# Apocalypse Eternal: *The Road* and *Parable* Series as Pilgrimage

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A Senior Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for graduation
in the Honors Program
Liberty University
Fall 2022

# Acceptance of Senior Honors Thesis

This Senior Honors Thesis is accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for graduation from the Honors Program of Liberty University.

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## Abstract

Octavia Butler’s *Parable of the Sower* and Cormac McCarthy’s *The Road* represent two different views on how humans create meaning in a postapocalyptic world. The authors’ writings utilize the critical dystopia genre, in which the protagonists’ surroundings are bleak but the possibility of redemption remains. As Butler’s Lauren Olamina travels from her burned-down home to a place where she can begin a new community with her religion, Earthseed, as the foundational structure, she brings together a group of diverse and useful people who aid her in her pilgrimage to a better place. The protagonist’s identity as a mentally impaired black woman influences the ways in which she views the world and what it means to be “good” in a world run amok with capitalistic greed, rampant racism, and dangerous weather. Her pilgrimage ends in Acorn, where her actions cast doubt on her praxis of Earthseed, but those around her are positively affected by her religion and presence. McCarthy’s father and son place hope in the coast, making a long trek along the gray wasteland of the apocalypse. As they travel, the father’s pragmatism contrasts with the boy’s idealism, and their interaction with multiple strangers highlight the man’s wish for his son to physically survive, while the child wishes for a strict moral code so he can define both as the “good guys.” Their pilgrimage ends when the father dies, and the son joins with another family on the road. Thus, the man’s pragmatism condemns his son in the end, while the idealism which defines the boy allows him to find a community within a different group.

# Apocalypse Eternal: *The Road* and the *Earthseed* Series as Pilgrimage

The apocalypse has captured the imagination and fear of humankind for centuries. In a decimated world, the construction of society, meaning, and love become secondary to survival. While a large amount of fiction concerns itself with this topic, Cormac McCarthy’s *The Road* and Octavia E. Butler’s *Earthseed* series provide similar morals in dissimilar apocalyptic visions. Within the sci-fi genre, the protagonists of *The Road* and *Parable* series embody the struggle to define self and surroundings in a devastated world through the practice of pilgrimage.

## The Critical Dystopia of Apocalypse

Octavia E. Butler and Cormac McCarthy are both prolific authors, though their novels do not boast many commonalities. Butler wrote almost exclusively science-fiction, while McCarthy became known for his gritty, blood-soaked westerns. For both authors, the examined novels mark a change in their usual writing style. Butler often examined space, inter-special interactions, and evolution, but in the *Parable* series she focuses more on earth, creating a world where economic inequity only continues to expand, the consequences of racism and sexism are death, and religious extremism burgeons with a right-wing political party. McCarthy’s *The Road*, while still boasting violence, is no longer set in the deserts of the southwest United States; instead, it focuses on a desolate landscape where marauders and cannibals roam the wasteland, and the father-son duo must survive while attempting to maintain a moral code.

While the words “apocalyptic” and “post-apocalyptic” have certain connotations, their etymological roots suggest a focus on revelation instead of only destruction. In the common literary imagination, literary critic and etymologist Adam Johns explains, these words have come to mean: “the end of the world” and “after the end of the world” (396). Based on these definitions, McCarthy and Butler alike focus on a post-apocalyptic view, assessing how, after the collapse of social order, people survive and draw meaning from life.

Butler's *Parable* series emphasizes a post-apocalyptic narrative, but the refusal to sensationalize the danger of a crumbled society applies the etymological meaning of "apocalypse" to the work as well. As he continues his commentary, Johns suggests that the *Parable* series not only focuses on the common view of "apocalypse"—an end—but also the etymological view: revelation. An apocalypse naturally includes the destruction of facades, as humanity reveals both its good and evil impulses in the drastic measures it takes to survive. However, the destruction of society often takes precedence over an ethical or spiritual revelation. Contrary to the sensationalist view of destruction littered throughout apocalyptic visions, Butler refuses to illustrate only evil, as she also details humanity's struggle to remain moral in a society turned feral. The *Parable* series also brutally illustrates the terrible effects of racism, sexism, religious extremism, capitalism, and ecological damage, thus also becoming a revelation of social constructions and their ensuing consequences. Butler's novels are truly "apocalyptic" works that focus on the end of modern-day society—the common association of the word—and a revelation of what (and who) can bring redemption to the world—the etymological association.

At first glance, McCarthy's *The Road* appears only as a collapse of social order, but the revelatory construction of meaning hides within the desolate setting of the apocalypse. McCarthy's principal duo become a dichotomy of survival, as the father obsesses over physical survival and the son defines a moral survival. The friction between the pair's focus serves as the setting for revelations, as they discover how meaning can be constructed in a world devoid of any recognizable features. As the father focuses on finding shelter and food—caring for purely physical needs—the boy is more focused on staying "good guys." A sense of moral declination yet possibility for redemption remains one of the only constants. Upon first inspection, McCarthy's novel seems to focus on the common end-of-the-world "apocalypse," but it also boasts piercing insights into human nature and morality.

While both works are clearly apocalyptic in nature, the examination of the genres "utopian" and "dystopian" can further specify the morals of the works. First, as Johns describes, the Greek word utopia has a dual meaning of both "no place" and "good place" (396). This definition suggests that utopia, because of its perfection, is also unobtainable. A newer term that better specifies a genre which operates within the liminality of perfection and inaccessibility, literary critic Meghan Hartnett argues, is "critical utopia." Hartnett believes critical utopia offers "more open futures and . . . the desire for change" (5). Thus, this genre emphasizes the possibility of social advancement but still idolizes a quasi-perfect society.

Dystopia, on the other hand, reveals the degeneration of society and humankind in startling, often gruesome, detail. The genre of "critical dystopia," as Hartnett explains, softens the nihilistic tendencies of dystopia, offering a glimmer of redemption within the struggle for survival: "some utopian elements . . . provide a sense of hope or agency for the characters" (5). This genre allows both the protagonist and reader to experience a sense of relief, although critical dystopias remain relentless in showing how current social, religious, economic, and ideological dissidence can cause much damage if allowed to prosper. The genres of critical utopian and critical dystopian literature allow for works to construct meaning with more nuance than a strict binary of paradise or devastation.

Both *The Road* and the *Parable* series fit into the critical dystopia genre. McCarthy's work can most aptly be described as the observation of human degeneration. Life becomes simple in its goals and dangerous in its setting: survival becomes the only motivator in the monotone gray world of *The Road*. The loving relationship between the father and son remains one of the only bright parts of the novel, with marauders and cannibals laying claim to the other sections. With moral and religious creeds replaced with a list of rules the father gives the son, one of the only redemptive parts of this tale is the small family unit and what it means to love in a desolate world. Butler's *Parable* series is not as bleak, though it arguably shares a more accurate representation of any "apocalypse" that could take place. Within the novels, apocalypse originates from the continued domination of prominent systemic issues. However, this also allows for the *Parable* series to contain more utopian views; if something gradually destroys the world, there are also those who fight against the decay, as can be seen through the protagonist Lauren Olamina. *The Road* and the *Parable* series can be labeled "apocalyptic," in both senses of the word, and fit into the genre "critical dystopia."

## The Origins of Apocalypse

The apocalypse that necessitates each protagonist's pilgrimage differs in severity and cause. The problems plaguing the United States in Butler's *Parable* series are continuations of societal issues such as racism, sexism, capitalism, and global warming. As the critic Johns believes Butler's *Earthseed* series fits into the "critical dystopia" genre, he argues Olamina's apocalypse serves as a warning for the current state of America, since the protagonist's ". . . dystopia is created by continuing current trends . . . to their logical extremes, without sudden transitions, as no definitive cataclysm is ever experienced" (401). The apocalypse arrives not from extreme nuclear or biological warfare, but rather the subtle domination of harmful ideologies: Olamina's community must recognize the capitalistic gap between the suffering middle/lower-classes and the elite, the freakish firestorms caused by global warming, regular and unashamed sexual assault on women and girls, and continued racism that influences Olamina's every action. The horrific reality the Earthseed community must endure illustrates how social constructions can metastasize, leading to the harmful exploitation of work and destructive natural phenomena. In a world where weakness means death, the protagonist's hyperempathy—a neurological condition which the literary critic Gregory Hampton summarizes ". . . makes her body sensitive to the feelings of those around her" (104)—construes her as an easy target, although through her pilgrimage hyperempathy becomes one of Earthseed's greatest strengths. The world through which Olamina and her group traverses is a facsimile of the present; the world is still recognizable, only distorted by malignant societal constructs.

McCarthy's father and son duo in *The Road*, however, lay claim to a much sparser environment than Butler's protagonist. The exact cause of the apocalypse is unclear, the only description stating: "A long shear of light and then a series of low concussions" (McCarthy 52). Regardless of the inciting incident, the effects turn the once-familiar landscape of the United States into a world of ash and endless gray, described by the father as "[b]arren, silent, godless" (4). The sheer destruction of the father and son's apocalypse thus elicits an extreme response from the pair, where survival becomes a combination of luck and skill. Unlike Olamina, the pair travel solely to stave off death from starvation, marauders, weather, or any other number of threats. The literary theorist Rune Grauland, focusing on the desert-like setting of *The Road*, argues the wasteland nature of the protagonists' surroundings means the man and son no longer define themselves in relation to the land but to themselves (69), as they become "each the other's world entire" (McCarthy 6). As the pair travel on their pilgrimage, they must rely on each other for survival in the gray world of *The Road*.

