inability to save his own family persists.

seemingly inevitable, I seek to take the lessons of indigenous approaches to withstand the end in the past and put them in conversation with the apocalypse of our future.

5. The End of Fatherhood: Apocalypse Part II

Building upon my exploration of historical American apocalypse and an indigenous perception of spiraling time in an effort to answer how fatherhood can positively embody care without devolving into domination, I now turn to a contemporary interpretation of the speculative, future apocalypse. Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* (2006) offers an exemplary depiction of a type of fatherhood that maintains the traditionally male approach to caring for one's child—namely protection and provision—and simultaneously integrates the relationality and tenderness often associated with motherhood and femininity. The result is an adaptation of the spiraling time mindset that holds the child's future as equally important to their needs in the present. This style of parenting is what I refer to as post-apocalyptic fatherhood: a version of the father/child relationship that acknowledges the importance of protecting and providing from a survival perspective but also recognizes that the parent/offspring relationship extends beyond the adult/child relationship, making protection and provision only a portion of one's caring duties. Through this recognition, the ultimate act of caring becomes setting the child up to be able to protect/provide for themselves, in various contexts, as they grow up. Rather than view a child as merely a non-autonomous agent that simply must be protected/provided for, the post-apocalyptic father must attend to his child's needs and concurrently value the child's personhood to ensure not only physical survival but an emotional and spiritual survival.

5.1 Surviving, Living, and Caring After the End of the World

James Berger posits that, in apocalyptic writing, the cataclysmic event itself "is only part of the point," (6) because the great paradox of the genre is that "[t]he end is never the end" (5). Apocalyptic writing oftentimes becomes post-apocalyptic writing because the period after the supposed end of the world unveils aspects of humanity and society that can only exist through the juxtaposition of their largescale collapse and the memory of what once was. In this sense of comparison, post-apocalyptic writing "is a study of what disappears and what remains, and of how the remainder has been transformed" (7). In the post-apocalyptic landscape of Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*, fatherhood—the relationship that "guides every moment of the novel's action"—both remains and has been transformed (Kunsa 67). Yet, the interactions between the unnamed father and son within the circumstances they experience demonstrate how the caring relationship of fatherhood is not quite irrevocably altered.[1] Rather, the post-apocalyptic condition dramatizes the necessity of a complete form of care even in a world that literalizes the imperatives of protection and provision—the traditional markers of masculine care.

The father and son inhabit a dying world that offers them little, if anything, to avoid a similar fate sooner rather than later. As the sole protector and provider for his son, the man must continually think and act in ways that stave off their impending

[1] Because the father and son go unnamed in the novel, I refer to the former as "the father" or "the man" and the latter as "the son" or "the boy" throughout this chapter.

doom. From the text's first pages, readers witness the stark reality of this mindset in action. The novel opens with the line, "[w]hen he woke in the woods in the dark and the cold of the night he'd reach out to touch the child sleeping beside him" (McCarthy 3). The reader's introduction to this world and the characters who inhabit it is the man waking in the middle of the night and instinctually reaching out to make sure that his son is present, safe, and alive. Readers not only experience the frenetic waking and reaching out of the man through the words, but they share in it through McCarthy's poeticism. The first part of the sentence consists of six anapests—unstressed syllable, unstressed syllable, stressed syllable—which mimics the regularity and calmness of the man's mind and body at rest. As the man wakes and reaches out to touch the child, the regularity of syllables disappears, and there is no discernible pattern of stresses versus unstresses. This is not a simple half-asleep glance to check on the boy; the man jolts awake with the quickened heartbeat of dread for the worst possible scenario. Welcome to the end of the world where even sleep is no longer restful.

As the novel unfolds, the implications of the opening passage crystalize, for the man does not shy away from reminding himself or his son of his duties. The man tells the boy quite bluntly, "[m]y job is to take care of you. I was appointed to do that by God. I will kill anyone who touches you" (77). He makes the most explicit conveyance of the protection imperative in the post-apocalyptic world. Love is "not sentimental at all"— or the type of love Steven Frye refers to as "gimme a hug love" ("Cormac McCarthy").

Instead, love is killing anyone who threatens the sanctity of one's relationship. Whenever this love is tested, the man reaffirms his commitment to his son, assuring the boy that he "wont ever leave [him]" (McCarthy 114).[2]

Daily, the man performs discrete actions to support his verbalized mission. For protection, he shoots a thug who approaches the boy with malicious intent (66), identifies possible threats before they get too close and takes evasive action (103), minimizes the chance of sickness by rejecting suspect food (22), and defends the pair from aggressors (263). For provision, he builds fires whenever possible and safe to provide them with warmth and comfort (16, 30, 36, 47, 72, 84, 88, 95, 102, 168, 182, 207, 218, 276), scavenges any edible food (40, 121, 207), and locates clean water sources (122, 201). Ashley Kunsa notes "the similarities between…[Ernest] Hemingway's style and the style of *The Road*," and the novel's numerous, poignant descriptions of the father's methodical approach to performing survival tasks are no mere coincidence (71n2).

