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„Post-Apocalypse and Patriarchy: Father-Child Relationships in Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* and Naughty Dog's *The Last of Us*"

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Abbreviations

TR	*The Road*
TLOU	*The Last of Us*

1. Preliminary

1.1. Post-Apocalyptic Potentials

The apocalypse is omnipresent. Be it the countless renditions of zombie outbreaks, nuclear world wars, alien invasions or world-wide natural disasters in novels, movies, comics, video games or TV shows, the end of the world is a transmedial phenomenon that does not cease in popularity. Therefore, the apocalypse is rightfully described as "one of mankind's most ancient fantasies" (Horn 21). Because of its historicity, the apocalypse has experienced various transitions and manifestations. For the majority of its history, the term has been closely linked to religious concepts in what is referred to as the "classical model" (Horn 13). It describes the point at which man's actual purpose and worth is revealed in the destruction of the world by a divine entity. Often, this culminates in the world's judgment, assigning people to eternal life or eternal death according to their deeds as it is described in Abrahamic monotheism for instance. As a result of the diffuse imagery presented in religious texts, individuals have incessantly associated the circumstances and phenomena of their age to those images, arriving at a vast array of interpretations regarding time and place of the apocalypse. While earlier generations of the Western world therefore disagreed on what these images represented, they nonetheless abided by a certain timeline: As described in the Apocalypse of John, they assumed that the apocalypse was preceded by the end times in which evils and tribulations would become so prevalent and powerful that only God could successfully intervene (Beer, Tomkins). When, for instance in the latter half of the 17th century, large scale disasters such as the Earthquake of Lisbon or major developments such as the French Revolution occurred that were of such extent, people therefore expected that the apocalypse was nigh. However, their hope of the abolition of evil through God's intervention was unfulfilled. Consequently, people became increasingly disillusioned with the vain promises of justice and judgment through the apocalypse.

Therefore, from the beginning of the 18th century onwards, various artists such as Jean Paul, Mary Shelley, Lord Byron or John Martin transformed these increasingly pessimistic notions into art and established what is today referred as the Romantic Apocalypse or the Last Man trope (Weninger 81-85). On the one hand, it retains the depiction of large-scale tragedies and catastrophes as described in the "classical model" before God's intervention and final judgment. On the other hand, these depictions do not rely on a godly entity that eventually reveals his divine plan to humanity through his apocalyptic schemes. Rather, they are based on arbitrary causes or human-inflicted practices and processes (Horn 26) that accumulate and reach a tipping point from which onwards "a previously stable condition suddenly becomes unstable,

tips over, and turns into something qualitatively different" (Horn 7). This can be exemplified through climate change or economic developments in which "the simple accumulation of small steps and minute acts" eventually culminates in the loss of control, rendering everything that ensues from thereon an unpredictable affair (Horn 8). As such, extrapolating the potential consequences of an overexerted accumulation marks the point in which the concept of the post-apocalypse is born. Unlike the classical model's conclusion of all things in the apocalypse, the post-apocalypse does not "represent[…] [man] […] as a creature of God but as a natural living being" (Horn 26). In not providing an end through the apocalypse but exposing individuals to its aftermath, it is shown "how a disaster might affect not only our environment but also the essence of humanity" (Horn 12).

Since the post-apocalypse does not feature the total end of humanity irrespective of the catastrophic extent, allowing for a potential future, it is argued whether it should be considered as dystopian or utopian. The question seems odd initially: As most post-apocalyptic works revolve around processes of the eradication and destruction of either living beings or the environment, they are intuitively assigned to the dystopian spectrum or, as Washington (5) states, considered nihilist in that post-apocalyptic texts "predict a future planet inhospitable to human life and to the meanings we attach to and derive from that life." At first glance, this seems an adequate description as it applies to a vast array of post-apocalyptic works, including the ones that are analyzed in this thesis. *The Road* depicts two unnamed protagonists, father and son, in a forbidding world full of ashes, relentless cold and cannibalistic foes that altogether reduce their chances of sustaining life to an absolute minimum. Resources are scarce and earth disallows for the perpetuation of conventional agricultural life, meaning that survivors either have to rely on ever-diminishing stocks or become cannibals in order to survive. Concerning *The Last of Us,* its setting is not of equally grim nature, however, circumstances are far from optimistic: A cordyceps virus breakout turns humans into violent zombie-like creatures, leading to the collapse of all government structures and society as a whole. Individuals are kept in quarantine zones governed by the military which has come under threat by a paramilitary group called the Fireflies and other marauder groups, rendering life within those zones is equally dangerous than living on the outside. Although the natural world blooms and blossoms, meaning that natural resources can be gathered and utilized as before, the constant threat of infected as well as groups of strangers abiding by their own rules paints a bleak picture regarding the possibility of societal recovery. Hence, these settings can hardly be considered utopian (Lucat 16, Åström 112, Morgenstern 34, Farca & Ladevèze).

Irrespective of the apocalypse's destructive and dystopic nature, it can be argued that there is an inherently positive potential that lies within post-apocalyptic works, meaning that their negative nature is not as obvious as it initially seems. Since the classical apocalypse culminates in God's judgment, eternal life and death, it signifies the end of all narratives. Extending even further, the final defeat of evil in the last judgment disallows for the states of eternal life and death to be altered; however, in order for narratives to be constituted, change between the two states of beginning and end are required (Schmid 2-3). This means that the post-apocalypse is better suited than its apocalyptic counterpart in order to be narratively utilized since post-apocalypticism is all about change. Furthermore, as Horn (24) states, the post-apocalypse "casts a cold and revealing light on all things human, a light that brings out not only the quality and worth of individuals but also the stability of political institutions and social bonds and even the usefulness or uselessness of objects and things." This is referred to as the *futurum perfectum*, a gaze backward to understand an ultimate truth that can only be revealed in hindsight. Additionally, because post-apocalyptic works do not offer the security of a divine plan as it is the case in the classical model, it provides the potential for humans to realize "themselves as the *authors* of their own future, […] both of hope and anxiety" (Horn 23). Once again, these are common denominators in *The Road* as well as *The Last of Us*: While *The Road* centers around the question of morality's value and applicability in a gruesomely Darwinist environment, *The Last of Us* points out the various potentials of reacting to a fallen society as a human being, either in succumbing to lawlessness as the societal order has failed or in utilizing the *tabula rasa* for a second chance in resurrecting human virtues and institutions such as loyalty, friendship, co-operation and family.

All in all, this brief overview offers a glimpse into the inner workings of the post-apocalypse and its historical development. Unlike the classical apocalypses' definite nature, post-apocalyptic works allow for a greater narrative potential in depicting the possible outcomes of reaching and exceeding certain tipping points or witnessing and surviving the earth's destruction or society's downfall. In gazing at the past from a possible future (*futurum perfectum*), a deeper insight regarding the value of human practices and its sustainability beyond apocalyptic disasters can be attained, rendering the post-apocalypse a vital expression when it comes to the critical reflection of human existence.

1.2. Parenthood and Patriarchy in the Post-Apocalypse

As stated in the previous subchapter, the post-apocalypse's intriguing quality lies not only in extrapolating currently observable processes and tendencies leading to potential disasters, but

also offering prognoses and scenarios regarding what human life might turn into or, more specifically, which elements of the previous societal order and human life as it was known can be retained. Since *The Last of Us* and *The Road* center around the relationship of a father figure coupled with a child, it is of interest whether the post-apocalyptic potential of deconstruction and offering potential alternatives is utilized when it comes to parenthood and patriarchy.

Regardless of the deconstructive potential that post-apocalyptic narratives offer, it does not seem to apply on conventional gender roles. In general, it has been observed that there is a tendency to rely on the depiction of strong, capable males in popular culture. Fuchs & Rieser (71) emphasize that the entertainment history as a whole has been dominated by male, patriarchal figures (Hamad 1). The same also holds true for a great number of post-apocalyptic works:"[After] society crumbles, a white male hero is called to lead", […] [h]e is heterosexual and cisgender; he is skilled in combat and he knows how to shoot a gun" (Lavigne 161). More recently, when it comes to the representation of fathers in post-apocalyptic works and other entertainment-related areas, the alpha-male stereotype has been replaced by fathers who embody distinctively female-associated characteristics such as "[nurturing], [listening] to [their children], and, ultimately, [making] way for [them]" (Fuchs & Rieser (71). As a result, it seems as if the post-apocalyptic necessity of males to function as the main or sole caretaker of children enables them to defy common clichés of masculinity.

However, what appears to be the subversion of masculine stereotypes due to the male embodiment of maternal stereotypes in the first place turns out to be nothing more than a reinforcement of the male dominance in those genres. It should therefore rather be understood as a postfeminist phenomenon since the male embodiment of stereotypically maternal behaviors achieves the very opposite of gender equality or non-binary parenthood. In other words, as the male is capable of personifying both male and female qualities, the female is made redundant (Hamad 3-4). This is attributed to the conscious strategy of male producers and writers in order to "allow for the privileging of masculine subjectivities, and the concomitant elision of motherhood" (Hamad 3) as it is present in a number of notable works such as "*War of the Worlds*, *The Pursuit of Happyness* (2006), *Martian Child* (2007), *Taken* (2008), *The Hangover* (2008), *The Road* (2009), *Due Date* (2010), *Somewhere* (2010), and *What To Expect When You're Expecting* (2012) (Hamad 2). In terms of post-apocalyptic works, this trope is taken up in order to ensure the preservation of male lineage, due to which female absence or subordination do not solely concern maternal figures but girls as well. Consequently, stories about fatherhood often emphasize "fathers raising and protecting their sons" (Lavigne 161). This can be observed in works such as *Jericho, Revolution, Falling Skies, Colony, The Walking*

Dead or *The Road* (Lavigne 161). Moreover, it is noted that in order to reinforce the importance of male figures, women's actions and choices, if featured, are often negatively connotated. For instance, Rick Grimes' wife Lori in *The Walking Dead* is frequently rebuked for her passivity when it comes to partaking in pivotal tasks to ensure the groups survival although she is pregnant. Meanwhile, Rick's participation in hazardous tasks, often unnecessarily risking his life, is never commented on in an equally negative manner "even though his death would leave his child extremely vulnerable in the zombie apocalypse" (Fox). The negative connotation of females also manifests in the image of the alien or zombie daughter as it is the case in *Falling Skies, Z Nation* or *Defiance* in which the process of othering signifies the inaptitude of the female in such patriarchally-structured worlds (Lavigne 161).

Another intriguing characteristic that is often present in post-apocalyptic works is the presence of child figures. As stated earlier, in terms of the patriarchal stance, the pairing of a father figure with a child is very useful in foreground the male superiority over women in not only functioning as a strong leader, but also as an empathetic and caring parent. However, this feature can also be utilized in order to achieve the opposite, undermining heteronormative structures. For example, although Ellie is introduced as a potential savior due to her immunity, the fact that she is lesbian as it is revealed in *The Last of Us: Left Behind* counteracts heteronormativity in that the world's potential savior is not a strong male, but a lesbian teenage girl (Fuchs & Rieser 77). Another instance of this can be discovered in Telltale's *The Walking Dead*. It features Lee, a male professor turned prisoner, taking care of a young girl named Clementine and functioning as her protector. His gradual decline in succumbing to the infection means he is progressively emasculated, up to the point where he has to abandon her altogether, thereby failing to ensure her safety.