## The Motivation of Pilgrimage

The construction of meaning in an apocalypse provides the motivation to survive. As the protagonists of the novels begin their pilgrimages, they must identify what they hope to accomplish. For Olamina, she wishes for a safe place with access to natural resources and space to spread and improve her Earthseed ideology. Thus, she holds a dual-nature that balances survival with morals; the protagonist refuses to reduce herself to purely physical terms, while also understanding that survival must come first in a harm-filled world. Unlike the woman's balanced nature, the father and son seem to represent one of either end. The man focuses purely on survival, believing that his divine purpose is to defend his son from bodily harm. The boy, on the other hand, must ensure his father and himself remain the "good guys" and do not become amoralistic in the struggle for survival. While they both agree to make it to the coast, the father knows this is a lie which serves only to give himself and the boy a reason to keep (physically) moving.

The origins and causes of Lauren Olamina's pilgrimage are more numerous than simply the apocalyptic world she inhabits. The immediate catalyst for Olamina's exile into the wilderness comes when drug addicts and poor beggars break down the walls of her gated community. Not merely a physical catastrophe, the crumbling of the wall also serves as the protagonist's recognition that she is no longer any different than those who wander without home or protection. As the commentator Hampton argues, "the wall that surrounds Robledo is literally a socially constructed border that serves as a marker of economic difference . . . the wall is a symbol of false and temporary security for the bodies in the Robledo community" (106). As the cul-de-sac's protection fails, the economic disparity does too. Now, all are reduced to the same economic condition: raging and deadly poverty. Exile from her middle-class enclave pushes

Olamina to hope for something better, becoming one of the main reasons she embarks on her pilgrimage to a promised land.

Another ideological reason Olamina wished to leave Robledo came from her father's religion. As a Christian minister, the protagonist's father represents a hopeful yet misguided soul who attempts to do right but limits himself with outdated, unchanging spiritual beliefs. Hampton emphasizes that, in direct contrast with his daughter, the father's religious belief ". . . is dependent on an Old Testament God that is inflexible and utterly mysterious" (91). This description of God leaves Olamina in despair, since she believes ideologies must be able to change with their surroundings. The protagonist thus struggles to create her own form of divinity, something that relates directly to her experiences while also boasting flexibility. As such, the literary critic Ester Jones believes Olamina embraces ". . . the dynamism and inevitability of God as Change [which] takes into account the daily struggle to survive and provides the groundwork for her ethical code" (134). Olamina finds change, ironically, to be the only constant. Her new faith in change as God originates directly from the upheaval around her, and usurps the inflexible Christian Godhead that her father believes in. The critic Jolanda Davis—an advocate for black womanhood within literature—further emphasizes that the protagonist's philosophy, which she labels Earthseed, rejects many of the Christian assumptions championed by her father (17). According to Davis, Olamina challenges ". . . her father's Christian faith . . . would construct suffering as an outcome to sin. Earthseed accepts the reality of pain and, rather than attempting to explain in terms of good or evil, provides a way to use it when it comes" (17). Largely in part to her intimate relationship with Christianity as a child, Olamina comes to identify with an ideology that preaches inclusivity and change above all else, things she believes Christianity denies. These spiritual differences are another reason she wishes to begin her pilgrimage; she wishes to grow in her spirituality and mature her views of Earthseed.

Finally, as Olamina begins her pilgrimage, she must construct a final goal or destination to motivate herself and the community she eventually builds around her. In fact, the woman has two goals, one for herself in the physical present and one for Earthseed as a religion. The former is simple: '". . . heading north to where water isn't such a problem and food is cheaper . . ."' (Bulter 82). With this goal comes her preparation for survival in the apocalyptic world, so she teaches herself how to forage for food, handle weapons, and apply medical care to strengthen her chance of living. Much like the father in *The Road*, Olamina understands that without providing for herself, no greater goal can be attempted or accomplished. However, the woman boasts a much larger end goal for Earthseed: "The Destiny of Earthseed / Is to take root among the stars" (Butler 85). Such a belief rises from her understanding that Earth has already been corrupted. The critic Delia Shahnavaz, focusing on the ecofeminist aspect of Olamina's ideology, explains that earth's unsustainability forces humanity to search ". . . for an untainted world" (41). Shahnavaz also posits Earth ". . . as not only the Mother but the *womb*" (41), suggesting Earth is not the final goal but the origin of the journey. Thus, while Olamina's pilgrimage is in part a desperate attempt at survival, she recognizes the need to leave the dying world behind to find new, un-corrupted life among the stars. Such thinking forms the basis for the actions she takes throughout the novels, revealing her stubborn faith in Earthseed and the society it could eventually create.

The father and son of *The Road* have radically different hopes for their own pilgrimage. In fact, the protagonists posit a type of duality; while they work together to achieve a physical goal, they boast wildly different moral and spiritual purposes. The man instills in his son

“. . . that everything depend[s] on reaching the coast . . .”, yet his hope is a façade, a promise that “. . . [is] empty and has no substance to it” (McCarthy 29). While the father establishes the coast as a means of salvation, he understands from the beginning there is no reason for the beach to be a source of hope. However, even in this deception, the father’s true purpose clarifies: “. . .the boy was all that stood between [the father] and death” (29). As such, the relationship between the father and son is of the utmost importance within the novel, becoming the focal point through which the duo’s actions and emotions are filtered. The critic Erik Wielenberg, examining the relationship between the pair and any attempt the two make at expanding their community, posits that the pair’s relationship “. . . provides their lives with meaning and value amidst all their suffering. It is the existence of this relationship that makes it worth continuing the struggle” (10). The father views the physical pilgrimage, then, as a distraction that allows him to ensure the boy’s survival; even in his recognition of their relationship, the man views his child in purely physical terms, focusing on the son’s bodily survival. While the father also attempts to assuage the boy’s conscience by repeatedly telling him that they are the “good guys” and that they “carry the fire,” his verbal assurances fail in moments of violence and stress, in which he breaks all “ethical” rules to protect his son. So, while the man preaches a morality focused on love, the wasteland forces him to do horrible things for the physical survival of his son. The man’s goal for the pilgrimage is to keep the boy alive, doing so with a rigor and violence as unwavering as it is loving.

The son, on the other hand, marks the antithesis of the man’s goal for the pilgrimage. While the boy concerns himself with the physical aspect of survival as well, he wishes to keep some semblance of morality intact. Often, the man suggests exploring a house or structure that could hold food or other necessities; the son responds in fear, wanting to continue without stopping, and hesitantly entering only when the father reveals his only other option is to wait outside. In this way, the son places other aspects of humanity above physical survival. Championing moral and spiritual well-being throughout the novel, the boy ironically protects his father from a far more dangerous outcome than death: becoming a "bad guy" in the pursuit of survival. Thus, Wielenberg posits the boy as the moral center of the novel: "[t]he child often seems to function as the man's conscience . . . When the man helps others, it is at the urging of the child. The man believes in the ideal of helping others but has a hard time living up to it . . ." (6). As such, the boy attempts to be an empathetic savior, and his pilgrimage focuses not only on the physical location of the coast but also ensuring that his father stays a "good guy" while they travel. Most likely the boy's insistence on morality comes from the recognition that he carries the burden of a new world; the father, stuck in memories, cannot construct something new because he lives in the past and immediate present. Such abilities of genesis lie only in the son, born to the apocalypse and christened in its ash, who must, by nature of his position, understand the moral consequences of his and his father's actions. This pilgrimage, then, must focus on the boy's ethical survival, in which the actions of those around him necessarily caution him to the cruelty and apathy that he himself cannot partake in if he hopes to create a world beyond survival.

So, the protagonists of the two novels have similar goals for their pilgrimages. Olamina and her Earthseed community head north in search of a place to start again, while the father-son duo travel towards the coast in a vague hope for salvation. Like the father, Lauren concerns herself with physical survival, protecting those in her group and taking all necessary precautions so as not to be caught unawares in a world full of violence. However, like the son, the woman's focus on Earthseed inherently means she has a vision for the future, something she plans to implement that could improve the world. In this way, Olamina combines many of the characteristics of the memory-burdened father and morality-centric son. One of the largest differences between their goals of pilgrimage is that she has a clear plan for what a better society could look like; she is ambitious and willing to work hard for what she believes in. The father and son, on the other hand, have no concept of what a new world could look like, for the former cannot imagine anything but the past and the latter has been isolated by his father's paranoia. The physical aspect of the duo's travels—reaching the coast—has no concrete reasoning, instead providing purpose and a reason to continue.

## Construction of Identity within the Apocalypse

Both protagonists, as they begin their pilgrimages, must recognize the new rules and assumptions that define their postapocalyptic environment. For Olamina, this entails her acknowledgement that the self is socially constructed, which benefits her as she passes as a man in her travels to leverage a better chance of survival. Using what little she has, Olamina manipulates the new society's rules and judgements to craft her physical presence, proving her resourcefulness and insight. The man, on the other hand, uses the concepts of Christianity to imbue his son with divine-like qualities so he can justify survival. He also addresses the Christian God in times of distress, suggesting that the construction of this deity helps him blame a higher power and thus not give in to helplessness. Thus, as the different protagonists' pilgrimages begin, they each find a way to manipulate previous concepts or current surroundings to continue surviving in a bleak, cruel world.