In his writing, Hemingway sought "the real thing, the sequence of motion and fact which made the emotion" (2). Hemingway's fiction "renders character in concrete details" as one means of accomplishing this goal (Stoneback 17). Rather than insisting on characterization through explaining how and why individuals are what they are, Hemingway "defines character, conduct, and manners through sharply focused

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[2] Throughout the novel, McCarthy refrains from using punctuation such as commas and apostrophes unless necessary to understand the word (such as using an apostrophe in the contraction "he'll" but not in "dont"). These grammatical choices are maintained in all quotes in this chapter.

attention to…particular action[s]" which enables the reader to witness a character's true self (99). McCarthy infuses *The Road* with a similar style by using pronouns to "emphasize the characters' deeds by drawing away as little attention as possible from action verbs" (Kunsa 61). For both Hemingway and McCarthy, words are one thing, but actions are another thing entirely [3]; characters "are clearly knowable and differentiable from one another by what they *do*," and the father's pattern of behavior throughout the text highlights his sincere dedication to his son's wellbeing (61).

Commitments to protection and provision for others hold a precarious place, particularly in how they are typically gendered. In *Caring Democracy*, Joan Tronto does not claim that men do not perform caring duties—in fact, she emphatically states that men *do* care. Rather, she argues that men receive a "pass" for "'girl things,' including the caring responsibilities assigned to women" because of how they typically care and how that care is framed (Tronto 68). Protection is a privileged form of caring because the individuals providing and receiving it are "marked by masculinity" (75). Since protection at the societal level comes from hyper-masculinized sources such as the police and military, the caring dimension of protection becomes obscured. This process is compounded by the association between protection and violence. By partaking in

[3] For an example of the vapidity of words in *The Road*, see the father's conversation with Ely (McCarthy 165-174).

'manly' forms of care like protection, men "work to earn themselves the 'protection pass' out of responsibility for other, more feminized forms of care work" (79).

Likewise, provision becomes privileged due to the stereotypical division in how men and women historically earn their citizenship; the former receive it through their contributions to society outside the home while the latter are defined by their domestic duties. Tronto posits that the inherent "state of competition" amongst men in the external world of the workplace encourages a "highly individualistic" mindset that emphasizes the role of the man working and diminishes the relational underpinnings of how that work contributes to the well-being of the domestic unit (87). By using protection and provision as excuses to avoid performing what are typically considered feminized forms of care, men—and fathers in particular—are able to appear caring, be considered caring, and receive praise for caring while they simultaneously elide the more personal, embodied forms of the practice.

None of this pertains post-apocalypse. The post-apocalyptic situation and the disintegration of society it engenders transform the very nature of protection and provision. They become so imperative for survival that neglecting them or ignoring them becomes a swift death sentence.[4] As Tronto argues, much of what denotes protection and provision as masculine forms of care are based on societal constructions

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[4] In the post-apocalyptic fiction of Octavia Butler, such as *Parable of the Sower* (1993), women oftentimes become the protectors and providers, further destabilizing the stereotypical, pre-apocalyptic divide of caring duties after the disintegration of society.

and notions of citizenship. After all, her project in *Caring Democracy* is to consider "what it means to be a citizen in a democracy" (x) and how "put[ting] responsibilities for caring at the center of…democratic political agendas" will improve democratic society (ix). These trappings are stripped away in a post-apocalyptic wasteland because concepts of domestic work versus external work become meaningless—such "[o]ld and troubling issues [resolve] into nothingness and night" (McCarthy 28)—at least in part because the domicile no longer exists as such.[5] Though the concept of competition remains, and is even amplified, protection and provision become some of the most personal, embodied actions of tenderness one can perform because they are quite literally life-giving.

Even with this newfound emphasis on the sheer necessity of protecting and providing *The Road* goes to great lengths to transcend them. Survival has additional meaning beyond prolonging one's physical life as long as possible amidst the breakdown of external structures. True survival not only involves life but *living*—and living requires some sort of spiritual or emotional nourishment that instills purpose and even joy. The text foregrounds the concept by focusing on episodes of love and tenderness between father and son. After searching through an abandoned grocery store for whatever food has been left behind, for example, the pair happens upon an

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[5] In "The Good Guys: McCarthy's *The Road* as Post – 9/11 Male Sentimental Novel," Nell Sullivan notes that "US rhetoric has historically conflated nation, home, and woman, with *domestic* describing all three" (84) and *The Road* eschews all three.

overturned soft drink machine. The father sticks his hand inside and manages to find a can of Coca-Cola, probably one of the last ones in the entire country. Amidst the destruction, waste, and destitution surrounding them, the father and son sit down, and the former presents the can to the latter as "a treat" (23). The boy, who has most likely never tasted a fizzy drink in his entire life, remarks that it tastes "really good" (23). However, his next impulse is to offer it to his father. Even though the man wants his son to enjoy this special moment of respite, the boy wants to share it with the man who is his "world entire" (6). The simplicity and commonplace nature of this exchange (at least from a reader's perspective) that is preceded by a scavenging trip through a lifeless, abandoned house and followed by an arrival in a city that is littered with "mummied dead everywhere" (24) emphasizes how different the post-apocalyptic world is from the pre-; the horrific has become ordinary and the normal has become extraordinary.