In addition to that, the presence of children in the post-apocalypse exceeds the mere purpose of enforcing or subverting patriarchy: According to Olsen (x), children play a vital role as the signifier of the godly and unblemished which is in opposition to the defiled and deranged post-apocalyptic worlds. This is in part attributed to the fascination of such unusual juxtaposition, however it is also believed to be rooted in the child's signification of past, present and future: "The child […], their image, their mythos of innocence and purity, defines the lost past/present and becomes a motivational, almost sacred image to spur on reclamation of the future" (Olsen xi). In addition to that, the child's frequent association with the godly, leading to the sacralization of the child in literature and arts from the 17th century onwards, is another reason for the presence of children in such works. Because they are depicted as morally incorruptible as it is the case in *The Road,* they are associated with hope and futurity and their

survival with the potential chance of humanity's or society's rebirth to what it was known for previously. This notion is also present in *The Last of Us*: Ellie's immunity means that ensuring her safety could provide a cure for the cordyceps infection, resulting in its eradication and the advent of a new society.

1.3. Narrativity in digital games

Despite the fact that both *The Last of Us* as well as *The Road* share fundamental similarities in their depiction of a parent figure and a child on their journey through a post-apocalyptic landscape, one major difference concerns the nature of medium since the latter is realized in the form of a novel while the former is a digital game. However, in arguing for the narrative qualities of *The Last of Us*, it is shown that it represents an ideal source regarding its analyzability and comparability to a novel such as *The Road* and not simply due to its post-apocalyptic and parent-child-focused setting.

The considerations of digital games in the fields of literature and culture studies has only been a recent phenomenon. This can be attributed due to early iterations of games such as *Tic-Tac-Toe* in the 50s or the rise of Atari games in the late 70s which were primarily simulation-oriented and neither possessed narrative value nor achieved mainstream popularity compared to other media such as film or literature (Kirriemuir 21-25). However, the advancements of both hardware and software capacities that occurred in the late 80s and early 90s allowed for digital games to present themselves in an entirely new light. This led to overall advances in audiovisual aspects such as improved animation, textures, colors, lighting and sound quality, but also a more pronounced narrative component. Further developments throughout the 90s and early 2000s and the emergence of new genres have resulted in an increasingly varied multimedial experience, meaning that "[n]arrative elements [have become] almost as ubiquitous to digital games as visual elements […] and [that] their importance and complexity increases steadily" (Domsch 14).

Due to games' becoming an increasingly popular medium as a result of these developments, several individuals argued that they should be accounted for in scientific observations and analyses. Thus, two main factions emerged, trying to establish an analysis of digital games in the scientific realm. The ludologists, a group centering around Gonzalo Frasca, claimed that computer games represented mere sets of rules that the player had to follow along in order to complete the game and that games' narrative elements are only of subordinated importance, meaning that they could not be analyzed according to literary or film studies (Kokonis 173-174). Furthermore, it was maintained that even if games featured characters, they

could only be seen as a more visually appealing representation than a cursor, therefore hardly comparable to the rich character depictions found in literary works or movies (Frasca 167-168). On the other side of the spectrum, narratologists argued that, irrespective of their complexity, most digital games feature narratives. These could be either proto-narratives such as releasing a captured princess with only little to no character interaction or development (*Super Mario 64*) or richly multilayered experiences such as *Silent Hill* with voiced dialogs, cut scenes, complexly arranged soundtracks and parallel dimensions (Frederking et al 299).

Although both sides offer important perspectives on digital games, it is their interplay that allows for a proper apprehension of the matter. Aarseth (130) therefore aims to unify the two concepts in pointing out the consistently shared elements of both stories and digital games. These can be described along "*four independent, ontic dimensions* [–]*WORLD, OBJECTS, AGENTS and EVENTS*" in the so-called "ludo-narrative design-space." It is further pointed out that while the presence of these is characteristic of "every game and every story", there are remarkable difference when it comes to their utilization in digital games. *WORLD,* the in-game space virtual characters interact in, manifests either as "*linear, multicursal, or open* […]". *OBJECTS* are either "*dynamic, user-created* [in ludic games] *or static* [when it comes to narrative games]." Regarding the representation of *AGENTS,* there is a tendency for them to be presented as "*rich, deep* and *round characters*" in narrative games or "shallow, hollow bots" in ludic games. Lastly, *EVENTS* are either "*open, selectable* or *plotted*", allowing for a spectrum ranging from "linear story […] [to] pure game" (Aarseth 130-132). As a result, it can be comprehended why *The Last of Us* is best-described as a narrative game since it offers "deep, rich, round characters" subject to development, fully-plotted events that can neither be changed nor avoided by the player and a linear game world with little to no room for free exploration (Aarseth 132).

While Aarseth's model bridges the gap between narratological and ludological approaches, it fails to provide the tools and criteria for a game's analysis on either the narratological or ludological level. As such, Boelmann's ludo-narratological approach serves as the ideal companion to Aarseth's model. Although Boelmann (106-107) points out the distinctiveness of digital games in comparison to other story-telling media such as movies or literature due to their interactivity, he concludes that the presence of narrative elements in games with the minor exception of sports simulations or simple party games justifies a predominantly narratological approach. While the influence of the player might sometimes materialize in changing the order of events or determining whether they occur at all, each of those individual missions or quests represents a so-called *narrateme* (Boelmann 112). As most of these *narratemes* are of

episodical nature, they can be approached in narratological means, much like a single act in drama. This means that irrespective of a game's genre, each of these narratemes, often pre- or succeeded by cutscenes (short movie-like clips triggering or explaining the circumstances surrounding an episode), can be sufficiently analyzed according to categories such as characters, space, time, and events/results (Boelmann 127-130). Subsequently, in juxtaposing and comparing those *narratemes*, the macro structure of the game can be revealed, decoded and assessed which is also achieved by the same narratological means (Boelmann 114-119). Thus, irrespective of a digital game's narratological or ludological emphasis, there are only minor exceptions which disallow for a game's ludo-narratological analysis according to Boelmann.

In addition to that, it has also been argued that due to the similarity between games and film, the former can be analyzed according to concepts of film studies. Since a number of games rely on cut scenes in order to introduce a new chapter or the underlying plot, these make use of the vocabulary that is utilized in most films. This concerns "audio-visual features such as the framing of images, *mise-en-scène*, shifts in time and space, and the use of sound effects and music – all of which can be analysed in terms similar to those used in film studies" (King & Krzywinska 115). Concerning perspective, this does not solely revolve around the analysis of the camera placement in cut scenes but also which camera perspectives are utilized throughout the gameplay. This either materializes in a first-person or third-person perspective, with the latter in some cases being fixed in order to achieve effects such as suspense, surprise (not being able to see what happens around a character) or lack of control (King & Krzywinska 118). The distinction between first- and third-person perspective is of pivotality regarding the player's immersion and identification with a character. Since the latter features "the player's activity […] represented in the form of an avatar visible to the player", there is less identification of the player with the character's behavior, resulting in greater distance than witnessing events from a first-person viewpoint (King & Krzywinska 118). As far as other factors such as the scene design, sound and music are concerned, they too can be analyzed by means of film studies, such as the visuals' iconography ("particular sets of visual motifs that become associated over a period of time with one kind of film or another") or distinguishing between diegetic (from the in-game universe) and non-diegetic sounds ("soundtrack music in order to create atmospheric or emotional effects") (King & Krzywinska 119-120).

As such, taking into account *The Last of Us'* rich repertoire of cinematic cutscenes, its complex, multifaceted characters as well as rigid structure disallowing for significant influence by the player, its comparability to the structure of novels or movies successfully allows for its consideration in this thesis along the lines of a narratology and film studies approach.

2. Ethics

Ethics, the philosophical foundation of the protagonists in *The Road* and *The Last of Us*, serves as the backbone of all character choices as well as the behavior they display towards each other and outside figures. As such, ethics does not solely concern the relationship between the respective protagonist pairs, but also how protagonists justify their actions in the light of survival, loss and trauma. Regarding an overall comparison, it will be shown that ethical choices employed by characters in the two works are of vastly different nature. This applies not only to the respective values but also to the ethical foundation of characters within each title. As such, this chapter aims to describe the philosophical framework each character abides by, how this framework is informed by faith, character histories and experience and how it eventually manifests in the perceivable behavior.

2.1. "Good guys", "Carrying the Fire": The Intricacy of Mainting Ethics in *The Road*

Concerning *The Road*, the uniqueness of the protagonists' ethical conduct is repeatedly reinforced through the phrases "good guys" as well as "carrying the fire". Johns-Putra (529-530) states that the novel overtly contrasts the two protagonists from everyone else in that "[t]he man and the boy are not humans in a dead world as such; they are humans in an inhuman world." Hence, "carrying the fire" can be linked to the Promethean myth: It depicts Prometheus, the Titan, who steals the fire from the gods in order to share it with humanity which he is punished for eventually, however crucially founding human civilization through his choice. (Luttrull 17). Wielenberg (3) points out the fire's relevancy for *The Road* in that its physical characteristics allow for the retention of fundamental human qualities:

> Fire sustains them; it keeps them warm and cooks their food. It allows them to play cards and allows the man to read to the child at night. Fire is the foundation of civilization [but] also the primary implement of the destruction of civilization in The Road. Perhaps to carry the fire is to carry the seeds of civilization. If civilization is to return to the world, it will be through the efforts of "good guys" like the man and the child. At the very least, the two struggle to maintain civilization between themselves.

The novel takes this notion further in that the allegorical meaning of "carrying the fire" signifies a missionary goal to re-introduce "some kind of moral order and as such [denotes] the guarantee of a future humanity to be borne by the son" (Patton 142). As the world they walk in is constantly described as animalistic, dark and cold (Juge 20), the father ritualistically inscribes the associated values that are associated with "the fire" in the son and thereby ensures that the latter is familiarized with the responsibility of maintaining it (Luttrull 22). This can be retraced

in three pivotal moments (Luttrull 22-23): The first of the "fire conversations" serves to "establish a sense of security" as they notice lights from the buildings of a nearby city, hinting at a potential threat. However, the father assures the son that they are "safe from the unknown" since "carrying the fire" has kept them safe up to this point (*TR* 83). In the second conversation, the boy independently makes use of the phrase in order to differentiate himself from the atrocities they have witnessed on entering the house full of (half-eaten) prisoners, waiting to be eaten by cannibal slavers. This signifies the realization that refusing cannibalistic behavior ("We wouldnt ever eat anybody") is what characterizes someone who is "carrying the fire" (*TR* 128-129) and, as far as their faith is concerned, is the reason for providence to keep them safe. This belief is supported throughout the plot: Although their precarious condition is pointed out several times, either due to prospective starvation or being exposed to natural hazards without a shelter, they discover provisions and hideouts repeatedly. As it is more explicitly described in the chapter on parenthood, this can be attributed to the father's skilled behavior when it comes to ensuring their survival which would seemingly refute the notion of providence. However, the random nature of these instances occurring immediately after moments in which any further survival is hardly conceivable strongly suggests that the two protagonists are indeed right about their assumption that they are taken care of by a divine power due to their moral faithfulness (*TR* 138, 204, 231). In the third of the fire conversations (*TR* 216-217), the boy comprehends that retaining "the fire" not only is their means of pleasing God and receiving his blessings as a result, but also bears the responsibility to remain vigilant. This involves keeping oneself safe from possible threats as well as being aware that they might not be the only "good guys", meaning that they are to be mindful when it comes to supporting anyone that is not one of the "bad guys".