One of the first events in Lauren Olamina's pilgrimage, and that which propels her into the world, is the destruction of Robledo. While the devastation of the walled-in community was the inciting incident which forced her to flee, the protagonist had been planning on leaving for some time before. Certainly, after Robledo falls, there is no other option but to begin her travels, but this does not mean her ideological pilgrimage had not begun much earlier. The traumatic fall of her community teaches the protagonist many lessons and tests the flexibility of her ideology. After returning to Robledo the day after its ruin, Olamina must recognize her new place in society. Hampton illustrates that before the destruction of Robledo, the protagonist was relatively safe behind her town's walls, cushioned not only by the physical boundary but also the small amount of income the community still managed to eke out: "the land define[d] those few as 'haves' and everybody outside of its walled boundaries as 'have-nots'" (106); now, exposed and without protection, she has become one of the many homeless and poor already roaming the streets. Her interaction with scavengers of her burned-down house relates the young woman's confidence in Earthseed, as her beliefs help her recognize the only options are survival or death. As such, in a nonchalant manner that portrays her acceptance yet remembrance of the past, she writes: "So, in company with five strangers, I plundered my family's home" (Butler 160). The first struggle with Robledo's fall is Olamina's need to accept its destruction and use what she can to aid her in the subsequent pilgrimage. The pragmatism of such a decision serves as the basis of Earthseed, in which there is no point wallowing in the past, for to do so would be suicide.

This pragmatism is further strengthened as Lauren acknowledges the gendered reality she now must traverse through. In this world where the wealthy only exacerbate capitalism, the consequences worsen for any minority group. Clara Agustí, a literary critic focused on the gendered violence and oppression faced by women within the novel, capitulates that, as the economy begins to decimate all other systems of value, "sexual slavery and prostitution . . . [become] inherent tendencies of a system that favors profit at the expense of human well-being" (359). Evidence of sexually assaulted, coerced, and traumatized women haunt the pilgrimage, and Olamina's acceptance of such realities brings her to the decision of masquerading as a man. In conjunction with Agustí, the commentator Petra Kelly argues that the plight of women becomes a main focal point through its casual portrayal: "women's suffering seems so normal and is so pervasive that it is scarcely noticed" (114). The suffering of women becomes unimportant and commonplace within Olamina's society, plagued by extreme capitalism and sexism, specifically because men believe women exist only as images of pleasure or as a vessel capable of labor. Olamina understands this easily, as with the incest-rape birth of Amy Duncan in Robledo (Butler 33), the bloodied story of Zahra's escape from the burning community (166), and the sordid tale of Allison and Jillian, sisters prostituted by their father (237). Through all the assaults and injustices Olamina witnesses or hears, she better understands the common-place and casual violence towards women. The protagonist's acknowledgement fully awakens her to how she must carry herself if she wishes to be spared the danger inherent in all that is feminine.

One of the decisions Olamina makes in response to the rampant violence faced by women is to alter her appearance to that of a man. Such actions reinforce the phenotypical, malleable appearance of humankind and reemphasizes the actions one must take for survival. Jones emphasizes Olamina's disabled identity and thus believes the protagonist recognizes her oppressed place in the social hierarchy and uses her perceived physicality as a boon for survival: "[a]s an ambiguously gendered, psychologically impaired black youth, Olamina's appearance must be manipulated as much as possible to allow her to survive in a postapocalyptic America" (122). Placed in many liminal categories, Olamina understands and utilizes binaries to her advantage while also attempting to create a community in which such information is irrelevant or, at least, secondary. Now that Robledo's walls have fallen, she is just another poor person with no support or aid. As such, she must do whatever it takes to mitigate the danger of her marginalized identities. The idea of changing the socially perceived self also conflicts with Olamina’s Earthseed ideology—which preaches authenticity and acceptance—as she believes the only options are to “Embrace diversity / Or be destroyed” (Butler 196). Her pragmatic need for survival, however, challenges the protagonist to embrace her androgyny and “put on” masculinity, with her mindset challenging the thought that men are inherently and exclusively “masculine” and women “feminine.”

The socially constructed self comes to signify all that Olamina begins her pilgrimage already understanding, whether subconsciously or actively. She must identify and attempt to mimic the most beneficial identities in a postapocalyptic world. As a black woman in a cruel environment, Catherine Ramírez—a commentator concerned with women’s subjection and portrayal by masculine viewpoints—elucidates that Olamina must understand the ways in which social constructs create a person’s appearance, thus applying the concept that “[t]he body is simultaneously material and discursive. [The] conceptions and experience of it as material are always socially mediated” (386). With this knowledge, she dresses and acts as a man because the social construct of masculinity—violence, danger, and strength—is better than that of femininity—weakness, emotion, and fear—in the present context. Similar to Ramírez, Agustí argues Olamina’s perception of herself as a social entity who is “created” by those around her proves she “. . . does not regard the body as an immutable biological given, but rather, as a field of inscription of socio-symbolic codes. . .” (355). Thus, importance is given to the physical composition of a person, as it suggests many facts about them; therefore, as Marilyn Mehaffy and AnaLouise Keating observe, Olamina does not denounce all physical aspects, but “re-imagin[es] and re-assembl[es] it within an ethics of survival” (49). From acknowledging her androgyny and thus leveraging it to code herself as male, the young woman begins her pilgrimage in a manner that originates in how she has observed the world as a black woman.

*The Road* begins long after the apocalypse, and thus there is no subtle collapse of society or socially constructed identities; instead, one of the first problems is the father's struggle of faith and hope in such a desolate environment. From the moment the man is introduced, he defines himself in relationship to his child and religion: "If he [the son] is not the word of God God never spoke" (McCarthy 5). While the father does not hold to Christianity, he often wields the religion's iconography in comparisons of worth. The son, who comes to embody the man's hope, is the only character who can appropriately be called a Christ figure because he offers a motive for living. The literary commentator Graulund thus applies the concept of salvation to the child: ". . . the hope invested in divinity is eventually transferred to the one being that quite literally seems to be of another, and future, world" (75). The man's transference of divinity onto the son allows him to construct a reason to continue surviving, and for the boy alone does he continue. The father consciously recognizes this: ". . . the boy was all that stood between him and death" (McCarthy 29). Spirituality, for the man, then, does not manifest in the need for evangelism or preaching, but applies directly to his son whom he must protect at all costs.

Quickly after declaring his son the word of God, thus imbuing the child with divine qualities, the man dares to address the divine as he vents his frustration at his surroundings. He demands, "[h]ave you a neck by which to throttle you . . . [d]amn you eternally have you a soul? Oh God, he whispered. Oh God" (12). Even in this pilgrimage of salvation, the man has little hope for the savior. However, he keeps the concept of Christ alive to have something beyond himself—beyond humanity—to blame for the apocalypse's devastation. Moreso even than this, Graulund argues the man's construction of God implies causality and allows the father to entertain ". . . the hope that the absent father [God] might at one point return in order to restore the world and relieve the man of his burden" (75). So, the whole pilgrimage, complete with the man's religious inclinations and applications, could be nothing more than a distraction as the father hopes for something other than himself (or the boy) to provide salvation.

Thus, the father's religious beliefs, when introduced, become the lens through which he searches for meaning in a seemingly desolate world. As with the first allusion, when he calls his son the word of God, Wielenberg believes the man essentially argues ". . . that either his son is the word of God, or, for all practical purposes, the universe is a godless one" (1). Between these options is no question at all: as the man needs divinity to find motivation, he chooses to see his son as the bearer of Christ. Such a view allows him to craft a reason for continuing in a hellscape cruel to both the man and his beloved son. The literary commentator Patrick O'Connor, concerning himself with the moral tendencies of the pair in *The Road*, thus accurately explains the man's ". . . nostalgic desire for perfection and peace is inherently connected to the empty universe" (9) because there is nothing from his memory that can serve as intrinsic motivation; no organized religion has survived the apocalypse, so from the ashes of faith he raises the son to divinity, and fights for his new "god." Survival is given meaning not because God exists, as this question is ultimately unimportant, but because a physical manifestation of salvation coalesces in front of the man and allows him to hope for something more than death.

The protagonists of both novels thus interact with and modify their past ideas as they consider their survival in an apocalyptic world. Lauren must comprehend the social construction of identity and use the knowledge to her advantage, crafting a façade of masculinity to provide her a better chance at traveling unmolested. The father must modify his own perceptions and attitudes toward God and Christianity; he molds religious practices to the wasteland around him, transferring divinity onto his child in a desperate bid for significance. While these first steps are vastly different between Lauren and the father, the events reveal the cunning, practical nature of the characters. They are not only cognizant of new rules and assumptions based on the construction of their present environment but use such acknowledgement to minimize risk to themselves and others.

## The Danger of Memory in the Wasteland

The protagonists must also consider how their past defines their present, keeping that which can help them survive and eliminating any harmful or escapist tendency that could lead to death. A readjustment on Olamina's self-perception begins with Zahra and Harry's reactions to her confessional, as for the first time she questions whether her hyperempathy is truly a detriment or not. Her realizations come with time, as she better understands how her environment shapes her sharing. Forming her Earthseed community also establishes the benefits of her sharing, not only the negative effects which her family focused on. The father must constantly do battle against his nostalgic memories, which often take him out of the present and leave the boy unprotected. Even in this, the man will have to recognize when and to what extent memories can be useful; while the ashen world of *The Road* is no place for idealistic dreaming, recalling the old world can be a gift to those who remember, as seen through his regret when abandoning his wife's picture—the final physical reminder he has of her.