In seeking such 'normal' experiences for his son, the man strives to give the boy a semblance of the joy that life has to offer. It is not a superficial desire or desire only when convenient. Rather, the man's behavior demonstrates that his yearning for his son to live is just as important as his mission for him to survive. When the pair finally reaches their destination of the coast, they see a shipwrecked boat that the father eventually explores for supplies. While the food and supplies that he scavenges are important survival items, possibly the most significant item he discovers is a brass flare gun. He delivers it to his son, explains its purpose, and agrees to shoot it off that night.

Shooting the flare gun ostensibly alerts the outcast thief to their location shortly thereafter (253) and could be interpreted as a lapse in judgment by the father. Yet, it points to something deeper. As an individual who always has a plan and always thinks things through, the father understands the risk of shooting a flare into the night sky.[6] However, the opportunity to give his son something that "could be like a celebration" (241) is more important at that moment because life without living is no life at all.

In addition to providing moments of happiness that he and his son can share, the father seeks to instill in his son a sense of drive and purpose. From the outset of the novel, the pair travels with a particular destination in mind: the coast. The father recognizes that there is "no substance" to this particular location, but it gives them an end to strive for (29).[7] Once they arrive at the coast that proves to be as gray and barren as the father anticipated, they create a new goal: finding other people (244). For this second mission, the father recognizes that his health has deteriorated to the point that he does not have much time left and the need to find companionship for the boy outweighs the risks associated with other people. Even though he does not have a particular destination in mind, he focuses their efforts on finding those who share in their same

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[6] The process by which the man finds the flare gun demonstrates his ingenuity, levelheadedness, and ability to analyze a situation, and it is delivered in one of the longest paragraphs in the entire novel (McCarthy 238-240).

[7] The relative purposelessness of the final location contributes to the novel's pilgrimage theme and imagery where the journey—the road—and the lessons one learns are more important than the destination. Contrast the pilgrimage with a defined destination to the roadrat's response of "I dont know" when the father asks him where he is going with his truck (McCarthy 63). Interestingly, this individual offers a precise answer to all of the other questions the father asks him during their exchange.

system of values. By creating operations with discrete objectives, the father attempts to give meaning to life beyond survival.

Just as significant as these outward journeys is the inward motivation to press on. Throughout the novel, especially when things seem bleakest, the father and son remind themselves that they are "carrying the fire" (83). Scholars have interpreted the concept of carrying the fire in different ways, ascribing it different meanings—from a symbolic process of "carry[ing] the seeds of civilization" (Wielenberg 4) to "some entrapped divine spark of the Gnostics" (Josephs 26) to a reference to the Celtic tradition of the hearth fire as "the center of family activity" (Bennett) to a reworking of the Promethean myth (Luttrull 20). Particular interpretations aside, the conversations between father and son about carrying the fire help "establish and buffer a common understanding, a single point of view on the world shared by both interlocutors" (Vanderheide 110). Choosing to face a world of darkness by orienting themselves as harbingers of light, father and son not only endure but prevail, which gives the father's version of parenthood a much more complex dimension than simply addressing basic survival needs.[8]

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[8] McCarthy's works and style (especially early in his career) are often compared to those of William Faulkner (Woodward). Man's ability not only to endure but prevail is a belief shared by Faulkner in his Nobel Prize Banquet speech on December 10, 1950.

Kevin Kearney notes that *The Road* juxtaposes "annihilating entropy" with a desire "to pass on life…betokened by the 'fire'" the father and son carry (161). However, for a text "explicitly concerned with questions of human futurity" (161), *The Road*'s purposeful lack of referents gives it the impression of existing outside of time. The unnamed apocalyptic event occurred in the past, prior to the boy's birth, and the boy appears to be somewhere between six and ten years old.[9] Time passes in the novel, but the vignettes rarely offer any temporal transition. Survivors don't know how to interpret time because the new forever is both "a long time" yet "no time at all" (28). Even the status of the immediate future is nebulous because, as the old man Ely says, "[p]eople were always getting ready for tomorrow," but "[t]omorrow wasnt getting ready for them. It didnt even know they were there" (168). Ely's personification of a cold, detached, naturalistic future implies a futility in trying to negotiate it. However, the dual interpretation of what it means to survive—to physically endure and to maintain some vestiges of morality that give a life purpose—dominates the father's thoughts and actions. It highlights how, even in a time after the end of times, a spiraling temporality can exist to help negotiate a post-apocalyptic existence. If spiraling time consists of a constant dialogue with both the past and the future in order to inform the present, the father's decision-making is not based solely on immediately prolonging his and his son's

[9] See Ellis "Another Sense of Ending: The Keynote Address to the Knoxville Conference" (29) and Spurgeon's introduction to *Cormac McCarthy: All the Pretty Horses, No Country for Old Men, The Road* (18).

existence but on setting the boy up to live life the 'right way' despite the external circumstances.