Ensuring that the two protagonists are displayed as radically unique in their conduct compared to any other individual, the novel relies on the principle of dichotomization (O'Connell 144). When they are almost encountered by a gang of marauders commuting by truck, these are described as follows: "They came shuffling through the ash casting their hooded heads from side to side. Some of them wearing canister masks. One in a biohazard suit. Stained and filthy. Slouching along with clubs in their hands, lengths of pipe. Coughing" (*TR* 60). On fleeing from them, they are unexpectedly running into one of their members, commonly referred to as the roadrat. Even though he does not display hostile behavior towards the two protagonists initially, this does not leave any impression with the man. Rather, he remains skeptical and proceeds to threaten the roadrat with his gun. In offering a glimpse into the father's mind, the roadrat's face is described featuring "[e]yes collared in cups of grime and deeply

sunk[,] [l]ike an animal inside the skull looking outside the eyeholes" (*TR* 63). As such, it is emphasized that neither can there be mutual trust nor any meaningful interaction between the two due to the roadrat's bestiality. Although this seems exaggerated initially, the man's caution proves vital since the roadrat suddenly grabs the boy and is about to stab the child before the father successfully intervenes in killing the man with a quick headshot (*TR* 66). Later, when he reflects on this experience, he recollects the roadrat's inhumane characteristics, the "reptilian calculations in those cold and shifting eyes[,] [t]he gray and rotten teeth[,] [c]laggy with human flesh" (*TR* 75). He therefore assures himself that killing the man was the only rational choice to resolve the situation. In the light of the animalized characterization of the roadrat, the minimalist description of the father as "the man" and the son as "the boy" attains further value since remaining human qualities in an inhumane world represents the greatest achievement and challenge they can accomplish.

Regarding the representation of "good guys", Wielenberg (4) condenses the father's behavior to a set of six fundamental principles that govern his conduct:

1. Don't eat people.
2. Don't steal.
3. Don't lie.
4. Keep your promises.
5. Help others.
6. Never give up.

The sum of these is, on closer examination, highly comparable to Kant's Categorical Imperative which fundamentally differentiates between the approach towards "*persons* and mere *things*". While *things* do not obtain an intrinsic value beyond their usability and can therefore be neglected at the point of their obsolescence, the same does not hold true for the "intrinsic worth" of *persons* (Wielenberg 4). When it comes to the first principle "Don't eat people", no compromise is made. Still upset about the cannibalistic practices they have overtly witnessed in their encounter with the enslaved prisoners, the boy asks if they would ever resort to cannibalism in case they were starving. Despite the father's admission that they are already in the process of starvation, cannibalism as their last resort in order to survive is categorically ruled out (*TR* 129). The man's resistance is even more remarkable considering that throughout the entire narrative, their situation remains highly precarious and only sporadically experiences relief. Multiple times, the boy's frailty is pointed out ("So thin" (*TR* 29); "The boy so thin it stopped his heart" (*TR* 38); "The boy so frail and thin through his coat" (*TR* 67)) and although the father's state is not equally commented on, there is indeed little hope of further survival around the novel's midpoint ("He was beginning to think that death was finally upon them and they should find some place to hide where they would not be found" (*TR* 129)). As such, their

decision to abstain from cannibalism puts them at a significant risk; yet, as stated earlier, the fact that they are taken care of by what they call divine providence as well as the father's evident survivalist competence means that they do not succumb to starvation.

However, the father's conduct in abiding by other principles is not of equal consistency. This issue is perhaps most apparent when the two protagonists encounter individuals which they could offer help, yet the father decides against doing so. On coming across a man gravely injured by a lightning and seeing him slowly succumbing to his fate, they walk past him despite the son's insistence that they should offer him support which the father completely ignores (*TR* 50). In another instance, the boy suddenly claims to have discovered a boy of similar age who he wants to chase after although it seems plausible that he might only imagine him. Nevertheless, the father, despite multiple invocations by the boy to go after him, rejects the idea although it puts the (imaginary) boy at risk. Besides, on discovering a house filled with captivated slaves waiting to be consumed by their slavers, they are pleaded to help them out of their misery. Instead, the father flees from the scene together with his son (*TR* 111). Furthermore, when a thief steals their belongings while they are walking along the coast, the father's behavior is everything but kind once they have traced him. Not only is the thief threatened to be killed in case he does not immediately return the stolen goods but also forced to take off his own clothes to the point of complete nudity as a means of punishment (*TR* 256-257). Although the father justifies his actions before the thief and the son ("You took everything. […] I'm going to leave you the way you left us" (*TR* 257)), his behavior seems unnecessarily harsh, in particular taking into account that the thief is not hostile and fully cooperates. The boy's reaction, repeatedly urging the father to stop and help the thief, sobbing in affection for the perpetrator, serves as further indication that the father's actions are inappropriate. Nevertheless, it is to no avail as the man demands the boy to stop crying and points at the fact that without discovering the thief and retrieving their belongings, their death would be a soon certainty, adding that since fear and responsibility way hard on his shoulders, he has no choice but to behave as he does. Irrespective of these excuses, he decides to relinquish the thief's clothes, securing them with a stone in order for them not to be blown away by the wind (*TR* 259-260) which could be perceived as an admission of his wrongdoing.

Due to these violations, Wielenberg (7) raises the question whether the father can be seen as a good guy after all. The son himself shares a similar sentiment, pointing at the discrepancy between theory and practice: "But in the stories, we're always helping other people and we dont help people" (*TR* 268). Yet, irrespective of the father's shortcomings, the father's self-proclamation is nonetheless valid since the father's principal desire is to keep his son alive,

meaning that circumstances will sometimes lead to the prioritization of one principle over another (Guo 3). The hazardous nature of those situations offers a plausible excuse for the father's reluctant behavior since sharing their scarce resources with others or getting trapped and eaten by the slavers is a substantial risk the father is not willing to take. It can therefore be said that "out of human instinct for self-preservation and out of love for his son, he sometimes chooses to act irrespective of others' feelings", indicating that his understanding of representing the good guys in the post-apocalyptic environment is not without limits (Guo 4). This however is less the result of an egotistical attitude but rather the consequence of the underlying dilemma he is facing, meaning his choices are not fundamentally flawed or amoral:

> [F]rom the moment the father decides to keep alive to protect his son, and to stay good, he begins to face the conflict of his two obligations: parental obligation towards his son and social obligation towards other humans, because sometimes keeping alive in this devastated world can only be achieved by hurting others directly or indirectly. This is the ethical dilemma he must face: to protect themselves sometimes needs to resort to violence and even killing and killing violates the basic principle of ethics. (Guo 3)

2.2. Individualism and Collectivism in *The Last of Us*

When it comes to ethical behavior in *The Last of Us*, its major aspects are remarkably different from *The Road.* As Joel is the game's protagonist, most of ethical choices are directly related to his actions and behavior displayed in the game. These reveal that neither can he be described as a morality-driven person nor does he consistently conform to a set of ethical principles.

Joel's conduct is driven by an essential distrust in people. This is strongly related to his past as well as his experience in which "trauma and loss are the most frequently recurring ideas [with] [d]eath [coloring] the tenor of the game and [defining] the most poignant moments of the narrative" (Voorhees b). The prologue sequence is perhaps the most pivotal in this regard: In trying to escape from the cordyceps breakout in his hometown with Sarah and his brother Tommy, his daughter is shot by a soldier who, in doing so, subverts his actual duty to ensure for the safety of the uninfected. His daughter's death triggers a significant character change since twenty years later, Joel is re-introduced as a smuggler and "damaged [man] […], [having] become a sociopath to survive 20 years in a devastated America" (Stuart) which his brother Tommy later describes as follows: "I got nothing but nightmares from those years" (*TLOU*, Tommy's Dam). Therefore, it seems as if witnessing his daughter being killed by someone who is supposedly committed to keeping society safe as well as seeing society's downfall results in Joel's abandonment of ethical belief. This is why there is little likeness between the caring and attentive father in the game's opening scenes and the torturing thug he resembles on meeting Robert which not only other characters such as his brother or Bill ("It's the normal people that scare me. You of all people should understand that" (*TLOU*, Bill's Town)) but also he himself

is aware of when he confesses to Ellie: "I've been on both sides" (*TLOU,* Pittsburgh). Despite Joel's changed ethical conduct, certain traits such as loyalty and affection are nonetheless visible in the game's early portions, indicating that he has not fully abandoned fundamental human virtues. When an infected Tess chooses to sacrifice herself in order to provide Joel and Ellie some breathing space from the military because she is doomed either way, she wishes for Joel to continue in taking Ellie to the Fireflies which he only slowly and begrudgingly accepts (*TLOU,* The Outskirts). This highlights that Joel is fully responsible towards those he cares for.

Irrespective of such acts, they are the exception of the rule. As previous traumata still weigh heavy on his shoulders, every kind of close emotional relationships bears the danger of re-experiencing feelings of loss which is why Joel prioritizes traits such as egotism and emotional distance over benevolence and empathy. Hence, his treatment of Ellie in the first half of their journey together is characterized by a harsh and impersonal stance towards her. Unlike *The Road's* father who is fully invested in the son's emotional life, providing and encouraging him to share and talk about whatever is on his mind, offering him messages of hope and affectionately cherishing him in every way possible, Joel does not at all account for Ellie's emotional well-being and shuts her off whenever she desires to discuss events such as the deaths of his daughter Sarah, Tess or Sam (Joyce). This initially occurs right after Tess' death when Ellie seeks emotional relief and wants to provide Joel with her condolences. Rather than gratefully embracing Ellie's empathetic behavior, Joel rebuffs her sharply, stating that their histories and emotional lives are not to be discussed (*TLOU,* Quarantine Zone). However, on meeting Bill, Joel realizes that shutting off from everyone poses the threat of turning into a paranoid sociopath. While Bill stresses the fact that individualism and the denial of emotional attachment towards others is the key in sustaining himself and seems to do well in physical terms as Ellie alludes to in humorous fashion ("By the looks of it, you could stand to lose some of that food") (*TLOU,* Bill's Town), his overall demeanor hardly serves as an advertisement of such mentality. This is shown in his constant irritability and his failure to empathize with both Joel and Ellie, often responding to them in an overly sarcastic and aggressive manner as well as mocking their current state ("Y'know, I hope you know what you're doin'. […] This goes on record as the worst fucking job you've ever taken. […] [T]ell Tess that she can take this job […] – she can shove it right up-" (*TLOU*, Bill's Town). While the protagonists' situation is indeed hardly desirable, Bill fails to realize the benefits of keeping company with others. Despite her physical inferiority, Ellie's presence is a vital factor in ensuring that she and Joel escape with a functioning car whilst staying safe from the infected. Unlike Bill who continues to belittle and ridicule Ellie, Joel realizes that she is more than mere cargo and functions as a

valuable collaborator before the end of the chapter. As such, he demonstrates his appreciation when he tells her that she is "doin' a great job" and later counteracts Bill's underappreciation ("That girl nearly got us killed") of her: "You gotta admit - she did hold her own back there" (*TLOU*, Bill's Town). Taking into account Joel's change in his behavior towards Ellie throughout the game's chapter as well as Bill's paranoid state failing to connect with others on an emotional level, it can be inferred that Joel has realized the advantages and disadvantages of a collaborative relationship with Ellie in comparison to Bill's solitude, although he does not consider her an equal.