Olamina's confession of hyperempathy to her neighbors begins an internal pilgrimage as she begins to recognize the positive aspects of sharing, contrasting with the memory of shame and evasion internalized from her family's treatment. The protagonist has the special ability to feel others' pain and pleasure; unfortunately, in the capitalistic apocalypse she finds herself, pain abounds while pleasure wilts. Hampton accurately describes the woman's hyperempathy as a mutation which “makes her body sensitive to the feelings of those around her" (104), but with the stipulation that the afflicted person must consciously recognize their pain. So, for example, when a person is in pain but does not show any physical manifestations of their hurt, Olamina does not feel anything. By the same merit, if someone pretends to be hurt, she will suffer the consequences. Inheriting this neurological distortion from her mother’s addiction to a drug named Paracetco (Butler 278), Olamina naturally becomes an incredible actress and finds herself able to bear enormous amounts of pain. The protagonist has a difficult time confessing her sharing ability, as she perceives it as “. . . a weakness, a shameful secret” (Butler 178). When she finally does, it comes as a shock to Olamina that her companion Zahra simply states, “[y]ou ain’t got nothing wrong with you, Lauren . . .” (193). With the help of her friend, Olamina can begin to understand her hyperempathy not as a curse, nor even as her defining characteristic. Instead, Ramírez suggests such affirmation begins an internal pilgrimage in Olamina, as she begins to see the incredible power possessed by those who “share”: it “. . . blurs the boundary that supposedly separates self from other” (386). The rationalization and contextualization of hyperempathy aid the protagonist in seeing within herself the incredible power to use empathy for constructing community.

The beginning of Olamina’s internal pilgrimage with her sharing contrasts between Zahra’s positive reaction and Harry’s paranoia. The final member of the trio which begins the pilgrimage questions her about their time in Robledo, in which she kept the secret of her hyperempathy from the entire community (Butler 194). His paranoia and inability to accept her hyperempathy teaches Olamina that her condition as a sharer inherently connects with her trustworthiness; she has trouble convincing him she means no harm because he feels his entire perception of her was a lie (195). Indeed, he even questions her sharing itself, saying, “[m]aybe you are normal. I mean if the pain isn't real . . ." (194). The critic Jones believes that, through the suggestion her hyperempathy is fake, Harry begins "[r]eflecting the dominant culture's dismissive perspective" (114), leading to when ". . . he prompts Lauren to share something 'real' so that he can be sure she is telling the truth" (114). Once again, the socially constructed self becomes the focus, as the man feels he cannot trust Olamina simply because his mental construction of her does not match the new reality. Harry's reaction also harks back to Olamina's father's reaction to her hyperempathy, since they both view it as a threat. Harry serves as a reminder that many people will perceive her sharing as a weakness—as her entire family did. In this way, Lauren must find a way to move forward and begin thinking of her hyperempathy as a positive trait, like Zahra believes, and not as a shameful secret, as Harry feels.

Olamina's environment further emphasizes how the perception of her hyperempathy changes depending on her surroundings. As most of the people in her life have emphasized, her unconscious ability to share pain seems a great burden. However, the disability-focused critic Davis argues the contextualization of her disability reveals how the environment around a person who is perceived as "different" matters: ". . . it is the environment that 'disabled' people occupy, rather than their particular cognitive or bodily difference, that actually creates disability" (16). Thus, many of the people around Olamina label her disabled because her hyperempathy is a weakness due to the horrendous conditions around her. If, on the other hand, she claimed hyperempathy in a utopian setting, her ability to share pleasure would be much more noticeable and may not be labeled a "disability" at all. Unfortunately, the apocalyptic conditions display only the worst qualities of Olamina's sharing; thus, although literary theorist Shahnavaz argues hyperempathy creates new opportunities for relationships and empathy, sharers are ". . . not seen by society as strengthened by [hyperempathy] but rather are viewed as weaker because of it.

Lauren's 'sharing' is seen by those around her to be a sort of sickness" (42). For this reason, Olamina's self-perception must change from shame and evasion to honesty and conviction; she must not let her socially mediated "disabled" identity overpower the positives associated with her hyperempathy, nor should she disavow her sharing, as it is a powerful lens through which her experiences and beliefs are filtered.

The father and son of *The Road* must also address the lens through which the father interprets the apocalypse. As the pair make their pilgrimage to the coast, they stop at the father's childhood home. In this small setting comes a hint that the father lives in memories. As with his religion, the man holds on to things from his past. His difficulty lies in finding significance in the new world when the old is covered only in ash and waste. With the visitation to his old home, the father brings ghosts to life, revealing that, while the son only has his father and the memory of his mother, the man remembers his past life and is haunted by it. As such, the young boy "[w]atched shapes claiming him [the man] he could not see" (McCarthy 26). The son, then, feels isolated from his father, as the man steps back to a past the boy cannot lay claim to. This becomes one of the great struggles in their journey, as the father struggles to accept the apocalyptic wasteland while burdened with the knowledge of what used to be. As such, he has difficulty leaving the place until the son states he is scared, to which the father replies, "[w]e shouldn't have come" (27). He realizes, too late, that his memories have separated him from his son in a way that no physical distance could accomplish. The son is newly burdened with the understanding that he cannot follow his father everywhere, while the father must comprehend that the world has changed irrevocably.

As the visit to his childhood home is one of the first clear interactions with the man's memories, it becomes vitally important to understand the pilgrimage the man goes through with his own memories. As the man comes to recognize, memory can serve a purpose, but can also serve as escapism, in which the motivation to survive in the apocalypse is lost. As such, the critic O'Connor argues the father must address ". . . that there is a different relation to memory necessary for constructing an ethical response to the world" (11). What this means, essentially, is that boundaries must exist for ". . . the needless conservation of memory. . ." (11). While the man's memory serves him well in practical situations, he demonizes his sentimentality because it leads to nothing except wishful, escapist dreaming. Battling these memories is the only time when the father's cold pragmatism is overruled; he sinks into the past and, if only for a few minutes, leaves his son defenseless, thus counteracting his entire purpose for existence.

Finally, the man recognizes his own moral and ethical failure, which becomes even more clear when contrasted with the memories of his old home. As he visits throughout the house, the father comments on past events, like Christmas and doing homework with his sisters (McCarthy 26). However, at the end of his exploration, he finds daylight "[g]ray as his heart" (27). This sentence suggests that the father no longer boasts his childhood capabilities for imagination and is startled by the transformation wrought by the inherent violence of the wasteland. Also, according to the critic Wielenberg, the man compares himself as a child to the boy in front of him, becoming aware that his son may not survive in a moral aspect: "[h]e worries not just about the survival of the child, but about the survival of the goodness within the child" (8) specifically because the man realizes he himself has already lost that battle. His morality has been replaced with singular obsession, as he does whatever he must to protect the child. However, the man wishes better for his son, and his memories of childhood seem to accomplish this revelation. Thus, when he describes his own heart as gray, it is not only a recognition of his own moral failure but a motivation to make sure his son does not end up like him.

While the memories of his childhood home steal the man from his child, his earlier abandonment of memories about his wife show the danger present in the wholesale destruction of his memories. The man recognizes the dangerous qualities of his wife's memory, and thus, the final reminder he has of her—a picture in his wallet—is left on the ground, to be swallowed by the endless road (McCarthy 51). Later, however, the man regrets destroying the final memory of his wife, because ". . . he thought that he should have tried to keep her in their lives in some way but he didnt know how" (54). Herein lies the problem for wholesale destruction of memory: those remembrances which could provide motivation for survival are thrown out with the deadly nostalgia. With his pilgrimage of memory, O'Connor identifies that the father's main difficulty ". . . stems from his realization of a world where only survival matters" (8). Ironically, the man's pragmatic practices lead him to abandon both the nostalgic past, like the childhood home which represents ". . . the temptation to surrender to an idealized version of the past . . ." (8), and the meaningful past, in which he and his son can remember the woman who used to accompany them. To not distinguish such varied memories means assuring physical safety at the risk of emotional and spiritual well-being. The father's emphasis on physical forms leaves him defenseless against the loneliness and hopelessness of the apocalyptic world, shown as he willingly leaves his wife's photo to erase her presence.

These events in both *The Road* and the *Parable* series reveal what the protagonists must understand about themselves as they continue their various pilgrimages. Olamina must begin to question whether hyperempathy is the curse her family always told her it was, and what it may look like to view hyperempathy as a positive force. With the various reactions of those around her, the protagonist becomes better able to regulate her shame and evasion towards her sharing ability. The father must carefully decide to what extent memories can serve as a beneficial source of knowledge and rest, and where they diverge into dangerously apathetic territory. The pilgrimage the pair endure must be faced head-on, so the father's insistence to sink into memories only creates separation and danger for his son and himself, but the destruction of his wife's memory serves as a warning that not all memories are necessarily evil.

## Praxis Within an Ideology

Olamina and the father-son duo must also find a balance between their professed ideologies and actions. As the woman finds her group expanding, she must consider to what extent empathy and altruism can coexist with each other. While the physical strength of the community members usually represents the most beneficial allies, Olamina attempts to construct a group that authentically embodies her Earthseed doctrine, in which the oppressed and forsaken can find a sanctuary. The father and son, on the other hand, represent two different ends of a binary, in which the man's pragmatic emphasis on survival eradicates the son's belief in idealism and empathy. The father's praxis with a stranger thus serves as an example of what the child cannot afford to partake in if he is to create a new world. Only empathy and community, the young boy believes, can construct a new world from the wasteland they find themselves in.