Throughout the novel the father *could* make certain decisions that would benefit him and his son in their present moment and even their immediate future, but he explicitly refuses to do so when they would compromise his son's future well-being. One of the text's most common refrains is how hungry the father and son are (32, 69, 81, 103, 108, 203, 231, 281), even if the boy won't admit it, for edible food is a finite resource generally relegated to forgotten cans or jars not betrayed by their seals. The most abundant source of food, and the only source of food that can technically be renewed, is other people.[10] Cannibalism appears to be relatively common practice in the novel. Many of the individuals the pair encounters are either victims of cannibalism—the roadrat the father shoots whose bones "looked to have been boiled" (71) when he returns to the body, the basement full of slaves being held as human cattle (110)—or actively participate in it, such as the "woman…with a waddling gait" who ostensibly gives birth and immediately proceeds to cook the infant for herself and three companions to eat (195). Thematically, the killing of the newborn for food functions as a perfect juxtaposition to the father's mindset. Where the father risks his own well-being

[10] The only foods that the father and son forage are a "small colony" of "shrunken, dried and wrinkled" morels (McCarthy 40) and the "[h]ard and brown and shriveled" remaining fruits of an apple orchard (121). Both are strongly implied to be old growths that had been passed over and forgotten rather than new.

in the present in favor of his son's morality in the future, this woman and her companions sacrifice the next generation for their own temporary continuance.

Partaking in cannibalism is a line the father and son emphatically refuse to cross "[n]o matter what," even when they are starving (128). As noted by Brad McDuffie, morality in the text aligns with "those who are cannibals and those who are not" (22). The former group exemplifies those who have "made of the world a lie every word" (McCarthy 75) while the latter are those who sustain a resolve to remain good. To vet the man who finds him at the end of the novel, the boy ensures that he has not eaten his own children nor anyone else before deciding to join him, even after the man agrees that he is also carrying the fire (284). No matter how agreeable, like-minded, or respectable a person may appear, defiling the enduring sanctity of the human body by consuming it immediately betrays that image.

Where the refusal to succumb to cannibalism addresses morality in times of desperation, the father instills in his son another lesson of what it means to be good in their solitary moment of excess: when they stumble upon the fully stocked bunker. The refuge contains virtually everything they could possibly need, from food to clothes to clean water to soap and even luxuries that the boy has never encountered like a chemical toilet, a working electric lantern, and freshly ground coffee.[11] The boxes of canned food, "hundreds of gallons" of water (138), and cases of gas could equate to months of living

[11] The only thing that the bunker lacks is a gun to take advantage of the boxes of bullets it contains.

in the "richness of a vanished world" (139). However, the pair only stays for a few days before moving on and continuing their journey to the coast. The father rationalizes that, since the door to the bunker has been exposed, "[a]nyone could see the hatch lying in the yard and they would know at once what it was" (144). Still, based upon his experience since the start of the apocalypse, the father must know that this bunker is the closest thing his son will ever get to a glimpse of the old world. It is not by mere coincidence that the experience causes the man to have the realization that, "to the boy he was himself an alien. A being from a planet that no longer existed" (153). By staying in the bunker, he could provide his son with a warm, dry, clean, satiated existence until their stores ran out or they were discovered. In a world that cannot "be made right again" (287), one may consider such an existence—for however long or short it lasts—to be the ultimate gift, especially in light of the father's God-given duty to protect and provide for his son. Yet the man does not entertain this notion and, shortly after arriving in the bunker, he and his son return to the road. They have a journey to continue. Even the greatest blessing of protection and provision imaginable does not supersede the importance of the father's other goal for his boy—nurturing a future version who would receive a greater mental and emotional benefit from proceeding than the temporary physical benefit from remaining stationary.

Rejecting decisions in the present that jeopardize the lives of descendants in the future comprises part of the spiraling time mindset to which I alluded in Indigenous

ontology. Considering the past is an equally important component, for descendants and ancestors walk on the same temporal plane as currently living individuals. Determining what is right versus what is wrong involves weighing "memories and stories of past persons" (Whyte, "Indigenous" 229-230) against present circumstances in order to "empower protagonists that can help us survive the dystopia or post-apocalypse" (231). Just like much of the external world and the structures that helped maintain society, after the apocalyptic event of *The Road*, memory itself seems to have collapsed into nothingness and waste. By the time the novel is set, memory at large has degraded to the point that even birds—creatures that died out with the rest of the animal kingdom years prior—are no longer easily replicable in drawing (McCarthy 63). The father himself fears that "each memory recalled must do some violence to its origins" and warns himself to "be sparing" in his recollections (131). Throughout the novel, he wrestles with the notion that "[t]here is no past" (54) and that, one day, "the world…would all be lost" as it completely fades from memory (18).

Ultimately, however, memories of the time prior to the apocalypse prove instrumental in shaping the man's outlook and what he imparts to his son, and these memories consistently intrude upon the present action of the novel. While the man's recollections are numerous and varied, there are three types that have a profound impact on how he seeks to negotiate a future for his son. The first group consists of memories of life's joys. These include the "perfect day of his childhood" spent with his

uncle (13) and a night on the beach with his wife that made him believe that "if he were God he would have made the world just so and no different" (219). The second group focuses on familial bonding, such as his recollections of Christmas and doing homework by the fire with his sisters, prompted by his arrival at his own childhood home (26), observing the gap in what is ostensibly the Great Smoky Mountains with his father (33), and the childhood day with his uncle.[12] The last group—though it really consists of one core memory—deals with confronting evil. The man recalls being around his son's age and witnessing "a great bolus of serpents perhaps a hundred in number" unearthed from the ground "[l]ike the bowels of some great beast exposed to the day" (188).[13] The only solution to dealing with the snakes was to set them on fire, for the men in charge "[had] no remedy for evil but only for the image of it" (188). In the post-apocalyptic world, a similar manifestation of evil has been revealed, and that evil has seemingly surrounded the man and boy. Rather than relying on an external fire to superficially destroy the image of this evil, the father resolves to carry a fire within to prevent this evil from overtaking him and his son. The bond that they share and the intimate moments of tenderness they experience with one another are markers of the fire. When

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[12] According to Wesley G. Morgan, the gap is the Newfound Gap on the border of Tennessee and North Carolina (42). See Morgan's "The Route and Roots of 'The Road'" for a complete tracing of the father and son's journey in the novel.