Joel's growth in sympathy towards Ellie the longer she is around makes him aware that his initial stance of emotional seclusion, keeping him safe from attachment to others and the danger of trauma and loss, is crumbling. Therefore, on reaching Tommy's Dam, he assigns his brother Tommy with the task of taking her to the Fireflies on his behalf, disclosing to Ellie that since she is not his daughter, there is no responsibility for him to continue with their journey (*TLOU*, Tommy's Dam). However, the short time spent at Tommy's dam is not without repercussions regarding Joel's character and yields a change of mind. On the one hand, Tommy's community is presented as fully-functional, capable of overcoming substantial technical issues (e.g. repairing one of the main turbines) or fending off an attack by a group of marauders. On the other hand, it is not only their capability that makes them such an extraordinary exception from the chaotic circumstances found elsewhere: The fact that the autonomous community is governed by a married couple in Tommy and his wife Maria as well consisting of over twenty families, as Tommy discloses to Joel, highlights the potential that lies within the institutions of community rather than individuality and seclusion. As Tommy tellingly puts it: "They're good men. This place gives 'em a second chance. It gives us all a second chance" (*TLOU*, Tommy's Dam). Although Joel fails to comprehend the relevancy of this notion for himself, he eventually realizes that in fully embracing Ellie as his surrogate daughter, he can experience a similar kind of redemption as well. This means that in ensuring Ellie's safety and survival, he transforms and replaces the negative experience of failure sustained in the prologue with his success of representing Ellie's protector, further resulting in benefits such as company and loyalty.

Joel's realization of Ellie's redemptive quality in eradicating his failed fatherhood with Sarah renders their journey to the Fireflies obsolete, meaning that, remarkably, he prioritizes Ellie over his long-term partner Tess despite the short-lived nature of his journey with Ellie. Therefore, before reaching the Lab, Joel suggests that they should return to Tommy's Dam in order to complete his transition from secluded individuality to embracing family life in a functional and cooperative community. However, Ellie denies his suggestion and they

eventually arrive at the Lab, albeit only barely as Ellie almost drowns, losing her consciousness, and Joel is knocked out by the Fireflies on trying to rescue her (*TLOU*, The Bus Depot). Discovering that Ellie must be killed for the development of a cordyceps cure, Joel is deeply infuriated, saving Ellie from a certain death in killing almost the entire personnel within the facility and shooting Marlene dead in the end. The radicality of Joel's behavior has been the cause of controversy regarding its ethical impetus: Because Ellie has fully committed to being examined and researched by the Fireflies ("[T]here's no halfway with this" (*TLOU*, The Bus Depot)), it is pointed out that "his paternal authority [robs] Ellie of the chance to make the most significant choice in the game" (Voorhees a) and is egotistically-driven by his individual desire to keep her as his daughter. Critics have furthermore issued their unease about the player's inability to influence the final decision to sacrifice or save Ellie as well as Joel's conduct on encountering the doctors in the operating room which materializes in at least killing one or even all of them. One the one hand, such criticism is unjustified as the game makes it very clear that it is Joel's and not the player's narrative in not offering the player choices throughout the game and depicting Joel from a third-person perspective. This establishes the necessary distance in substantiating that Joel's choices are not the player's and that the latter is hardly anything more than an engaged and interactive spectator. On the other hand, however, it has been pointed out that his decision emphasizes Joel's lack of growth as well as honesty towards Ellie, meaning that her previously stated desire to help the Fireflies is neglected (Plante).

Therefore, his decision is taken as an indication that "Joel [is] completing the projection of his old daughter onto his new one, […] digging deeper into his emotional pit[,] […] taking Ellie [as a] hostage and [turning] her into his dead child" (Plante). This seems to be reflected by the game's framing through the beginning and end sequences which reflects the symbolic nature of these: The final sequence functions as a mirror of the beginning in that Joel carries "an unconscious Ellie" instead of his injured daughter Sarah", signifying "closure but also a new beginning" as Joel has finally completed the process of becoming a father again (Triana). The criticism of Joel's decision furthermore applies to the aftermath of saving Ellie: When he is asked by Ellie concerning the events at the Firefly lab as she does not appear to possess any recollection, he displays a lack of revealing the truth of his decision. Thus, he states that her contribution was not necessary due to the presence of dozens of other immune subjects and claims that the Fireflies have stopped searching for a cure because of their inability to make sense of the virus (*TLOU*, Firefly Lab). Despite what appears to be Ellie's disappointment in detecting Joel's lie as she closes her eyes again and turns her back to Joel (see Images 1.1-1.4), she explicitly topicalizes Joel's behavior right at the end in order to confront him explicitly:

“Swear to me. Swear to me that everything you said about the Fireflies is true.” Joel lies to her once more: “I swear” (*TLOU*, Jackson). Hence, although his parental protection and attachment towards Ellie are legitimate factors for his decision, his repeated lies are a strong indication that he feels guilty in selfishly overruling Ellie’s desire to help the Fireflies in their search for a cure. Kunzelman therefore harshly condemns Joel’s actions:

> “The end of the game comes around. Joel has killed everyone that Ellie knows and has finally filled the hole in his heart left by his dead daughter through torture and mass killings with nail bombs and shotguns and boots on the heads of people trying to survive. Ellie asks him a question and he lies to her and we cut to black.”

Image 1.1 Ellie listening to Joel‘s description (*TLOU*, Jackson).

Image 1.2 Ellie realizing Joel’s lie (*TLOU*, Jackson).

Image 1.3 Ellie turning her back to Joel (1/2) (*TLOU*, Jackson).

Image 1.4 Ellie turning her back to Joel (2/2) (*TLOU*, Jackson).

Irrespective of a certain truth that lies within this assertion, it fails to acknowledge the contextual causes for Joel’s decision not to sacrifice Ellie. Apart from Ellie’s redemptive importance in Joel’s life, allowing him to regain his ability and confidence as a father figure, Joel’s brutality towards others can be explained in the way other individuals are portrayed throughout the game. Since their ethical conduct is cast in an overarchingly negative light, Joel is provided with little reason to base his choice on benevolence or sympathy for anyone apart from the people he cares for. This can be observed in the following examples: When Joel seeks help in escaping from the city in the prologue, his daughter is shot by a soldier. His encounters with the army in the “Quarantine Zone”, the hunters in Pittsburgh and the cannibalistic group

of David's men, far from displaying any moral boundaries, do not leave both Joel and players with a particularly positive impression of human behavior either. Finally, on resuscitating Ellie from drowning, he is knocked out by one of Fireflies despite his obvious struggle to keep her alive. Thus, it makes little sense for Joel to entrust Ellie's life into the Fireflies' hands in search for a potential cure, having witnessed their brutality and indifference towards him at first hand as well as the overall state humanity is in.

As if these factors were not sufficient justification for Joel's brutal behavior against the Fireflies in saving Ellie, a number of audio logs further validate his actions: In these logs, the Fireflies' progress regarding their search for a cure is presented as futile and amateurish, for instance in releasing a number of infected monkeys as well as their numerous unsuccessful attempts in researching immune humans. What is more, the doctors' impulsivity not to keep Ellie alive for further tests and research seems unnecessarily rushed and irrational. Since Ellie's unique condition in comparison to previous subjects is explicitly highlighted in one of the logs, risking her life without lengthier and more thorough investigations can only be described as a knee-jerk reaction than scientific circumspection. Besides, while the discovery of a cure might stop the infection from spreading any further, the amount of already infected individuals posing a threat to the uninfected as well as the inexistence of a functional social order makes it difficult to assume that the existence of a cure could provide an amelioration of the current state (*Reddit,* CockasaurusRex32). Perhaps even more importantly, the fact that Ellie does not possess any recollection of the events at the Firefly lab strongly suggests that she was not asked for consent regarding her sacrifice which is why the Fireflies' conduct is not confidable. Hence, reducing Joel's decision to his traumatizing past or the execution of male dominance over Ellie fails to depict the entirety of contributing factors and must be described as one-sided. And even if the aforementioned were not taken into consideration and the Fireflies were acting out of pure altruism, "[saving] society and […] [increasing] the quality of life of thousands of people" Joel's behavior is of substantial moral value as well "[the outcome of his actions […] save the life of an innocent girl" (Triana).

2.3. Discussion

In sum, taking both works into account, their ethical foundation is expectedly of very different nature. *The Road's* protagonists are primarily concerned with maintaining their ethical foundation in a fallen world and preserving it for a possible revival of a future humanity of "good guys, carrying the fire". Irrespective of their strong philosophical framework, the gruesome and bleak universe they are surrounded by leads to a number of intricacies in which

they are forced to decide which of these values should be abided by and to what extent. Meanwhile, *The Last of Us* presents players with a more ambivalent perspective on morality, juxtaposing various aspects of individualism and collectivism as well as their consequences in the game's universe. Although Joel has realized that radical individualism bears the danger of losing the ability to approach others and interact meaningfully, meaning he embraces traits such as loyalty and responsibility in order to maintain Ellie's company, he refrains from collectivism in sacrificing Ellie for a possible greater goal. Despite the fact that this results in the undermining of Ellie's ethical choice to dedicate herself to the Fireflies, her presence in Joel's life brings out qualities and traits that he has long abandoned and forgotten, meaning that her sacrifice would annihilate his development throughout the narrative as he has become an empathetic, caring and approachable human being through the presence of a counterpart. Joel's egotism, whilst ignoring Ellie's desire, attains further traceability since the narrative points out the questionable behavior of the Fireflies in their attempt to sacrifice Ellie. Therefore, his decision to reject collectivism in favor for his individual intentions (Triana), while flawed in a number of ways, can ultimately be seen as the right choice.

3. Relationality

Due to both works' emphasis on the journey of a father-child pairing, the question whether the involved characters can be viewed as independent, entirely separate from each other, or inseparable and co-dependent is of great interest. While *The Last of Us* makes it very clear that it is Joel's narrative as his point of view is emphasized throughout most of the game, his character is significantly influenced by Ellie's presence, reaching the point at which he cannot envision a future life without her. *The Road* goes even further in terms of the pairing's co-dependency, describing father and son as "each the other's world entire" (TR 6) both in terms of the boy's reliance on his father in survivalist terms and the man's reliance on the boy in order not to abandon his hope, ethical framework and faith. Although each character cannot be neglected an own agenda or independent personal history, the fact that they are complemented by a closely-linked counterpart necessitates a relationality-oriented perspective.

The concept of relationality is strongly associated with philosophical concepts of the 19th and 20th century. A very Foucault-oriented take on relationality is offered by Friedman (22) who claims that it signifies a context-oriented concept, meaning that the self is nothing without its surroundings (Marks 4). This means that the interplay of discourses and power relations influences how and along which parameters a human being identifies itself. While societal factors are indeed of pivotal importance regarding the regulation of the self, determining the manifestations the self can embody, it is also the interactions of the self with its immediate fellow human beings that are of revelatory quality. In her monograph *"I am because you are". Relationality in the Works of Siri Hustvedt,* Marks provides several vital examples and definitions in order to make the concept both more approach- and applicable for the field of literary studies. She points out that human desire, either for affirmation or physical needs "such as food consumption and sexual encounters", results in the necessity to "turn to the other [and be recognized] in order to find itself" (Marks 26-27). Furthermore, it is argued that in its interaction with others, the self and the other reciprocally mirror each other, gaining empathetical skills as well as realizing their individuality.