As Olamina's group expands, the woman must practice Earthseed ideology to create a community based on mutual respect and support. After shooting a dog that means to attack a couple's baby, the family gathers around Lauren, Zahra, and Harry, petitioning to band together. Interestingly, the couple has a transactional means to endear themselves with Olamina's group, as they offer ". . . small pieces of their treasure" (Butler 210). However, it seems that the protagonist has already made the decision to let the couple and child join. Her choice of companions seems interesting, especially since a baby, unable to care for themselves, becomes a significant burden. However, the couple appear to balance out any pragmatic argument for the child, as the man, Travis, "… has an unusual deep-black complexion" (Butler 211) and the woman, Natividad, is "… stocky … a pale brown woman with a round, pretty face" (211). The mixed couples' appearances matter to Olamina, as she begins building a community of what could be called "otherhumans." This type of person, as noted by minority literature scholar and commentator Diana Fuss, is "… marked by vulnerability" (qtd. in Agustí 353), and Olamina seems particularly drawn to those who are labeled otherhuman, whether by their skin color, ethnicity, language, or orientation. Olamina wishes to "collect" these people because she wants Earthseed to "[e]mbrace diversity. Unite" (Butler 196). Thus, although these people seem wildly different—and indeed because of this difference—Olamina begins to truly practice her Earthseed religion, as the critic Hampton argues: "… the bodies in Lauren's group represent the acceptance of ambiguity that is at the foundation of the Earthseed religion" (90). With a mixed group of gender, race, ethnicity, and age, the woman's community already establishes Earthseed as a place where socially constructed binaries can be addressed and disregarded. The woman believes power comes from a community built on many different viewpoints, identities, and practices, and thus it makes sense to accept the Travis, Natividad, and their child Dominic.

For the first time in the pilgrimage, as well, Olamina establishes the praxis behind her ideology. Earthseed has the possibility of flourishing, but only if Lauren acts as well as philosophizes. The first action she takes to support her belief system is the killing of the dog. There is no pragmatic reason for shooting the animal, but her firm belief in God as change allows her to rationalize the killing. Also, from the beginning, she has marked the family which later unites with them, to which Harry states, "'[y]ou've adopted those damn people'" (210). Interestingly, Olamina believes she did the same for Zahra and Harry. In these lines, a central tension is established, as Lauren balances between pragmatism—cunningly choosing "natural allies" and using naturally-occurring change to aid her in her mission—and her empathy—watching over the young child and assuming responsibility for saving him. In theory, the woman is practical and survival-focused, but as her pilgrimage begins, she finds herself focusing as much on empathy as logic. In fact, these ideas need not be in contention with each other; as Jones argues, ". . . Earthseed offers an alternative system that respects human life and dignity but has the ethical leeway to take actions necessary to survive" (133). Thus, Olamina's praxis promotes freedom within the confines of empathy. Naturally, it is difficult for the woman to let a child be killed when she has the power to stop it, and so she does not act from a fully altruistic motive. Her empathy and pragmatism combine, working together, to save the child and also leverage her protection so the family joins her community.

Later, Olamina's consideration of a potentially dangerous pair—a beggar woman and her child—positively illustrate Earthseed's emphasis on change. Most of the people in the group have been recently new additions, but Harry, her companion from the beginning, accuses the woman of changing her beliefs, as she would have never accepted the two beggars only a few weeks ago (Butler 285). Of course, his argument is invalidated by Earthseed's focus on change. She truly embodies in her praxis what she believes because she allows for her opinions, thoughts, and practices to change in relation to new environments and situations. As such, Jones argues that "Earthseed's survival ethic constitutes a dynamic system of knowledge, one based on daily experience and practical application . . ." (133), meaning that Olamina's change in opinion adapts to the fact that she now has a larger community around her and can thus take a risk with the beggar mother and child. Through one of her oldest companion's accusations of instability, Olamina can once again live out the Earthseed beliefs she espouses so strongly.

The father and son's ethics become clearer when they find a stranger walking along the road, as they have different reactions for how—or even if—they can help. Coming across a pitiful man who has been struck with lightning, the son asks repeatedly, '"[c]ant we help him papa?"' (McCarthy 50). The man refuses, and after the child begins weeping, the father justifies his decision: '"I'm sorry . . . but we have nothing to give him. We have no way to help him. I'm sorry for what happened to him but we cant fix it"' (50). Here, for the first time, the praxis of the father clashes with that of his son. The man is worried foremost about practicality, focusing on his son's protection and his inability to provide help for the man. The son, as the moral center of the pilgrimage, wishes to do whatever the pair can to aid the stranger. Wielenberg extrapolates the difference between the man's mantra of himself and his son as the "good guys," and the abandonment of the lightning-struck man, proves that the father hypothetically wishes to help others but has great difficultly living up to such a standard (3). The man's inability to transcend his utilitarian, pragmatic views leave him coldhearted to others on the road, as he cares only about his son. His son's attempt to help the stranger, contrasts with his father and shows "[t]he man no longer has the capacity to expand his world beyond the child; the child, by contrast, does have this ability" (Wielenberg 8). The suggestion, then, is that the man's community is rigid, including only himself and his son as the "good guys," while the son's view of community is more fluid and contains the possibility for others.

Here, too, when the man justifies that they cannot help the stranger and the boy sullenly accepts the information, the son's actions are oppositional to his father's praxis, and thus creates a dichotomy between the representation of the father as past/present and the son as future. Because the man's actions are focused on pragmatic survival, the son is allowed to create a moral and ethical code for himself which blends idealism with empathy and posits a future beyond the bleak and desolate wasteland they find themselves in. Indeed, the literary Critic

O’Connor argues “[t]he [father’s] pragmatism manifests in the boy’s moral armature; the boy is always other-focused and forward-looking” (8). As a direct response to the father’s inflexible morality, the boy attempts to reclaim their identity as “good guys” by focusing on empathy and idealism to combat their nihilistic and meaningless surroundings. The father’s memory, in fact, limits him in his philosophical capabilities, because he cannot picture a morality of a post-apocalyptic community after living in the old world, with its own societal rules and constructions. The man, then, belongs to the present and past, as he recognizes there is no physical aid he can give to the dying man. The son, on the other hand, comes to represent the future, and for this reason he wishes to help the man, even in dying, because an obtainable future must be based on building community with others and de-centering the self.

The father and son’s interaction with a different stranger confirms the different ideologies that the man and son hold. After a marauder stumbles upon them and threatens the child, the man expertly shoots and kills the man. Besides the obvious practicality of such an act, the father and son’s reactions are exact opposites. The man quickly picks his son up, running away, with the boy “. . . covered in gore and mute as a stone” (McCarthy 66). Once again, the man focuses on the physical survival of himself and the child; the son, on the other hand, cannot comprehend the murder of another—especially when the killer is his father—and thus retreats into himself, a survival tactic that attempts to save his morality from such a horrendous act, even if it could be justified. However, the critic Ashley Kunsa, examining the power of naming within *The Road*, argues that the style of the passage does not condemn the father. Instead, the man’s “. . . inherent goodness or vileness” (61) can be known only “. . . by the actions he commits with regards to other men. It is simple and essential” (61). With no label given to the man, whether “murderer” or “protector,” his actions’ morality becomes ambiguous. Thus, it is the actions each person takes, not the name they are called, that determine what is good and evil in a postapocalyptic setting. While the son's idealism blinds him to such a reality, the father's focus on survival serves him and his son well in this situation. However, immediately after, the man completely ignores the child's feelings as he places physical survival above all else, telling his son to "[t]ake the gun" (McCarthy 71). When the boy refuses, he replies, "I didnt ask you if you wanted it. Take it" (71). Once again, there is ambiguity in whether the idealism of the son or the pragmatism of the father reigns supreme. Whatever the belief, the marauder's death highlights the ways in which each of the pair perceives the world.

Olamina's "adoption" of Travis, Natividad, and Dominic echo the questions of faith, ethics, and community embodied in the father and son's reactions to the dying man. While Olamina's praxis allows her to act in balance with empathy and altruism, the father and son create a more rigid binary, as the man symbolizes pragmatic survival, and the child portrays idealistic empathy. Indeed, it appears that, if the father and son truly create a type of binary, Olamina would find herself near the middle, as she recognizes the value of survival while also avowing the importance of ever-expanding community. The man's refusal to move beyond a two-person community belies Olamina's Earthseed ideology, but so too does the son's near-suicidal attempt to provide relief to others on the road conflict with the woman's emphasis on survival.

## Faith in the Apocalypse

The faith of the protagonists, and how they make meaning in a bleak world, comes under attack through the people around them. For Olamina, a newcomer in her community challenges her Earthseed manifesto. Rather than causing her faith to crumble, the interrogation allows Olamina to share what she believes and create open dialogue between the members of her community. Through the man's questioning, Earthseed thus becomes a rallying point for many in the group, to provide meaning and hope. The man, on the other hand, must combat his late wife's nihilistic reasoning. In a flashback sequence, he argues with his wife about what the future may look like. The woman can see no end besides brutal murder, rape, or slavery, and her relentless attacks on the man's illogical reason for survival—the son as a holy figure—reveals what a person must construct to not lose hope.

As Olamina's community grows, her group begins to question the woman's Earthseed doctrine, forcing her to reveal her own religious views as they question how her religion could create a sanctuary for them. After Travis accuses her of making up Earthseed, the woman responds that her writings have come from observation. As she describes her journey through Christianity and Earthseed, she says she ". . . wasn't looking for mythology or mysticism or magic . . . God would have to be a power that could not be defied by anyone or anything" (Butler 217). More than anything, then, Olamina searches for something practical, which can be acknowledged without necessarily being worshipped, seen without necessarily being judgmental. The literary critic Hampton argues Christianity is the base of Earthseed, but ". . . Lauren questions both the function and practicality of her father's God" (91) because she needs something to trust in. As such, she lands upon change, a truth that is ongoing and unavoidable. However, in the tradition of her father, Hampton amends that Olamina ". . . takes on the role of a sort of shepherd guiding a flock of sheep to an unknown better place" (107). While the woman thus appears as a Christian symbol, she certainly breaks away from Evangelical thought in her own Earthseed. For her father, God is mysterious, all-knowing, and sovereign. For Olamina, Change is constant, unavoidable, and malleable. The emphasis here, according to another the commentator Johns, is not that ". . . God works through change and the evolutionary process," but rather that “. . .the evolutionary process itself, including the survival of the fittest, with all its brutality, *is* God” (405). This distinction allows for a more hopeful worldview, in which action directly effects change, as opposed to a Christianity that eschews responsibility by placing responsibility on the Lord. Thus, Olamina’s pilgrimage allows her to strengthen her ideas in concept and in praxis.