[13] This memory, like many of the father's memories in the novel, is an allusion to one of Ernest Hemingway's Nick Adams stories. Throughout the novel, McCarthy alludes to "Indian Camp" (12, 59), "Big Two-Hearted River" (41, 286), "Soldier's Home" (54) (technically not a Nick Adams story but part of Hemingway's *In Our Time*), "Cat in the Rain" (187), and, in this passage, "Now I Lay Me" (188).

it comes to the juxtaposition of the inalterable state of the planet in the post-apocalyptic present versus the lushness that once was, the father "is burdened…not by the loss of memory but precisely *because* of it" (Godfrey 174). However, by maintaining a conversation with his past, the father chooses to strive for goodness to prevail for his son's sake.

While the man could make the decision to eat others or remain in the bunker, while the man could choose to let the good from the forgotten world of the past fade into obscurity, he has a way of living in mind for his son that requires each of them to reject such propositions. Despite the clear schism in the world pre- and post-apocalyptic event, the father does not sever all ties between the two periods. In apocalyptic writing, the nature of apocalyptic event prevents the return to society and social structure as they were once known, for apocalypse both "as cataclysm and as revelation…share a common movement toward a perception of the primal," a state prior to such societal structuring (Berger 38). Yet it does not mean that there cannot be any carryover. The father strives to preserve "some version of humanity in the midst of the inhuman" (10) by employing consistent dialogue with his ancestors and descendants—even his wife who did not share in his choice to endure the post-apocalypse. By focusing on the caring relationships that made his own life meaningful in a non-apocalyptic world and maintaining a goal for how he wants to raise his son, he rejects the timeless void of the apocalyptic present for a unifying temporality between past, present, and future.

The sense of self that the father wants his son to embody is expressed quite simply in the novel; it is maintaining a commitment to being one of "the good guys" (McCarthy 77). While the concept of carrying fire has deeper thematic resonances, the fire is, at one level, the fire of goodness and morality. It is no mere coincidence that two of the three conversations the father and son have about being good guys mention carrying the fire (129, 137) and the other takes place while they are sitting at a fire (77). Perhaps this concept is best elucidated when the man finds a solitary candle in the drawer of a long-abandoned and ruined house. Holding the candle with no way to light it, he steps outside and "[sees] for a brief moment the absolute truth of the world. The cold relentless circling of the intestate earth. Darkness implacable. The blind dogs of the sun in their running. The crushing black vacuum of the universe. And somewhere two hunted animals trembling like ground-foxes in their cover" (130). Yet, even when the entire universe has seemingly been enveloped by unwavering darkness, all the darkness in the world cannot extinguish the light of a single candle.[14]

As the man is close to death at the end of the novel, he sees a fading light that is overlaid with an imagined vision of his son. The source of the light is "a candle which the boy bore in a ringstick of beaten copper" (280). In a convergence of the real with the imagined and the figurative with the literal, the boy's final framing in his father's mind

[14] This phrase is often attributed to Saint Francis of Assisi, though this attribution is dubious for the supposed source of the quotation does not appear to contain it.

is that of someone who embodies "[g]oodness" (281) and refuses to relinquish morality despite the circumstances of his life.

This vision of the boy carrying the fire is more than just the father's imagination. As the text demonstrates throughout, the boy has not only embraced but embodied his father's teachings. If there can be any accusation against the man, it is in how he cares for his son so deeply that he refuses to extend similar feelings to anyone else he encounters. The boy is the one who recognizes that he and his father have "a deeper and greater responsibility to do what's right outside of the survival impulse" ("Cormac McCarthy"). Ashley Kunsa notes every action the man performs that, by non-post-apocalyptic standards, would be considered "reprehensible"—killing another person, leaving the basement with the slaves without attempting to free them, refusing food to clearly starving individuals (59). But she also explains that they are executed solely "in his role as the boy's protector, not for [his] own benefit, and…never out of malice" (70n12). While the circumstances turn the once reprehensible into the just, the boy seems to recognize that these same circumstances do not absolve him and his father from treating other humans as humans, for being good guys means being good to others. The boy's moral promptings are a form of care he returns to his father in a role reversal of who serves as teacher and who serves as pupil.