Furthermore, it is claimed that self-consciousness cannot be successfully developed "without the ability to conceive the viewpoint of others – to imagine being the other person" (Marks 28). However, since the respective perceptions of the self and the other are not necessarily in agreement with each other, the opposition between the self and the other might result in martial confrontations: "Insofern es Tun *des Andern* ist, geht also jeder auf den Tod des Andern" (Hegel, Marks 29). As eliminating the other results in the elimination of the source of recognition, the other must be retained, albeit in a master-slave relation which seems to

signify the master's dominion and victory over the slave in dictating the other how to react to the self. Yet, the necessity of the master to require a slave in order to be recognized results in the humiliation of the former, meaning that the self's dependency on turning to the other in order to attain recognition disallows for true satisfaction (Marks 29).

A less martial and more positive stance on the matter is offered through both Buber and Bakhtin respectively who conceive relationality as a "dialogical relationship with the world", based on the principles of "complementation and reconfirmation" (Marks 33). Buber distinguishes between two kinds of relations: In the *I-Thou* relation, two subjects are actively involved in a dialog, meaning that they "do not perceive each other as consisting of specific, isolated qualities, but engage in a dialogue involving each other's whole being" (Scott). Unlike Hegel's assumption, relationality is thus not seen as the struggle of two independent selves turning to the other to seek recognition and/or dominion over the other. Instead,"[t]he encounter of two human beings is an encounter of embodied imagination, [creating] something beyond the bounds of their separate identities through mutual exchange" (Marks 34). In comparison, the *I-It* relation denotes the objectification of the other in that the self observes and experiences another self from the vantage point of a spectator (Marks 36). It follows that the self is only complete in the *I-Thou* relation since the passive experience of viewing another entity in the 3rd person disallows for the self's whole presence since being a spectator results in the loss of interaction or ability to influence an otherwise mutually-shared space. As such, in an *I-It* relation, borders between the self and the other are established. Similarly, in defining the "dialogical principle", Bakhtin notes that the self is constituted through the discourses surrounding it. Hence, he assumes that by engaging in those discourses and communicative processes, a sense of "wholeness and unity" can be achieved. He too employs an anti-Hegelian stance in emphasizing that dialogical consciousness is not contended in dialectic processes. Rather, it is concluded that a person can only truly discover themselves in the other or vice versa (Marks 42). This means that the "dialogical principle" brings forth an interdependent semanticized space that is shared and constituted by all partaking individuals and does not belong to any of them entirely because "in the space where I and you overlap, where the word travels […] [, it] is neither mine nor yours" (Marks 44).

In addition to the two previous takes on relationality, Husserl and Merleau-Ponty offer a more phenomenologist perspective on the matter. Husserl for instance claims that the self is an intersubjective category and contributes to overall objectivity in sharing and negotiating its own subjectivity. However, this raises the question how the concept of ownness can be accounted for if true objectivity cannot be achieved in complete isolation. Thus, Husserl assumes a "unique

and non-exchangeable position of the self" (Marks 49) that allows for the distinction between the self and the other. In acknowledging that the self is governed by both an unchangeable constant as well as external forces (*Here* vs *There*), the deduction that others experience the same phenomena results in empathy towards one another (Marks 50-51):

> Although we do not have a direct perception or former knowledge of another consciousness, since it never has been and never will be immediately accessible to us, we can affiliate the movements of another body with those of our own lived body and by way of analogical transfer reach an apperception of the other's consciousness (Marks 51).

Merleau-Ponty further points out that "to exist inevitably means to be engaged in the world, and the self has no way of separating its consciousness from this lived engagement" (Marks 54). Contrary to Husserl who assumes some space within every individual that is isolated from outside influence, Merleau-Ponty is of the opinion that "there is no autonomous self governing the world around it" (Marks 54). Thus, the relationship between the body and the world is not one that is "coordinated with each other through functional relations of the sort by physics" (Merleau-Ponty 366) but should be rather characterized as total reciprocity:

> I have the world as an unfinished individual through my body as a power for this world; I have the position of objects through the position of my body, or inversely I have the position of my body through the position of objects, not through a logical implication, nor in the manner in which we determine an unknown size through its objective relations with given sizes, but rather through a real implication and because my body is a movement toward the world and because the world is my body's support (Merleau-Ponty 366).

The radicality of his understanding becomes evident in claiming that "just as the parts of my body together form a system, the other's body and my own are a single whole, two sides of a single phenomenon" (Merleau-Ponty 370). Interestingly, he does not deny the possibility of interferences since these processes require the negotiation of two or multiple selves in order to arrive such mutuality. It thereby alludes to the Hegelian scheme of master-slave and goes even further in assuming that this negotiation process could result in each other's annihilation in case a self refuses the reciprocity of the other (Marks 57-58). Although it is suggested that by means of the other's objectification, the contention for the same space can be avoided, this disallows for mutuality:

> We can choose to "make ourselves in an inhuman gaze," to regard the other as an object in an I-It constellation, with a gaze that lacks affection and denies subjectivitiy to the other, or we can opt for a communicative openness – an I-Thou relation – that leaves both self and other unharmed. (Marks 59)

In short, although the four briefly introduced concepts showcase a number of differences when it comes to the depiction of relational patterns, their fundamental value lies in their emphasis that the self can only be fully comprehended in its juxtaposition with its immediate surroundings

and/or through other fellow selves. As humans are inherently social beings, their surroundings not only reveal what the self is in relation to others, allowing for reciprocal recognition and influence, but also the collective creation of commonly-shared semantic spaces in which the particularities of two individuals are conjoined, benefitting both individuals in terms of empathetical sympathy as well as establishing a sense of wholeness.

3.1. Making Sense of the Self in Turning to The Other: Relational Reciprocity in *The Road* and *The Last of Us*

As stated previously, the fact that both *The Road* as well as *The Last of Us* feature a strong interplay of father and child, examining the characteristics of their relation offers a more profound insight into the characters' self and their fundamental intentions. Concerning *The Road,* it is evident that the father's existential purpose lies in the well-being and survival of the son. In admitting right at the beginning that he would rather die than live on in case of his son's death, he demonstrates his fundamental dependency on the boy (*TR* 10-11). This stems from his ethics-induced mission in describing the son as the perpetuator of the fire (*TR* 31) and the prospect of originating an unblemished future generation, rejecting the vices most others have currently succumbed to. Describing the son as the "word of God" and a godly "warrant", (*TR* 5), the father subordinates everything to the survival of the son in order to fulfill God's divine plan: "My job is to take care of you. I was appointed to do that by God" (*TR* 77).

In abiding by the narrative's assumption that God's very presence is within the boy, their relation can be described along Buber's *I-Thou* schema. Since it is assumed that the ultimate relationship between two subjects is the spiritual relationship between man and God, it follows that any individual experiencing divinity is in the position to live in an ideal relation with the world and anyone in it (Scott). Yet, because of the father's struggle with God, assigning his faith as the basis for his relationship with the son is treacherous. This is drastically exemplified in the woman's behavior since her total lack of faith culminates in nothing other than her suicide (*TR* 55-58). As the woman never references God in her conversations with the man and rather proclaims death as her "new lover" (*TR* 57), the extent of her disbelief surpasses the father's struggle with God, even though his anger and desperation directed towards God is apparent throughout the narrative: "He raised his face to the paling day. Are you there? he whispered. Will I see you at the last? Have you a neck by which to throttle you? Have you a heart? Damn you eternally have you a soul? Oh God, he whispered. Oh God" (*TR* 11-12). Hence, the father finds himself in a very precarious position as his challenged beliefs echo his wife's total disbelief and her eventual suicide.

Due to this, in an inversion of Buber's divine *I-Thou* scheme, the father renders the boy a messianic figure, meaning that his experience in witnessing his son's survival and moral behavior positively translates into his faith. As the son "is the clear authority on morality, persuading the father to preserve a charitable spirit in McCarthy's amoral wasteland" (Sanchez), the father, in the light of his own moral shortcomings, realizes that the son's understanding of "carrying the fire" is superior to his own ("You're the best guy" (*TR* 279)). Therefore, he does not attribute the son's behavior to his education of the boy but rather the son's immaculate and messianic self that can only be of godly origin. This is perceivable in the boy's compassion he displays towards each of the individuals the protagonists encounter, signifying the opposite of the man's distanced and rational behavior which means that these qualities cannot be attributed to following his father's example. Rather, the boy provides the father with an external consciousness that the latter can look up to: The boy's criticism of the father's shortcomings results in the recognition and topicalization by another human being. In judging the father, the son represents his mirror and moral compass, meaning that he receives the necessary correction before those singular violations manifest into the systematic decline and abandonment of his values.

Although the aforementioned attitude provides the man with sufficient reason to abide by his mission of taking the boy south, the father's negativity towards God represents a constant threat. In encountering Ely, a lone wanderer travelling the road, his struggling faith is challenged even further. Ely's presence in the novel is a major signifier for the biblical undertones of the novel in that he claims to possess the ability to prophesy which likens him to Elijah, the Old Testament prophet (Wielenberg 1-2). The significance of Ely's presence in the narrative is initially downplayed through the means of dehumanization, rendering him an unreliable lone wolf: "[E]ven by their new world standards, he smelled terrible. […] He looked like a pile of rags fallen off a cart" (*TR* 161-162). On giving him something to eat, he is objectified through the gaze of both the man and the boy, watching him as he feeds on a tin of canned fruit they have just offered him:

> He reached with his scrawny claws and took it and held it to his chest. He made tipping motions with his hands. The old man looked down at the tin. He took a fresh grip and lifted it, his nose wrinkling. His long and yellowed claws scrabbled at the metal. Then he tipped it and drank. The juice ran down his filthy beard. He lowered the can, chewing with difficulty. He jerked his head when he swallowed.

The practice of gazing at the bestialized man is a further indication of the supreme position both protagonists employ towards the man, comparable to feeding a wild animal. As such, Ely's position in relation to them is subverted before he even engages with them in a lengthy dialog.

Buber's take on relationality (Scott) offers applicability once again: Rendering Ely in an *I-It* relation ensures that the two protagonists are detaching themselves from the yet unknown outsider, not considering his presence of equally human nature compared to theirs. Hence, the possibility of mutuality as it is described in Bakhtin's "dialogical principle" in which multiple individuals contribute to and share a semanticized space is, at that point, not allowed for.

Irrespective of Ely's marginalized entrance however, the father, realizing that turning towards another individual in order to seek recognition and conformation could alleviate his troubled faith (*TR* 11-12, 33, 114, 154), overcomes his initial repulsion and initiates a conversation with the old man. However, unlike the father's desire to be confirmed and mirrored in his sentiments, their conversation results in Ely's deconstruction of his entire endeavors and beliefs. In opposition to the man's purposeful journey towards the south in order not to perish, Ely merely travels the road for the sake of not remaining in one place, pointing out the fatality of his endless journey in stating that he does not pursue any specific goal or search for something in particular (*TR* 168-169). When he is asked by the father about death and the meaning of life, he replies by saying that "there is no God and we are his prophets" (*TR* 170), possibly implying that the decadent practices of humans coupled with a lack of divine intervention is sufficient evidence of God's inexistence. Intriguingly, the father, believing in divine providence, proceeds to ask Ely how he is still alive, perhaps in an attempt to convince him that survival without succumbing to cannibalism or slavery is impossible if it was not rewarded by a divine plan. Ely merely states that he only perseveres because of donations from random strangers but does not attribute it to God (*TR* 170). Towards the end of their conversation, in thematizing the son, the father aims to elicit Ely's opinion once more, asking him whether he thinks the son is a "god" or whether he thinks that the son believes in God. However, each of the questions is met by total indifference as Ely relativizes everything the father says at this point (*TR* 173-174). Therefore, his desire to be mirrored and recognized in his sentiments in order to make sense of his purpose and thereby establish a mutually-shared semanticized space in which both encourage each other of their beliefs is not met. Therefore, his earlier assertion of being truly alone in his quest of "carrying the fire" is a fitting description of his predicament: "On this road, there are no godspoke men. They are gone and I am left and they have taken with them the world" (*TR* 33).