One important aspect of Earthseed, which develops during Olamina’s pilgrimage, is its dialogical nature. Through Travis’ questions, Olamina find the opportunity to spread her beliefs while also sharpening her own thoughts and explanations. While some in her community view her as a “secular” preacher, the protagonist uses dialogue as a unique, intimate way to share her ideas. It is not the silent pews and microphoned speaker common to Christianity, but rather a collection of individuals interested in a new idea. The critic Hampton again focuses on the ways Earthseed equalizes gender, since Olamina also “. . . ‘(de)genders God, and in doing so, creates a ‘democratic’ image of God that may not be a symbol of social equality but is definitely gender-friendly” (87). Her dialogue with the women of the group, Zahra and Natividad, emphasizes the non-judgmental nature of her God, ensuring the sexism which erupts within many organized religions will not infect her own. The dialogical nature of the woman’s religion means that she is also open to correction, questioning, or elaboration from her community; thus, as described by Delores Williams, Earthseed “. . . evinces multidialogical intent, which advocates for ‘dialogue and action with many diverse social, political, and religious communities concerned about human survival and productive quality for the oppressed’” (qtd. in Jones 129). Thus, within Olamina’s religion, dialogue serves to create a community of likeminded—though by no means ignorant—individuals who work together towards survival, equality, and empathy. Through Travis’s questioning, Earthseed’s dialogical nature aids in building a strong community of free thinkers who respect each other, regardless of their differences.

Olamina and her group's democratic dialogue of accepting new people reveals her pilgrimage as communally driven and effective. When the group awakes one morning to find two strangers among them, they question whether there is value in accepting two starved, desperate people, even if it is a mother and her child. Olamina takes a quasi-poll of those around her, asking each whether they want to try the pair or turn them away. Such a practice, according to Agustí, illustrates that, ". . . by engaging in active dialogue with the members of the group, Olamina gives a power message . . . on how to de-legitimize the dominant ideology and introduce her subjectivity" (356). This form of communication is not the patriarchal demand that the strongest or smartest decide alone. Instead, the protagonist insists on a communal decision, hearing each person's complaints, fears, or arguments. Together, they weigh the benefits and dangers that could come with introducing two wild cards, a mother and daughter, into their community. Olamina has not done this before, and while it can be argued she can do so now only because her group has grown, the fact that she has recruited so many people suggests that her capabilities have grown exponentially since she first left Robledo.

The wife, in a biting dialogue with the father, argues for the nihilism inherent in the surrounding wasteland and privileges non-existence above all else. As the woman argues against the man's hopeful, illogical beliefs, she clarifies that there is no "good" future in the apocalyptic wasteland. As she discusses suicide with her husband, she does not hesitate to say that it is ". . . the right thing to do" (McCarthy 56). She has seen the future and tells the man, '". . . I'm speaking the truth . . . They are going to rape us and kill us and eat us and you wont face it. You'd rather wait for it to happen" (56). This mindset shows the woman understands the new rules for survivors of the apocalypse, as survival takes precedence over any type of morality. The complete antithesis of the boy’s theology, his mother argues no matter how hard a person fights or how lucky a man gets, the end is always the same. As such, she strips the man of any pretenses, destroys his façade of religion, morality, and community: “[y]ou talk about taking a stand but there is none to take” (57). Intellectually, she is correct, because there is no “living,” only an evasion of death for as long as possible. And so, as the natural conclusion to her thoughts, she states, ‘“. . . my only hope is for eternal nothingness . . .” (57). The argument between the husband and wife highlights the illogical aspect of survival. For the adults, who have gone from society to apocalypse, there is no future besides death; their memories of an old world leave them ignorant of what new creation can look like. The only option remaining, if the nihilistic worldview is followed to its proper conclusion, is the hope for eternal peace through death.

The mother forms the final ideology to contrast between the man’s and son’s, as she recognizes the cruelty of the world and embraces it as a final means of freedom. In fact, although the father could arguably represent the past and present, especially when the son is the only contrast to him, the mother becomes a symbol of the present in its perverse logic. As O’Connor describes it, the woman becomes “. . . a lost present, the father the brute instrumentalist survival of tradition and the past, and the child represents possibility and the future” (10). The mother, with her nihilistic suicide, mirrors the harsh reality of the present and the loss of opportunities via an obsession with survival. The father, with the memories that hinder him and the flimsy morality of a ravaged religion, becomes the tradition, as he attempts to remember how the world once was. And the son, final among the family and the most hopeful, embodies the idealistic belief necessary to any who wish to carve a future out of the wasteland. The mother, as she strips all pretenses from the father’s ideology, also makes him acknowledge that “. . . she was right.

There was no argument" (McCarthy 58). The man must recognize the evident futility in survival. And so, Wielenberg states, the father illogically ". . . grasps for beliefs that will make his struggle make sense" (3). The construction of a holy mission is thus a remedy for the hopelessness the man feels towards living and a means through which he can justify survival of the son at any cost. For if the child is truly divine, if he embodies the salvific figure that can bring paradise out of destruction, then the father is justified in immoral acts because it is not his soul he must save, but his child's.

Much like the man's illogical reasoning in the face of his wife's brute nihilism, he embraces his dishonest mindset as a means of survival. The pair's pilgrimage reaches one of the religious climaxes in this scene, as the man cleans the dead marauder's gore off the child, comparing the act to an ". . . an ancient anointing" (McCarthy 74). He then tells himself, "[w]here you've nothing else construct ceremonies out of the air and breathe upon them" (74). The father's rationalization suggests that this ritual is a figment of his own imagination, superimposed upon reality to grant the man some semblance of meaning in a world so infected with cruelty. As with his wife's accusation, the man understands the illogical assumptions he makes towards his child as a divine figure but accepts such contradictions with the knowledge that it keeps him alive. For this alone, Wielenberg argues that ". . . the desire comes first: because [the father] wants to keep going, he believes—or tries to believe—that he is on a divine mission" (3). However, in sharp contrast with the boy's characterization as a holy vessel, the man recognizes the murdered marauder as '"[m]y brother at last. The reptilian calculations in those cold and shifting eyes" (McCarthy 75). The man perceives himself, and perhaps everyone besides the child, as less than human, beings who placed survival above their own souls and have turned into something monstrous, "who [have] made of the world a lie every word" (75). Once again, the father seems to recognize his own moral failings, feeling lost and soulless in the eyes of his idealistic son. He and the marauder—indeed, all those who focus on physical survival—have forgotten the truth: without a soul, physical survival has no meaning. Thus, according to the literary critic O'Connor, the father holds to the belief that "[r]eality itself is neutral, inhospitable and cold; the material universe offers no meaning or purpose . . ." (4). The father's pragmatism forces him to admit the hopelessness of physical survival, while the religious fixation on his child counteracts such belief with the illogical faith of the zealous.

Travis's questioning of Earthseed thus draw parallels to the wife's interrogation of the man's reasoning. As the newcomer in the community wishes to better understand the woman's reason for hope in a dangerous, cruel world, the mother seems to do the opposite, attempting to justify her own loss of hope and reveal the illogical reasoning behind her husband's motive for surviving. Of course, differences abound between the pairs. While Travis is simply curious and opens a dialogue through which they can argue, clarify, and expound on different people's ideas, the woman shreds any illusions the man may have about the future, revealing a bleak image of torture, assault, and death that seems as unavoidable as it is gruesome. However, in their effects, both conversations leave the protagonists with a better understanding of what they need to survive. For Olamina, she must trust in diversity of thought and belief to craft a community where all can be respected. For the man, he must create significance, however illogical, to combat the nihilistic self-destruction his wife partakes in.

## The Expansion of Community within the Apocalypse

In the pilgrimages of each novel, the protagonists decide how to organize their communities. Olamina and her group embody a democratic process, in which dialogue and mutual agreement are championed. The father and son form a simple hierarchy in which the man makes decisions based on physical survival, regardless of the boy’s emotions. While both groups consider survival imperative, the Earthseed community understands that their decisions must also be ethical, or they are no better than the rapists and pyros that surround them. As the son embodies the moral argument between himself and his father, the emotional or ethical aspect of a decision becomes insignificant in the face of the father’s paranoia.

Another Earthseed doctrine which Olamina proves through action is helping those in need and accepting newcomers who would like to join the community. First comes Bankole, an older black man who noncommittally begins walking with the group and finds a place among them, which shows the empathy-driven approach of Earthseed. If someone wants to stay and is willing to work, the community will happily allow them in. Soon after the man joins them, the group pulls two white women from the rubble of a collapsed house. The impracticality of the entire episode can be summarized when one of the newly rescued women asks Olamina who she is, and the leader responds, ‘“[a] total stranger’” (Butler 232). Pulling the survivors out makes the group a target, something they are aware of, and yet the threat of danger does not stop them from rescuing the women anyways. Such illogical actions once again posit that Earthseed is first and foremost a structure through which community can reach out to help those in need. The literary critic Shahnavaz affirms: “Earthseed’s worth is within each person’s being . . .” (44). Thus, the community saves those in need, and does not consider race, ethnicity, gender, or physical strength as a person’s worth. Proven when Olamina and her group save the women not out of any altruistic need or capitalistic gain, Earthseed sees people in need and moves to help them, even when conscious of the danger such actions can bring.