When they pass a man struck by lightning, the boy asks, "can't we help him?" multiple times (McCarthy 50). Later, the father and son are forced to abandon their

shopping cart of supplies in order to escape from a mercenary. Despite stating that he is "really hungry" after not eating for days, the boy begs his father not to kill a stray dog that they see (81). Shortly thereafter, he believes that he spots another young boy and pleads for his father to find him. He even offers to "give that little boy half of [his] food" if it means they can take him along with them (86). During their encounter with the old man Ely, it is entirely the boy's decision to offer him food and stay with him for the night (165). Even when their cart of supplies is stolen by a commune outcast whom the father eventually leaves for dead, the boy begs his father to "help him" because "he was just hungry" (259).[15] Though the boy may not be old enough, strong enough, and able enough to survive without his father, he knows how to live even when his father will no longer be around to help him. By the novel's end, he even performs his own counterfactual dialogue with his father. Instead of talking to God, the boy finds it "best" to "talk to his [deceased] father" in order to ensure that he "[does not] forget" the man or what he taught him (286). In this way, there is a hopeful future even though humanity's survival at large is doomed. As long as humanity persists, goodness can exist, and the candle, the light, the fire will not be extinguished.

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[15] The exchange between the outcast and the father where the latter forces the former to not only relinquish the stolen supplies but strip naked seems like a moment where the father goes too far and betrays the morality of being a "good guy." However, the son has internalized this mantra enough where he not only recognizes his father's error but influences him to fix it.

5.2 Passing from Man to Man Through All of Time: Post-Apocalyptic Fatherhood

Describing Cormac McCarthy's writing, Steven Frye remarks that it centers on "taking philosophical ideas, placing them in narrative, and, in doing so, seeing how those ideas shake out in the lives of people" ("Cormac McCarthy"). Regarding *The Road* in particular, he claims that it is a hopeful book because "[w]e all carry the fire. We all care for one another. We are all capable of committing to one another. We're all capable of going on even when it absolutely makes no sense to" ("Cormac McCarthy"). McCarthy's writing, particularly *The Road*, is not didactic but reflective. Through the circumstances that he explores in the novel, readers inherently think of themselves and their own lives.[16] After all, if the father and son can find meaning, purpose, and joy in a dying world that "could not be put back. Not be made right again" (McCarthy 287), what excuse do readers have in a world that has not yet fallen quite so far? The last two chapters have asked how fatherhood can positively embody caring while avoiding domination. In spite of—or perhaps due to—its post-apocalyptic character, *The Road* provides one model that can refract backwards into the pre-apocalyptic world.[17]

The father of *The Road* practices what I call post-apocalyptic fatherhood, a negotiation of parenthood's responsibilities and possibilities informed by the

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[16] This holds true for the author as well. The novel is dedicated to McCarthy's son, John Francis McCarthy. In an interview with Oprah, McCarthy noted that "it never would have occurred to [him] to…try to write a book about a father and a son" if it weren't for John Francis ("Oprah's Exclusive").

[17] Berger makes a similar claim for all apocalyptic writing, noting that "[e]verything after the end, in order to gain, or borrow, meaning, must point back" (xi).

literalization of what were once the ultimate existential questions. Post-apocalyptic fatherhood requires a simultaneously looking around and looking forward. Because the duties of protection and provision not only remain essential to survival but become amplified due to the circumstances of a post-fall world, they also remain significant roles for the father to negotiate in the present moment. However, a post-apocalyptic scenario heightens the importance of giving one's child the opportunity to survive into adulthood because the typical safety nets of society to maintain health and wellbeing no longer exist. In effect, a parent's goal is to enable children to live to an age where they can protect and provide for themselves, which results in a paradox: protection and provision are supremely important, but a relationship simply based upon them becomes disposable if the protector/provider succeeds, for the one receiving the protection and provision will eventually be able to perform those duties by themselves. A meaningful relationship requires something more. This "something more" is flexible, but *The Road* demonstrates that it includes teaching, guiding, assisting, comforting, and sharing, all in the effort to walk with the child from youth to adulthood.

Put another way, apocalyptic texts like *The Road* convey no guarantee that any relationships will last. When the dawn of each day presents renewed threats of starvation, sickness, and murder, there is a hyper-awareness that you and/or your loved ones may not live to see the next. Bereft of the typical sources of meaning-making in a functioning society, post-apocalyptic life draws meaning from survival itself. For

parents, then, their child's survival into adolescence and adulthood becomes paramount because they are the sole arbiters of ensuring it. Giving a child the opportunity to grow and experience more life inherently extends the adult/child parental relationship beyond that to simply parent/offspring. Post-apocalyptic texts emphasize the necessity of offering a type of care that foregrounds protection and provision yet simultaneously reaches beyond both. Childhood ends, but fatherhood does not. By attuning oneself to a style of fatherhood that treats the child as a person, despite age, the post-apocalyptic father can forge a relationship that transcends the present moment and enables connection in the future through the creation of what will become memories of tenderness and intimacy.

The other side of fatherhood in a post-apocalyptic world is that the adult in the relationship is equally as vulnerable as the child. Both the father and the reader of *The Road* understand that he is terminally ill from very early in the novel. As father and son slowly progress towards the coast, he faces away from the boy to cough. As he stops and rises from his hunched over state, a "fine mist of blood" covers the gray snow (McCarthy 30). In a world without doctors, prescriptions, or surgeries, hemoptysis, regardless of cause, signifies an incurable ailment.[18] The father attempts to forget about or at least not dwell upon this fact, but he cannot avoid telling himself "you are dying.

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[18] While hemoptysis is a symptom of several possible illnesses including lung cancer, it is traditionally associated with tuberculosis. This wasting disease inside the father would mirror the wasting away of the earth around him, making it the most likely cause thematically.