The encounter with Ely weighs heavily on the father's shoulders, who therefore asks himself: "Do you think that your fathers are watching? That they weigh you in their ledgerbook? Against what? There is no book and your fathers are dead in the ground" (*TR* 196). Because the passage does not feature an explicit reference to God, it signifies the progression of the father's

loss in the belief that any of his deeds are of transcendental significance. Ringström (15) adequately describes the father's conflict: "The father has to make a decision here. Does he pursue his journey or will he believe Ely and give up?" However, "in the end, the old man is left behind and they continue on their journey. With this turn of events, we can construe this as if goodness wins over evil, and God's power will be maintained since the [protagonists continue their] mission on the road" (Ringström 15). Therefore, shortly before his death, he is capable to recall the extraordinary nature of the boy's morality (*TR* 279) as well as their unexpected success regarding their survival, reassuring the boy: "[The fire]'s inside you. It was always there. I can see it." […] [Y]ou'll be okay. You're going to be lucky. I know you are" (*TR* 279). Although the father dies and is not confirmed in his assumption, the fact that the boy is adopted by the veteran, professing to "carry the fire", indicates that the father has made the right choice.

With regard to *The Last of* Us, it is vital to recall Buber's and Bakhtin's notion that it is optimal for the self's consciousness to be engaged in dialogical relationships, either in the "reciprocal interplay of personal energies, [enriching] both parties of exchange (Marks 34-35) or by means of reciprocal conformation and discovering oneself in the other (Marks 41-45). Yet, assessing the initial state of the relationship between Joel and Ellie means it can only be described as the very opposite. Since, as it has been noted earlier, dialogical relationships involve the full presence of the self, this also involves total transparency when it comes to discussing and sharing one's past or other emotional matters. In assuming his leadership over Ellie, the declaration of three rules forbidding Ellie to initiate such topics (*TLOU,* Quarantine Zone) means that she is actively denied "opportunities to develop and to express feelings that may create a stronger link between her and the player" (Joyce). Furthermore, it disallows for the establishment of a mutual relationship of the two characters since Joel shields himself from Ellie. Although Joel's attitude is most likely rooted in his distrust of others due to his sustained trauma of witnessing Sarah's death, Ellie, despite having experienced similarly traumatizing events, behaves in a very different manner. She attaches herself to Joel much earlier than he does, frequently sharing her emotions, comments and opinions as well as asking Joel about his past despite his prohibition not to so. Unlike Joel, Ellie's experiencing the death of beloved ones as well as abandonment requires her to assure herself of recognition through others which is why she actively seeks Joel's recognition. For instance, this occurs right after she has successfully helped him in clearing an area on exiting the hotel ("How'd I do" (*TLOU,* Pittsburgh)) or when she is reunited with him after being separated in the sewers ("I took out a couple of infected by myself. You'd be proud" (*TLOU,* Suburbs)).

Therefore, she is utterly disappointed to realize that despite her efforts in establishing a mutual relationship, Joel does not respond similarly. Because Joel is afraid of re-experiencing loss in attaching himself to others, he instead decides to abandon Ellie which is why she tells him not to make his loss account for his decision to keep Ellie's company: "I'm sorry about your daughter, Joel, but I have lost people too" (*TLOU*, Tommy's Dam). Yet, Joel does not allow for Ellie's emotions to be put on the same level as his: "You have no idea what loss is" (*TLOU*, Tommy's Dam). Such assumption is all the more cruel and inappropriate since Ellie not only has lost her parents and her best friend and love interest Riley, but also witnessed the deaths of Tess, Henry and Sam. This is why it can be rightfully assumed that Joyce summarizes their encounter adequately in stating that "[d]espite the fact that Ellie has grown up in a world defined by loss, Joel refuses to acknowledge Ellie's personal experiences or emotions" (*TLOU*), further "[privileging] his own loss and his own emotions over Ellie's."

Although the suppression of Ellie's personality disallows for sameness and equal coexistence (Marks 55-58), Joel's realization of her importance regarding their survival positively influences the way he conducts himself towards her. Therefore, the longer Ellie accompanies Joel on his journey, the more approachable Joel becomes as can be seen by juxtaposing Joel's behavior at certain stages. After Tess' death, he forces Ellie to abide by everything he says, coercing her to repeat his commandment not to bring up his partner's death as well as their past histories. However, only little later, Ellie's violation in offering her condolences regarding Tess in "Bill's Town" curiously remains without consequence and Joel gently avoids the topic without either rebuking or punishing Ellie. This can be linked to having witnessed that Ellie is not a burden but capable ally, such as in finding a way into Bill's Town as well as releasing him from one of Bill's traps whilst being attacked by infected herself. On asking Joel about his history with Tommy before arriving at the dam, he does not rebuke Ellie either, eventually revealing the acrimonious split of the two brothers. Since Ellie has saved Joel two additional times by that point (*TLOU,* Pittsburgh), he is by now fully aware of her selfless attitude in keeping him alive. After realizing the extent of her dedication towards him in the "Winter" chapter, providing him with food, medicine, and risking her life whilst he is recovering from his grave injuries, Joel eventually embraces her as his daughter, overwhelmed by her unconditional affection towards him. This means that not only does he practice full transparency and emotional approachability when it comes to his conduct in the game's final chapters, but also does everything in his power to ensure her survival as well, saving her both from drowning and also from being sacrificed by the Fireflies in search for a cure as she has become his "baby girl".

The notion of a dialogical relationship is supported by gameplay elements as well: Throughout the game, there are multiple instances in which the player is able to trigger optional conversations (see Image 2) which are either detected through the careful examination of the respective areas or appear at certain points in the game irrespective of the player's behavior. Although these optional conversations do not influence the outcome of the narrative, they nonetheless contribute to the impression of the game's characters. This can be most distinctively exemplified in Joel's encounter with Ellie in the "Bill's Town" chapter in which Ellie approaches the former to offer her condolences despite Joel's prohibition. Since, as stated before, Joel does not take appropriate action despite having threatened Ellie before, it reveals a certain sympathy for Ellie at an earlier point than it is disclosed by the narrative without unlocking that dialog.

Image 2 By pressing the triangle button, the option conversation is triggered (*TLOU*, Bill's Town).

Similarly, after Joel's harsh reaction when Ellie saves his life in the hotel, the player can approach her through Joel when, on exiting the building, she stops to gaze at a photo backdrop. After they have talked about the backdrop, Joel asks Ellie if there is "something on [her] mind", to which she replies: "I wasn't trying to disobey you back there. You were taking a really long time and I thought, maybe he's gotten into trouble" (*TLOU*, Pittsburgh). Despite Joel's insistence on his paternal stance ("It don't matter what you thought. I need you to listen to me" (*TLOU*, Pittsburgh), the fact that he is not entirely indifferent towards Ellie's emotional needs paints him in a more empathetical and caring light and ensures a more seamless and traceable development of his character. Furthermore, shortly before encountering Tommy and his community, Ellie and Joel are required to collaborate in order to cross the dam. After successfully managing the task, Ellie offers Joel a high five, which can or cannot be replied by the player. In case of a reply, Ellie responds with a joyful exclamation ("yeah"), in case of its lack, she sarcastically complains about Joel's behavior: "Really? Just gonna leave me hanging?

All right, I see how it is. It's just a high five, it takes like 5 seconds" (*TLOU*, Tommy's Dam). Therefore, the more players are invested in the game world and its characters, the more Joel is displayed as emotionally caring and approachable. As such, Joyce's assertion that "the game suppresses Ellie's character and story by denying Ellie opportunities to verbally express her thoughts and motivations" only holds true in case players do not make an effort in fully investing themselves in the game's universe. In case they do, their investment results in Joel's increased attention towards Ellie and other characters, rendering him a more rounded character.

3.2. Discussion

Irrespective of the two works' differences in areas such as ethics, parenthood and patriarchy, there are similarly constructed when it comes to the nature of the parent-child relationships. Both father figures are fully dependent on their children when it comes to their existential purpose: Whereas *The Road's* father requires the role of the son in order to be assured of his faith, finding in him a source of inspiration and moral immaculateness he sees as the ideal foundation of a future humanity, Ellie's presence allows for Joel's empathetic self to grow and develop, leading him from total emotional seclusion to embracing relationality as his life's purpose: "I struggled for a long time with survivin'. And you- No matter what, you keep finding something to fight for" (*TLOU*, Jackson).

4. Parenthood

The following chapter centers on parenthood in the two works. While the parent-child relationship between father and son is a constant due to the protagonists' kinship, the same does not apply to *The Last of Us* in which the relationship between Joel and Ellie takes until the last quarter of the game to develop into a parenthood scheme. As such, the latter is analyzed in terms of its development from a purposive relationship to surrogate parenthood, pinpointing significant caesuras, whereas the former is analyzed according to the father's ethical commitment that is the main driving force in influencing parenthood.

4.1. "My job is to take care of you": Parenthood as Ethical Application in *The Road*

When it comes to parenthood in *The Road,* it signifies the practical reflection of the father's philosophical and ethical beliefs. When the first page of the novel depicts the father waking up in the middle of the night, his first thought is dedicated to the child, showing that the son is his primary purpose in life (*TR* 1). As specified previously, the father's theological framework unifies the well-being of the son with a God-given duty to do so amidst a fallen world. Thus, the man's parenting style is most efficiently characterized as protective and caring. When the son wakes up early in the morning at the beginning of the novel, the father assures him of his presence in order to provide him with comfort. Little later, the boy is asked whether he is okay (*TR* 5-6), once again denoting the father's commitment to center his entire attention around the well-being of his son. In fact, his self is so strongly tied to the son that he does not see any purpose to continue with his life in case of something happening to his child: "If you died I would want to die too" (*TR* 11). The father sees his child as "his justification and guarantee for living [,] […] [functioning] as a statement of parental care as the absolute measure of collective humanity (Johns-Putra 531).

The man's exceptionality in abiding by his promise to take care of his son is perhaps most drastically foregrounded in the juxtaposition with others: When the two encounter the charred, headless remains of a newborn infant who was roasted by his family for food (*TR* 198), the extent of humanity's ethical decline is gruesomely demonstrated, in particular taking into account that the father's attitude is the exception of the norm (*TR* 181). The extraordinariness of the father's parental care is further emphasized by means of comparison to the boy's mother who, unlike the man, fails to see any reason in staying with her family, eventually committing suicide as she denies the father the means to ensure the family's survival, accusing him of a lack of realism:

> "I was stupid. […] And now I'm done. […] You cant protect us. […] 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. But I cant. I cant. […] I cant help you. […] You talk about taking a stand but there is no stand to take. My heart was ripped out of me the night he was born so dont ask for sorrow now. There is none. Maybe you'll be good at this. I doubt it, but who knows. The one thing I can tell you is that you wont survive for yourself. I know because I would never have come this far. (*TR* 56-57).