Olamina has progressed far in her own pilgrimage, as the conceptual framework she had for Earthseed becomes reality, as evidenced when they save Allison and Jillian from the rubble.

As some of the group move to help the women, others, like Travis and Bankole—who understand their male physicality works as a deterrent to would-be attackers—keep watch. No dialogue is disclosed, highlighting that each member understands their role and moves to accomplish it. Based on the communication and trust of the group, the literary critic Ramírez argues Olamina has ". . . learn[ed] to forge links with others through acceptance, trust, and cooperation, rather than through domination and intimidation" (383). Although the protagonist serves as an impromptu leader, each person has independence and power, highlighted in their ability to make their own decisions and work together. Their teamwork also embodies what the commentor Jones considers the cornerstone of any effective community, which is the ". . . ethic of interdependence [and] the related concept of interrelationality—the idea that [community members are] dependent upon each other because [they] are ultimately connected by a shared environment and shared vulnerabilities" (138). This brings pragmatism and empathy in proximity, as each member of the group recognizes that to leave or betray the others is to invite their own death through a loss of community, while also recognizing that they expect to be treated as humans. Such a belief is clearly shown in rescuing Jillian and Allison; nobody argues to not rescue them, although they use caution due to the threat of bait and illusion. The group, then, already represents a fully interrelational organism, as each person is allowed independence while also being expected to help others in and outside of the community.

The small community of the father and son in *The Road* does not have such democratic practices as Olamina. The child believes he sees another boy on the road and yells to get his attention. Instead, his father harshly reprimands the child: "I told you to stay put. Didnt I tell you? Now we've got to go. Come on" (McCarthy 84). Again, the man prizes physical survival over the chance of expanding the community. However, for the first time his anger is directed at the boy, which highlights an ironic belief of the man: physical protection of his son can mean emotional or spiritual neglect. As the man pushes his son away from the place where the newcomer could have been, Wielenberg suggests he denies the boy meaning specifically because “[t]he absence of connections with others is the real threat to meaning and value . . .” (11). The father seems unable to recognize this fact, instead placing all his hope in the physical survival of his child. However, as the child appears to understand, the father’s emphasis on the pair alone means that once the father dies, the child will essentially be doomed as well. As such, the boy recognizes the need to reach out to others, regardless of the threat, because physical survival means nothing to him if there remains no community with which to celebrate it.

The refusal of the father to expand the pair’s gravely effects the son, who may lose something if physical survival is the only trait the father believes to be important. Time and time again during their pilgrimage, the father has decided what action to take, and his practices come directly from his belief that he must protect his son’s body. Thus, as his paranoia rules supreme, the critic Graulund argues the man sees “. . .any one such act of compassion, no matter how small, [as] an unpardonable lowering of his guard” (73). While there is no doubt the man’s preparedness and lack of trust keeps the boy alive, the isolating effect of relying on no one but themselves has a devastating effect on the boy. The man, for all his attempts of salvation, understands that “. . . for every refusal of help, the boy becomes further and further removed, not just from the man but also from himself . . .” (73), which eventually makes the father fear that “something was gone that could not be put right again” (McCarthy 145). The newcomer serves as a harsh reminder for the child especially because he seems himself reflected; the man does not care for children in general, but only for his son, and he has the moral fortitude—or weakness—to ignore other children. The boy finds it difficult to label his father a “good guy” when it becomes clear the father's morality begins and ends with the son.

Also, when the father attempts to atone for his murder of the marauder, he solidifies the pairs' different destinies. The man gives the boy a flute he made with the hopes of restoring the boy's belief that they are the good guys. The child plays it, and the result is "[a] formless music for the age to come" (McCarthy 77). The father seems to understand his child will survive but can conjure no image of what that life will look like. His domain is that of the past, and he has no place among the boy's future. However, the man immediately modifies his previous statement with the acknowledgement: ". . . perhaps the last music on earth called up from out of the ashes of its ruin" (77). This recognition of temporality revolves around the son, as the father questions whether the boy is the first good thing to begin a new creation, as his first statement supports, or the final good thing in a collapsing world, as his latter clarification posits. Inherent within these questions is the man's positioning within them. If the child is the final blessing, his father will travel with him and, even if the boy outlives him, will not be separated for long. On the other hand, if the child is truly creating a new world, his father will be left behind in the wasteland, unable to join his son not only because of his focus on the past but also his lack of morality. In the world the boy embodies, ethical matters take precedence; the man and marauder have no place in such a society, and so it becomes necessary for them to be abandoned.

Olamina's group saving Allison and Jillian thus contrasts to the father's saving of his son. The Earthseed community works together, incorporating their belief of mutual dependence to trust each other and keep outsiders away. The group's empathetic drive to save the women shows their value for human life, even when the risk of danger is high. The man, on the other hand, values only his child, and will do what he must to protect the child. He does not trust anyone besides himself, and commands the child to do things for survival, even if they go against what his son wants. However, both groups understand that violence is a natural aspect of the apocalypse, and in this way they align. Both do what they must to protect their community, prizing their own people first. As the Earthseed group grows and begins to include more members, it seems they shall all make it to the end of the pilgrimage together. The father knows no such comfort since he understands that either his son will die with him, or his son will create a future in which he cannot exist.

## Conflicting Ideologies Within the Wasteland

Olamina and her group encounter one of their first dissenters in the form of Grayson Mora, whose ideals of masculinity and patriarchy threaten the egalitarian view of Earthseed. The man believes himself superior to Olamina—if not in ability than at least in awareness—and says as much, to the dismay of the group (Butler 310). He then states that Lauren seems to be the only man there, referencing her decision to dress as a man (310). Within these sentences, Mora reveals a miscalculation of how the community organizes itself. Unlike the patriarchal society which creates a hierarchy, in which the most powerful claim the top and those below obey, Earthseed embodies a different structure. Literary critic Agustí clarifies that Olamina ". . . does not base her leadership on charisma or on the retention of power" (358), as Mora is accustomed to, and thus he only serves to isolate himself within the community by proving he has difficulty seeing himself as in interrelation with the others. There is no hierarchy within the group, although there is a recognition of different people's abilities: Bankole's medical expertise, Olamina's leadership, Zahra's smarts, Emery's speed, and so on. Thus, the commentator Davis believes Earthseed's ". . . lack of dualities and its emphasis on adaptability through pain and loss . . ." (17) means that to create any sort of hierarchical structure is to invite destruction. Adaption, no doubt a primary focus in a religion based on change, cannot be fully embodied in such a rigid society where the powerful rule and the powerless follow.

As Mora challenges the beliefs of Earthseed, it becomes clear that Olamina's pilgrimage has been effective in creating followers of her ideology. Although some of her group question Earthseed, they believe many of the basic tenets, which in this situation revolve around protecting one another. Olamina tells Mora, after his outburst: ". . . we've managed to keep ourselves alive by working together and by not doing or saying stupid things" (Butler 311). The group looks after themselves. If a person is truly inside the Earthseed community, then they hold a responsibility to care for the others in whatever ways they can. For Mora, this entails working together with them and dissecting some of his biases to question their validity. However, Olamina also empathizes with Grayson, as he is a sharer like her; as such, she wonders if his rude demeanor conceals desperation to ". . . hide his terrible vulnerability?" (324). The view of hyperempathy as a sickness is intimately familiar to Olamina and she understands how it can be even harder on a man, since the social construction of masculinity demonizes any sign of emotion or pain. However, the ecofeminist critics Vandana Shiva and Maria Mies argue the man's patriarchal focus on hierarchy and violence embodies the antithesis of Earthseed's teaching, which ". . . recognizes life in nature (which includes human beings) is maintained by means of co-operation, and mutual care and love" (5). As Mora reveals his own patriarchal beliefs, everyone else in the community recognizes the dangers his ideology espouses.

The son and father run into another stranger along the road, and this time the man's survival instinct is balanced with the boy's empathy. As a compromise, since the father is concerned about the boy's emotional wellbeing, he allows the boy's suggestion of giving the man something to eat (McCarthy 163). The beggar, named Ely, appears ". . . like a starved and threadbare buddha . . ." (168), which suggests a position of spiritual authority, like the man's perception of his son. As the child represents a Christ-like figure, Ely comes to signify spiritual wisdom from asceticism. But, while the child comes to embody the spiritual hope of the future, the beggar is posited as the opposite, a man whose spirituality has crumbled, making him believe humans are alone. The critic O'Connor believes that, with the analogy to Buddha, Ely rejects the belief that humans can have any control or plans over the future, as such an attitude ". . . exposes a fundamental human vanity in the face of a chaotic and indifferent universe" (10). The beggar utterly rejects the boy's ideology, instead advocating, "[t]here is no God and we are his prophets" (McCarthy 170), thus labeling himself and the pair as witnesses to the death of morality. This "messianic nihilism" (O'Connor 10) infers that no meaning can be found outside of the physical. No spirituality, no religion, no ethics nor morality will reverse the apocalypse, and so Ely names humans the only beings left. Moreover, according to O'Connor, Ely argues that the survivors have elevated themselves ". . . above the material world in the vain hope of transcending the material destruction at the core of all things" (10). In contrast to the boy, who has hope for the future and its morality, the beggar believes such posturing to be ultimately escapist, as the individual attempts to distance themselves from their surroundings. Ely denies such a practice, arguing that the apocalypse survivors are all a product of the destruction around them, and so they are no better than the ash.