That is not a lie," (238). While the father keeps this information from his son and maintains a brave face—partially by reiterating their quest to head to the coast and partially by denying the boy's repeated questions about if they are going to die with replies like "sometime. Not now" (10)— he is fully aware that there will come a day when he will no longer be able to take care of his son. [19]

When that day arrives, the boy provides the same care for his father that he had offered to him up to that point. The boy builds a lean-to to shelter his father from the coming rain and searches for something to feed him (278), but it does not rain and he cannot find any food. Once again, attempts to protect and provide are important but not all-encompassing. The more important form of care he shows for his dying father is through talking with him and "[sleeping] close to [him]" (281). When there's a hyper-awareness that one's life is on a clock that can hit zero at any moment, always sooner rather than later, a domineering approach to fatherhood loses any of its misguided efficacy, for the father can quickly become the recipient of care.[20]

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A subset of criticism levied at McCarthy in general and *The Road* in particular focuses on the author's lack of women, the treatment of women, and elimination of

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[19] Again, McCarthy's personal life seems to inform this aspect of the novel, as he was in his mid-60s when John Francis was born.

[20] For more on the importance of vulnerability and care-receiving, see the chapter "Giving Pain and Receiving Care: Wartime" in this dissertation.

women.[21] While my focus is on a model of fatherhood based upon a relationship between father and son depicted in the post-apocalypse, I do not think that it necessarily precludes mothers from this parental outlook or the kind of probing of the father/daughter relationship visible in the HBO adaptation of *The Last of Us*.[22] Before committing suicide, the boy's mother has a very sobering conversation with the father. She tells him "it's meaningless" to try to keep going, for "sooner or later" hostile individuals will "rape [them] and kill [them] and eat [them]" (56). The father offers no counter to this comment and makes no argument. The father and son have every reason to give up, every reason to resort to murder and theft and selfishness because, in the end, the mother is right. No matter how many times you insist on carrying the fire, it is not enough to stop the wickedness occurring around every bend in the highway or halt the rapid death of the planet.

Berit Åström argues that the mother character in *The Road* "is a non-entity with no relevance to the lives of her husband and son," which enables "McCarthy and his critics [to] present a futuristic world in which the only parent who is needed is the father" (114). She asserts that the man in *The Road* performs what Hannah Hamad calls

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[21] See Sullivan, "The Evolution of the Dead Girlfriend Motif in *Outer Dark* and *Child of God*" (2000), Al-Dhamari and Siddiqui, "Destiny of Female Character in the Fiction of Cormac McCarthy" (2017), Åström, "Post-Feminist Fatherhood and the Marginalization of the Mother in Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*" (2018), Bellamy, "The Reproductive Imperative" (2021), and Chartudomdej, "'Death is not a lover': An Ecofeminist Perspective on the 'Extinction' of Women in Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*" (2022).

[22] A great number of apocalyptic fictions focus on fathers and sons as opposed to mothers/daughters, mothers/sons, or fathers/daughters. See Berger, *After the End* and Bellamy, "The Reproductive Imperative."

"postfeminist fatherhood," a type of parenting that simultaneously privileges and valorizes the father over the mother, leading the former to effectively replace the latter (Åström 115). Åström makes a convincing argument for how the novel's framing of the mother is contrasted with that of the father. She "seems to have been absent from the boy's life even before she left physically" (123) as the only scene that mentions all three family members is a flashback where the father attempts to catch a dog. The mother "[walks] away down the road" as the boy begins to cry at the father's efforts and begs for the animal's life, resulting in the father comforting his son (McCarthy 87). Additionally, Åström details how, in the mother's explanation of her choice to kill herself, she "does not exhibit a moment's remorse, anguish or worry about [the boy's] future," which is a clear contrast to the man's "emotional outbursts" that invite "reader[s] to sympathize with the father" (120).

However, Åström's argument makes no mention of the other important mother in the text: the mother in the family who finds the boy at the end of the novel. While this other mother does not receive many details, her introduction is key: "The woman when she saw him put her arms around him and held him. Oh, she said, I am so glad to see you" (McCarthy 286). The text foregrounds her action of reaching out to the boy and holding onto him—an echo of the father's first action at the novel's opening. The boy's mother's attitude, outlook, and ultimate decision is a commentary on the person rather than the gender. If the story is about a father and a son and the love that they share for

one another, eliminating the mother from the equation works perfectly as a narrative device because it forces focus on that dyad which subsequently highlights caring duties that are not predicated by gender.

The Road is a love story written by a father for his son about a father and a son. The father's love for his son *is* exceptional because of how it transcends what is typically expected of fathers and avoids the pitfalls of mixing care with masculinity. This should not be a reason to criticize it but a reason to commend it, celebrate it, and emulate it.

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In *We're Doomed. Now What?*, Roy Scranton claims that, despite a foregone conclusion that the planet is too far past every point of no return to persist as we know it, "our human drive to make meaning reappears as our only salvation…if we're willing to reflect consciously on the ways we make life meaningful" (7). When faced with the prospect of apocalypse, the only solace that humans can muster is in continuing to find meaning and purpose. Maybe the reason for this phenomenon is that humans constantly face versions of apocalypse daily. After all, "merely the entry into adulthood is an apocalypse—an event that forms and reveals but leaves nothing but ruin" (Berger xii). Perhaps, this intersection of aging, apocalypse, and meaning making is why fatherhood becomes such an important position in post-apocalyptic fiction. A post-apocalyptic approach to fatherhood negotiates the relationship through a constant awareness of

endings—personal, relational, societal, and planetary—so the time remaining must be meaningful in order to retain some sort of purpose.