And indeed, taking both the man's and boy's physical state into account, there is little hope for their sustainable survival. The novel "substantiates her prediction by presenting us with horrible images of violence: starving, naked people trapped in a basement to be eaten limb by limb; roaming bands of cannibals with appear to be sex slaves and a pregnant mother who eats her newborn child" (Noble 98). In other words: "In this world, there is not only no perceivable hope for the future, but even more unsettling, the end that will inevitably come appears horrible beyond imagining" (Noble 98-99). Besides, it is not solely outside threats that endanger the protagonists' survival, but also their weak physical state. While the son's appearance is continuously described as miserably frail and ravenous, (e.g. *TR* 29, 102, 152) the father suffers from an unspecified disease throughout the entire novel, often resulting in coughing attacks in addition to disgorging blood and subsequent exhaustion (e.g. *TR* 11, 175, 237), culminating in his death together with the injury sustained from taking an arrow to his leg eventually. Apart from causing his death, his condition further endangers already precarious situations, decreasing their slim chance of survival. This transpires when they are trying to hide from a group of marauders (*TR* 66-67) or when they are fleeing from cannibals while can only barely restrain himself from coughing uncontrolledly (*TR* 105-115).

While those factors seem to justify the woman's lack of faith in the man, his remarkable survival skills ensure that the two protagonists prevail in challenging circumstances against all odds. While it is likely that their constant exposure to both environmental hazards as well as the threat of every-present cannibals and other hostile groups has influenced and increased both protagonist's awareness and behavior, the novel highlights that the man has possessed his skills and instincts already before the event. When the man and his wife experience what is most likely a giant explosion or detonation during the event, he instantly walks towards the bathtub to fill it with water in order to have a source of water for the upcoming days, "[intuiting] that this unknown event might leave his family struggling for resources" (Kearney 173-174). His extraordinary knowledge is also evident on encountering the roadrat. When the father threatens to shoot him in case he tries to harm the boy, he states the following: "[The bullet travels faster than sound. It will be in your brain before you can hear it. To hear you will need a frontal lobe and things with names like colliculus and temporal gyrus and you wont have them anymore. They'll just be soup" (*TR* 64). This is responded by the unknown man with the question if the

father is a doctor to which the man answers: "I'm not anything" (*TR* 64). Whether the roadrat's assessment regarding the father is true is not clarified throughout the novel, however it shows the man's supreme knowledge which is substantiated in his successful survival for such a long time without becoming a slaver, cannibal or other perpetrator. Further instances, as Kearney (174) demonstrates, additionally reinforce the father's competent image, for example in his ability of "finding safe hiding places and food and keeping the cannibals at bay." This is why the man's competence renders him a reliable father irrespective of his physical state.

Although referring to his endeavor in ensuring his and the boy's survival as a "job" might sound cold and distanced in the first place, likening the father's efforts to an involuntary responsibility bestowed on him by God (*TR* 74, 77), his uncompromising attitude demonstrates that this does not have a negative effect on his behavior towards the boy. This is exemplified in reading and telling the son of "stories of courage and justice as he remembered them" (*TR* 7, 41), providing him with the greater share of their provisions (*TR* 34), holding and warming him in order to protect him from the cold (*TR* 68, 74) or showing parental affection (*TR* 223). In addition to that, the father's behavior towards the son whenever the latter makes a mistake serves as an impressive account of the man's goodness. When the father wants to use their gas tank in order to prepare a fire and warm food, he despairingly notices that it is empty, realizing that it was the son's fault who forgot to turn off one of the valves. Irrespective of their desperate situation, he does not scold the boy and rather resolves to blame himself instead in order not to discourage the boy:

> It's not your fault. I should have checked. […] It's not your fault. You have to turn off both valves. The threads were supposed to be sealed with Teflon tape or it would leak and I didnt do it. It's my fault. I didnt tell you. […] It's not your fault. (*TR* 176-177).

In another instance, the man is examining a shipwreck that they have discovered right at the coast, leaving the boy on guard with their pistols and their belongings ashore whilst searching for supplies (*TR* 222-223). On returning, he asks the boy for the pistol, leaving the boy in despair as the latter realizes he has forgotten it in the sand. Yet again, the father does not proceed to punish or yell at his son and instead undeservedly takes the blame, consoling the devastated and sobbing boy: "The man knelt and put his arms around him. It's all right, he said. I'm the one who's supposed to make sure we have the pistol and I didnt do it. I forgot" (*TR* 232). Although searching for and eventually finding the lost gun means they are caught by the dark and only rediscover their camp due to the lightnings of a thunderstorm, the father does not hold the boy accountable or revisit the topic. Hence, his behavior towards the son is focused on maintaining an optimistic attitude in order not to discourage or disillusion the boy. As such, he very often resorts to avoiding questions regarding their chances of survival or other sensitive questions.

For instance, when the boy elicits the man's opinion on how they are holding up, the father does not disclose his actual feelings (*TR* 83, 100-101), using the phrase "I dont know" instead. This also applies when the two are talking about events and scenes they have experienced, for example after fleeing from the house occupied by the imprisoned slaves of the cannibals (*TR* 127). A similar result is achieved through the word "okay" or phrases containing it which is employed by the father to euphemize their situation (*TR* 67, 83, 127, or downplaying threats (*TR* 25, 106, 134-135).

Another way of ensuring a positive attitude in the son manifests in the man's encouragement of his to talk to him about difficult or traumatizing experiences. Unlike Joel in *The Last of Us* who does not allow Ellie to share her feelings and opinions, leaving her to deal with those on her own, he repeatedly urges the son not to shut off his emotional life before him. This occurs initially after they have encountered the injured man struck by a lightning who the son wanted to help, yet the father decided against doing so. Since the son is brought to tears by the miserable state of the injured man and the father's reluctance to help, he becomes overwhelmed with his emotions and isolates himself from the father, prompting the father to encourage the son to talk and explain his reasoning to him again as well (*TR* 50). Another instance can be observed after shooting the roadrat right above the son's head, traumatizing the son to a significant extent and leaving him speechless for a couple days, once again resulting in the father's urging the son to talk to him (*TR* 68-77). Similar to the instance with the lighting-struck man, the son opposes his father's behavior with regard to the thief, causing him to behave apathetically and troubled by the father's aggressivity towards the perpetrator. Yet again, the father actively engages with the son in order to provide emotional relief and an opportunity to resolve their conflict (*TR* 261).

The son's inability to cope with such instances can on the one hand be linked to his difficulty in "locating the "bad guys" in the world around him (Jordan 238), causing him to over-empathize with others and therefore to struggle to deal with their demise, justified or not. However, it also highlights the disillusionment the son experiences with regard to the father's conduct on the other hand. This is apparent in the boy's questioning the man's decisions with regard to the injured man (*TR* 51-53), Ely (*TR* 174-175) as well as the thief in which the boy strongly articulates his dissatisfaction that the perpetrator is not helped by them (*TR* 259-260). The boy's disillusionment is perhaps most strongly articulated after the father has been shot by an archer and asks the boy to talk to him, most likely as a means of moral support for himself rather than providing emotional relief for the boy as it was in previous cases. Therefore, dissatisfied with the father's decision to shoot the unknown attacker with their flare gun, leaving

him presumably dead, the boy replies to the man's question ("You have to talk to me, he said." (*TR* 267) in a terse and tight-lipped manner:

> 'I'm talking.'
> 'Are you sure'
> 'I'm talking now.'
> 'Do you want me to tell you a story?'
> 'No.'
> 'Why not?'
> The boy looked at him and looked away.
> 'Why not?'
> 'Those stories are not true.'
> 'They dont have to be true. They're stories.'
> 'Yes. But in the stories we're always helping people and we dont help people' (*TR* 267-268)

Nevertheless, as has been stated in the ethics chapter, the father's task of keeping the son safe means that he is sometimes forced to prioritize one belief over another. As such, abiding by his promise to help others would result in the endangerment of their own survival since resources are scarce and the frail state of both protagonists is repeatedly emphasized (*TR* 29, 102, 152). Therefore, while the boy is disappointed about the father's moral compromises in these situations, prioritizing the son is, in the light of the boy's divine origin, the more appropriate and consistent choice for the father.

The son's disappointment can also be linked to the father's demand for the son to disclose his feelings and emotional state whilst he is isolating himself from the latter. As such, the son confronts the father even more harshly than before, pointing out his inconsistency:

> 'When you wake up coughing you walk out along the road or somewhere but I can still hear you coughing.'
> 'I'm sorry.'
> 'One time I heard you crying.'
> 'I know.'
> 'So if I shouldnt cry you shouldnt cry either.'
> 'Okay.' (*TR* 270)

Despite the father's apology, the son's rebuttal does not result in a change of attitude. As such, when their conversation shifts towards the father's injured leg, the father once again shies away from revealing his actual feelings:

> 'Is your leg going to get better?'
> 'Yes.'
> 'You're not just saying that.'
> 'No.'
> 'Because it looks really hurt.'
> 'It's not that bad.' (*TR* 270)

The father's reluctancy to talk about his feelings with the son is a trait that is present throughout the entire novel. Yet, as mentioned earlier, this strategy of avoidance is employed in order to

boost their morale. When the son asks the father the rather serious question whether they are going to die, the father responds with an unspecific and laconic answer: "Sometime. Not now" (*TR* 10). Later, as the son becomes gradually aware of the father's tactics in that he fails to provide a reasonable justification for his irrationally positive outlook, he even admits that he is not fully honest when talking about their chances of survival:

> 'We're not going to die. […] But you don't believe me.'
> 'I dont know.' […]
> 'Do you think I lie to you?'
> 'No.'
> 'But you think I might lie to you about dying.'
> 'Yes.'
> 'Okay. I might. But we're not dying.'
> 'Okay.' (*TR* 101)

However, despite the son's realization that the father is not entirely honest about their current state, the father does not cease to provide the son with messages of hope despite a lack of reason (*TR* 236, 242-244). Rather, he claims that as they represent the "good guys", their perseverance is guaranteed by providence and there is no need to worry about their future (*TR* 128-129). As a consequence, the boy, fully aware of the father's strategies towards the end of the novel, does the exact opposite in emphasizing the bleak nature of their endeavors, confronting the father: "I dont know what we're doing" (*TR* 244). Only shortly later, when the boy becomes sick with fever, the man nevertheless assures him that he is going to be okay (*TR* 247), only for the narrative to reveal that despite the articulated positivity, the man feels the exact opposite: "He was terrified. […] He walked out on the beach to the edge of the light and stood with his clenched fists on top of his skull and fell to his knees sobbing in rage" (*TR* 250). Since the father' avoiding expressions do not accurately reflect the father's perspective and are essentially lies, their function lies in instilling hope into their troubled and weary minds. Furthermore, they can also be described as the purposeful instruction of the son in order to allow for reciprocal encouragement: If the father is successful in instilling hope within the son, he might become capable to do the same for the father, providing the latter with a source of encouragement, in the same manner that the son functions as his moral guidance due to having received the father's education before.