The man, as he shares his own religious beliefs about the boy, must once again combat a nihilistic worldview that strips meaning from the relationship with his son. After providing the beggar with food, the two adults hold a philosophical conversation on spirituality at the end of the world. Ely expresses surprise at seeing a child in such a horrid environment, to which the father replies, "[w]hat if I said that he's a God?" (McCarthy 172). Ely, despite his earlier comment that God has disappeared, takes the man's inquiry seriously: "[w]here men cant live gods fare no better” (172), further expounding, “. . . to be on the road with the last god would be a terrible thing . . .” (172). The beggar’s thoughts towards spirituality seem to be those of indifference and fear, since he believes gods are constructs of the human mind and thus die when their creators do, or the gods crave praise from the living and cannot fulfill such longing when their worshippers die. As Ely speaks, the literary critic Wielenberg argues the stranger thinks “. . . he and all the other survivors of the catastrophe are prophets of atheism, bearing witness to the absence of God from the universe” (2). Essentially, much like the father’s argument at the beginning of the novel, Ely posits a divine being would have motives to keep humanity alive; the wasteland the three now live in, by its very nature, denies the capacity for a beneficent God. Also, the beggar’s comments towards the child as a god suggest all humans and their constructions must perish; religion, he believes, fits into this category.

In both situations, the pilgrims in an apocalypse must defend their doctrines against someone who threatens their beliefs. One of Olamina’s own people challenges the interrelational model she and her group have constructed, and the woman must combat the restrictive, patriarchal hierarchies he attempts to place upon them all. The protagonist understands how a man like Mora can view his hyperempathy as a weakness and thus attack those who emasculate him, but she does not allow the man’s ideology to infect those around her. Indeed, the group recognizes the danger presented by Mora’s beliefs, as he could turn their microcosm into a reflection of the patriarchal world outside. The man also meets with someone whose views do not align with his. Ely, with his nihilistic tendencies, believes complete eradication of humanity to be the best outcome, and thus directly conflicts with the man’s wish to protect his child and the boy’s wish to construct a future. As such, at this point in the pilgrimage both protagonists must deal with potentially dangerous ideas; Olamina and the man fall back on their own religious beliefs, as the former claims Earthseed's communal focus and the latter boasts the child as a religious figure.

## The Original Goals of Pilgrimage

Olamina has found a land that could be suitable for the end of her community's pilgrimage, but she once again uses interdependence to build trust and safety. While Olamina's only goal has been to go north out of California, Bankole eventually offers to house her and the entire group on land he bought earlier. Once the group makes it to the land, Olamina's dialogical practice once again grounds the group as they decide whether to stay or not. However, Olamina uses whatever argument she can to get her people to stay, and it leaves uncertainty as to whether it is an empathetic or manipulative endeavor. In fact, the woman reports that "[c]hildern were the key to most of the adults present" (Butler 321), suggesting she views many of her group's children as pawns—or anchors—that can be molded as tool against their parents. While it could be argued that this mindset comes from a healthy place, as Olamina knows these people work well together and does not want them to leave, it could also appear that she herself breaks from the idea of interrelationality. If she truly views the children as pawns, then she has denied them— and by extent their parents—the independence she has claimed to want from them. While Shahnavaz argues Olamina's Earthseed principles attempt to find people's ". . .value is in the talents they are willing to share with each other" (44), it seems she does not allow for a completely independent and unbiased decision. The question remains of whether she uses the children as pawns or simply encourages the people in her community to view everything they will lose if they decide not to stay. So, while dialogue is used as the group decides whether to begin there or move on to another location, the motivations behind Olamina's actions must be interpreted as either a breach of her own Earthseed principles or an acknowledgement that her leadership is so strong that not a single person leaves.

The father and son’s pilgrimage in *The Road* also nears its end as they reach the coast, the mythical place that, according to the father, was meant to end their struggles. Instead, as they come upon the water, there is the gray and stormy sea. The man must once again reconcile that “. . . he was placing hopes where he had no reason to” (McCarthy 213). Unfortunately, the father’s illogical reasoning haunts the pair, as he hoped for something he knew would be impossible. Thus, the critic Brad McDuffie argues “the subtext of the boy as a redeeming grail of the land and the two-heartedness of the journey only magnifies the pilgrimage” (24-5) because even the holiness of the boy seems powerless against the wasteland. Abysmal gray coats everything, and the hope the father had, which posited the coast as a place of physical safety, fails. His pilgrimage has nearly ended and there is no hope left for him. However, the boy starkly contrasts with his father’s failure, the literary commentator Christopher Pizzino posits, as the child still hoped “. . . for new experiences and encounters . . .” (360), and thus the child’s pilgrimage has not yet ended. The physicality of the man’s goal, as he focused solely on reaching the coast, implodes and he must attempt to construct some new meaning for which to continue striving towards, while the boy can keep his hope in a larger community, in the future, and in new experiences.

As both protagonists reach their end destination, they seem to have a re-adjustment of ideals. Olamina possibly breaks her own Earthseed teachings by removing her community’s independence to make their own decisions, and the father recognizes that his purely physical goal has crumbled under the ash of the wasteland. Their pilgrimage, in which they learned from their mistakes and attempted new ways, seems to end in a regression to the people they were before the journey. This could possibly suggest that goals made at the beginning of a pilgrimage have the tendency to revert the person back to who they were when they made the meaning, or it could suggest that the completion/destruction of a pilgrimage allows the person to resemble their old self again, as they no longer must struggle so much. Either way, the protagonists have difficulty living out their ideals as their pilgrimages end.

## Pilgrimage as Its Communal Effects

However, the final acts taken by Olamina and her community suggest that Earthseed is a positive addition to the world and can make sense of the apocalypse that birthed it. After the group decides to stay on Bankole's land, they hold a communal funeral for all those who died along the way or before they met each other. Such a ritual is commemorated through a simple phrase: '"life commemorating life"' (Butler 326). The group plants trees for those they mourn, and in this powerful action Olamina universalizes grief, thus embodying what Shahnavaz would consider ". . . no longer the Other but rather *All*" (45). Although her lapse of Earthseed principles before casts doubt on her current actions, the woman seems legitimate in her wish to remember those who passed away and celebrate the life still salvageable in the community she has created. This powerful final image, of a community focused on self-healing, -betterment, and -guidance, ends Olamina's pilgrimage with peace. She has found what she wanted and will fight to protect it. Inside the apocalypse, Earthseed has carved a place for itself and relies on interrelationality and interdependence as a means of survival, positing itself as a radical alternative to its surroundings.

The father's recognition of hope in the face of death reveals that his pilgrimage has been successful, just not in the way he thought. After the destruction of the coast as a salvific place, the father begins to die. As the pair camp outside, the man recognizes, ". . . he could go no further and that this is the place where he would die" (McCarthy 277). The boy attempts to care for his father, but eventually understands that death is upon him. The final thing the father mentally comprehends is that "[g]oodness will find the little boy. It always has. It will again" (281). The final belief in an ideology defined by illogic, it echoes with the naïve hope that, even though the father did not trust a single stranger they saw on the road, there are "good guys" out there who will protect his son. The father's last thought, according to Graulund, ". . . seems to suggest that a humanist belief in the tenet of goodness is not only worth more than the remainder of creation, but actually able to sustain itself independently of it" (74). There is no reason for the man to believe besides his irrational belief that goodness is a thing outside of the natural order of the wasteland, that it need not be created by a conscious effort but exists independently and will continue to do so. In this way, with the father's hope guiding the child, the man suggests that hope may not lead to redemption but ". . . opens up the possibility that hope *might* matter" (76). Hope, which pushed the man to reach the coast, is repurposed in his death. He realizes that his pilgrimage was never about reaching a physical location but about protecting his child; he has hope that the son's hope can thrive where his fails. Thus, the father's pilgrimage ends with his death, and defines his child as the means through which peace can be obtained.

Finally, the child finds a community after his father's death, proving the father's errors while also praising him for keeping the son—and by consequence the future—alive. After the death of his father, the child walks back onto the road and is met by a man, woman, and two children. Even though the father never allowed his son to experience a community outside of himself, his mistake is rectified by the presence of this family. For the first time, there is a "good guy" that is not the father or son. And, as Graulund extrapolates, since ". . . goodness is able to exist outside the close-knit union of father and son . . . the world outside the father-son relationship . . . is still invested with meaning, purpose, and future" (72). The child has found others who share the same sense of "good" and "evil," which means the world is not meaningless. If what made the father and son's relationship meaningful also exists in other contexts, it suggests that significance can be applied to more than only their relationship. Ironically, Pizzino comments that the man's hope of goodness finding his son ". . . is fulfilled only because others enact a kind of goodness the man has refused; he speaks a collective truth despite the fact that he has participated in its making in a limited way" (365). Even though the man can hardly claim that he allowed even the opportunity for goodness into the pair's relationship, in his final moments alive he perhaps recognizes his mistakes and wishes for someone to do what he had not: expand their community and seek other "good guys." The father's pilgrimage has come to an end, but the child's can continue because he has found those with whom his father's memory is flawed yet loving.

Thus, in the end, it appears that both protagonists' pilgrimages were successful to an extent. While Olamina may not cling as closely as she preaches to her Earthseed doctrine, the introduction of the religion appears to have positive impacts on the others in the community. The members of the new establishment, Acorn, use an interrelational model to protect themselves and others, which they learned from Olamina during her pilgrimage. Even if the personal growth of the protagonist can be questioned, the effect she causes on those around her cannot. The man, on the other hand, seems to redeem himself in the last possible moment, as the goal of his pilgrimage moves from the physical location of the coast to his recognition that he has allowed his son to survive. As he represents the vanguard of the past, his hope transfers from his and his child's physical survival to the child's morality and future.

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