Visions of the apocalypse have saturated popular American media of the 21st century. Whether at the hands of nuclear war (*The Book of Eli*, *Fallout*), disease (*The Last of Us*, *I Am Legend*), climate (*The Day After Tomorrow*), or zombies (*The Walking Dead*, *World War Z*), society seems doomed to collapse, leaving those who survive in a state of nature, competition, and anarchy. Of course, we have not quite arrived at that point yet. Apocalypse looms, but life continues. Babies are born. Men and women become parents. Questions of how to negotiate responsibilities of caring in such relationships persist. Will widespread adoption of post-apocalyptic fatherhood in a pre-apocalyptic world help stave off the ostensibly impending end of life as we know it? Probably not. But, for the time that remains, is caring for future generations the best that we can really the worst thing?

6. Conclusion: Who Cares?

In the opening chapter of international bestseller, *Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind* (2015), Yuval Noah Harari reveals the "disturbing secret" of *Homo sapiens*: "there used to be many other species of this genus [*Homo*] besides *Homo sapiens*" (5). To account for the whittling down of multiple species to one, Harari explores two theories that hold scholarly credence. The Interbreeding Theory posits that *Homo sapiens* and other species, such as *Homo neanderthalensis*, merged populations. The Replacement Theory maintains that all other human species aside from *Homo sapiens* died out. This elimination would have been no mere accident, for *Homo sapiens* would be at least partly responsible for "[driving] them to extinction" (17). While anthropological and scientific developments continue to emerge in favor of both theories, there is presently not enough evidence to solidify or refute the Replacement Theory.

The theory's persistence and plausibility are enough to raise a troubling conjecture: humans, from the very beginning, have been a genocidal species. Harari alludes to it himself in the text's afterward, claiming that *Homo sapiens* transformed from "an insignificant animal minding its own business in a corner of Africa" to "the master of the entire planet and the terror of the ecosystem" in the span of about seventy thousand years (415). One does not reach the precipice of "becoming a god" without decimating all things standing in the way (415).

Perhaps an equally troubling recognition is that the characteristics consistently associated with masculinity—domination, tenacity, independence—are the same characteristics associated with the drive to destroy. This dissertation focuses on moments that recur throughout American history, a microcosm of human history, where such characteristics are on full display. Times of war, times of disease, times of destruction, and times of collapse foreground the worst that humanity has to offer by encouraging the worst that masculinity has to offer. When the options are kill or be killed, survive or get sucked under, the options of fight or flight both privilege individual (or small group) safety over the risks of caring for others. Yet, these exact same moments inspire individuals to wholeheartedly reject the characteristics of self-serving masculinities. Time and again, an examination of crises shows how, amidst the warmakers, fearmongers, and agitators, there is another impulse to find the strength to care for those who need it. While genocide has occurred and deplorably still occurs, it is not a foundational characteristic of humanity.

In his tracing of manhood throughout American history, Michael Kimmel claims that "we tend to search for the timeless and eternal during moments of crisis, those points of transition when the old definitions no longer work and the new definitions are yet to be firmly established" (3). Masculinity, however, is far from timeless and eternal, for it is ever changing based on context and era. In creating various constellations of crisis and caring, the preceding chapters seesaw through three different centuries,

perhaps giving a misguided impression of a static view of masculinity. While the apocalypse chapters are the only two to name spiraling time in their analyses, the concept is much more instrumental to this entire work. Yes, there are historical differences and particulars, but, by putting similar situations into conversation with one another, the past informs the future, the future informs the past, and they both inform the present. It is no mere coincidence that the texts analyzed in the preceding pages are very much engaged in transtemporal connections—from Whitman's concern for what "[f]uture years" understand about the Civil War (Whitman, *Memoranda* 6) to *Angels in America*'s focus on progress to Henry Wilcox's euphoric witness of "[t]he past, the present and the future all at once, all in concert, all around him" in *The Inheritance* (Lopez 296) to the father's reflection and refraction of life before and after apocalypse in *The Road*.

Is it fair to say that the caring impulse is a foundational characteristic of masculinity or American masculinity? Maybe, maybe not. Either way, American literature expresses a pattern flowing forwards and backwards that, now recognized, ought to be celebrated, championed, and encouraged. At the very least, the question of "who cares?" can be answered quite literally with one word: men.

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Biography

Michael P. D'Addario received a BA in American Studies from Poughkeepsie New York's Marist College in 2014. He attended the State University of New York at New Paltz from 2014-2016 where he taught composition courses and received an MA in English. Prior to attending Duke in 2017, he taught as an adjunct at Manhattanville College and the Culinary Institute of America. His first article, "Soldier's Home: Post-Traumatic Stress, Warrior Masculinity, and the (Re)Framing of Care," was published in *JAm It! (Journal of American Studies in Italy)* in December of 2022. He is a member of Alpha Chi, Phi Alpha Theta, and Sigma Tau Delta, along with the Ernest Hemingway Society and the Elizabeth Madox Roberts Society.