Another means of increasing their morale is the father's messianization of his son. This means that irrespective of the difficulties they encounter, his duty of taking care of the son is translated into a privilege rather than a burden. On washing the boy from gore after killing the roadrat, the procedure is likened to an "ancient anointing" (*TR* 74) which, considering that "Messiah […] means anointed one" (Josephs 25), signifies the son's godly origin. The same impression is offered on the following page when the son is further described as a "[g]olden

chalice, good to house a god" (*TR* 74-75). Remarkably though, it is not only the narrator's choice to liken the son to a divine entity, but also the boy who associates himself with such notion. On discussing the father's behavior when encountering the thief, the father justifies his actions before the boy, claiming that since he is the one who is responsible for their survival, his harsh behavior is fully justified: "You're not the one who has to worry about everything." This is replied by the son amid tears: "Yes, I am, he said. I am the one" (*TR* 259). In employing the frequently-used "I am" phrase in order to denote the biblical God, "the boy offer[s] to take responsibility […] in [an] unmistakably religious language" (Josephs 25). This is of remarkableness since the boy has most likely been brought up without either a "church or scripture" which is the reason why, according to Josephs (25), "his scriptural echoes must therefore issue forth from narrative design or divine inspiration." When the father dies at the end of the novel, the father too acknowledges the extraordinary nature of the child ("glowing in the waste like a tabernacle" (*TR* 273), taking pride in having had the privilege of raising and instructing his son as far as he could: "Look around you, he said. There is no prophet in the earth's long chronicle who's not honored here today. Whatever form you spoke of you were right" (*TR* 277). Because of this, the father does not despair on leaving the boy behind, something he has dreaded before and sought to avoid in killing the son "when the time comes" (*TR* 29, 114). Rather, he rests assured that "[g]oodness will find the little boy. It always has. It will again" (*TR* 281). This is most likely not solely directed towards the son's question whether the (imaginary) boy will be saved but rather applies to his son who, as the "best man" (*TR* 279), is predestined to persevere according to the father. And indeed, the repeated instances of discovering provisions and shelter as well as escaping from enemies throughout the novel confirms both the father's and the boy's notion that, as they are God's representants in a fallen world, their survival is aided by divine providence (*TR* 128-129). The fact that the novel closes with the boy's adoption of the veteran and his family who are "good guys" themselves, full of godly affection towards the boy, further reinforces the father's sentiments in that regard.

4.2. Parenthood as Recovery and Redemption in *The Last of Us*

Concerning parenthood in *The Last of Us*, it is less of an account on retaining human qualities and serving as an example in a desolate and fallen world through a parental relationship, but rather the experience and character development of the two main protagonists Joel and Ellie that is focused on. Thus, their relationship centers less on religious or philosophical ideas and instead emphasizes the protagonists' transition from trauma to a purposive relation and finally the fully-realized embodiment of a surrogate parent-child relationship.

The aspect of trauma is mostly associated with Joel whose experience in the game's prologue is the determining factor regarding his behavior and choices throughout the entire narrative. His cordial and tongue-in-check behavior with his daughter Sarah highlights their familiarity and intimacy of their relationship, more like a close friendship than a typical parent-child relationship. In calling his daughter „baby girl" when he takes her to bed, Joel displays his parental love towards Sarah, further emphasizing the significance of her presence in his life. However, their relationship within the game is of short-lived nature as Sarah is shot dead by a soldier, changing Joel's life forever (*TLOU,* Hometown). One of the key mechanisms of the game in order to empathize and relate to Joel's loss is achieved through playing Sarah's character until she is injured in a car accident. Because the player is as helpless in ensuring for her survival as is Joel, "the player and Joel have something in common: a shockingly eye-awakening perspective on the affected world, and the horrible people in it. The player can't help but be cautious after a scene like this" (Mendez). As Joel is reintroduced as a reserved and rather rancorous character in comparison with Tess, it can be inferred that despite twenty years having gone by, he has not fully recovered from his crucial loss. Hill (171) highlights that a lot of fathers experiencing the loss of their child "enter an existential vortex of isolation, anguish, withdrawal, and emotional detachment as they hide their emotions under layers of responsibilities", explaining Joel's distanced behavior in the game's early chapters.

Consequently, Joel is at odds when he is assigned the task to smuggle Ellie out of the city, voicing his discontent: "Hey – we're smuggling her? […] Whoa, whoa. I don't think that's the best idea." (*TLOU,* Quarantine Zone). Nevertheless, "despite […] [making] his opinion clear, he doesn't bail on the plan because he has a heart still" (Mendez) although increased interaction with other human beings puts him at risk of reliving old traumata again:

> [The girl] is the first [one] he's seen in a while, and he's assigned the painful task of taking her to the Fireflies. He's used to smuggling things, objects, not people. He's perfectly aware of the dangers and how he failed Sarah. He's not up to the task of failing someone else again, especially someone who is roughly the age Sarah was when she died. What if they bond while they're out there fighting to survive? (Mendez)

And indeed, this danger is confirmed immediately after meeting Ellie for the first time: When they arrive at their meeting spot in a rundown office building, Joel takes a nap while waiting for Tess in order to kill time. On walking by Joel before the latter falls asleep, Ellie notices and points out Joel's broken watch (*TLOU,* Quarantine Zone), the remnant of his last moments with Sarah before the cordyceps outbreak and also a reminder of the exceptional relationship he has had with his daughter (Fuchs 76). Furthermore, the fact that Joel's watch is broken functions as a signifier for Joel's brokenness as a character. On waking up in the nighttime, still awaiting

Tess, Ellie tells Joel that he was mumbling in his sleep which she attributes to "bad dreams." Therefore, it seems probable that her reference to the watch has triggered old traumata haunting Joel's sleep instead of Fuchs' (76) assumption that such dreams would have occurred anyway and did not necessitate the elicitation of traumatic experience.

Due to Tess' strong leadership who offers Joel the necessary direction in order to survive whilst his role is reduced to his physical aspects when it comes to their endeavors, his persistent trauma and lack of recovery are alleviated. With Tess representing the pair before others in negotiations or other encounters, Joel successfully maintains his solitary shell of emotional distance towards others. Crucially though, her role in the game's narrative is cut short since Tess sacrifices herself after having been bitten by one of the infected right after the game's second chapter. Because Tess wishes for Joel to continue in their search for the Fireflies due to Ellie's immunity, Joel realizes that without her, he has lost the guidance that has been of crucial value in his life after Sarah's death. Therefore, in abiding by Tess' final wish of taking Ellie to the Fireflies, his relationship with the girl needs to be defined without Tess' mediation, something he seems to be afraid of (Mendez). Hence, he ultimately relegates Ellie to a muted and obedient companion. When the two have escaped from the military at the beginning of the "Outskirts" chapter, Ellie brings up Tess, shaken by the recent events surrounding her and seeking emotional relief in talking to Joel: "Hey, look, um… about Tess… I don't even know what to…" (*TLOU,* Outskirts). Joel however harshly interrupts Ellie's attempt as follows:

> Here's how this thing's gonna play out. You don't bring up Tess – ever. Matter of fact, we can just keep our histories to ourselves. Secondly, don't tell anybody about your condition. They'll think you're crazy or they'll try to kill you. And lastly, you do what I say, when I say it. We clear? (*TLOU,* Outskirts)

Joyce therefore concludes that in "denying Ellie opportunities to verbally express her thoughts and motivations[,] Joel dominates the relationship with Ellie", allowing for his "character [to be] presented as the authority while Ellie's character is reduced to a submissive role." Nonetheless, despite Joel's reinforcement of power over Ellie, his authoritative stance is not as strong as it seems. This is already apparent in the first moments of assuming his leadership over Ellie. The game displays Joel in a sitting position whereas Ellie is standing upright, meaning there is a discrepancy between his posture and paternalistic set of rules (see Image 3.1). Furthermore, when she fails to repeat the three rules, Joel does not correct her although Ellie clearly does not follow his script. On talking about his plan to visit Bill in order to attain a car, his eyes are shifting back and forth, indicating his overall insecurity. As a result, it can be assumed that Joel's approach in this sequence is not primarily directed at establishing authority over Ellie but rather in maintaining the necessary distance in order not to be overcome by

emotional attachment or affection. Irrespective of how their relationship is characterized at this stage, it is very far from resembling a father-child relationship.

Image 3.1 Joel's sitting position is in opposition to his words (*TLOU*, Outskirts).

Image 3.2 Joel's shifting eyes as an indicator of insecurity (*TLOU*, Outskirts).

On arriving at "Bill's Town", Joel displays moments of a shift regarding his attitude towards Ellie. When Joel approaches Ellie in an optional sequence, Ellie brings up Tess despite Joel's prohibition to do so: "I… I just want to say I'm sorry. About Tess. That's it. I won't bring it up again." Surprisingly though, Joel neither punishes nor condemns Ellie: "[…] [Y]ou don't need to worry about me. We should go check on Bill." Furthermore, right before escaping from a hoard of infected by car which involves Ellie's unknown driving skills, he offers her words of encouragement: "You're doin' a good job. I figure you should know that" (*TLOU,* Bill's Town). Both examples counteract his authoritative stance in the previous chapter, raising the question why Joel does not live up to his own principles: On the one hand, this might be due to Bill's radical seclusion that renders the latter a paranoid maverick, unable to properly empathize or communicate with Joel and Ellie. Because of the negative example Bill sets when it comes to embracing total disentanglement from others, Joel realizes that abiding by a similarly extreme stance towards Ellie could yield similar consequences for himself. On the other hand, it mirrors Joel's understanding that Ellie is less of a burden and more of a helpful companion who does not require constant parenting, capable of ensuring her own safety. Voorhees (a) links this to the game's design choice in that Ellie allegedly cannot be "harmed by enemies" and has the ability to "give Joel items when not in combat, such as health packs and bullets" as well as to "help Joel by shooting enemies and sometimes stabbing them if Joel is on the losing end of a grapple." While Voorhees (a) is wrong about Ellie's immortality since there are several instances in which she can be overwhelmed and killed by infected or raiders if the player does not intervene on time, her other qualities are of importance not only to the player but her relationship with Joel as well. This is apparent through the earlier half of the Pittsburgh chapter when they are attacked by marauders right at the chapter's beginning. Ellie importantly draws

Joel's attention to the position of their attackers in order not to be overwhelmed and even warns him to take cover in order not to be shot. In addition to that, Ellie's inability to be directly commanded through the player unlike other video game companions (Voorhees a) serves as another instance of demonstrating her independence.

While, as it has been established, it does not suffice to reduce Joel's relationship between him and Ellie as a regiment of dominion over her after Tess has passed away, he nevertheless exhibits great irritation when his stance as the provider and authority over Ellie is threatened. On being saved from her in an almost deadly encounter with one of the marauders in the hotel area, he acts in complete opposite to the encouraging behavior displayed in Bill's Town. This manifests not only in the failure to account for Ellie's emotional well-being when she expresses her agitation about killing a man ("I feel sick.") but also in rebuking her despite saving his life: "Why don't you just hang back like I told you to?", to which Ellie responds in exasperation: "You're glad I didn't, right?" (*TLOU,* Pittsburgh). Following this, Joel goes even further in his denial of Ellie's efforts, "dismissing her need for emotional support by telling her he's only grateful she didn't shoot *his* head off" (Joyce). As stated in the introductory sentence of this paragraph, his inappropriate behavior towards Ellie is most likely linked to the challenge of his only recently gained position as the leader of the two. Despite his appreciation of Ellie's role as a useful companion in the "Bill's Town" chapter, his reluctancy to allow Ellie to carry a weapon "[denies] her the opportunity to defend and protect herself" (Joyce), ensuring that their hierarchical relationship stays in place and Ellie's life depends on Joel. What is more, the incident makes Joel aware of his inability to ensure for his own safety, pointing at the futility and danger of taking Ellie to the Fireflies in risking their lives. Hence, he concludes their conversation ("We gotta get going.") to which Ellie sarcastically, almost consciously referring to his volatile leadership position, replies as can be inferred by her intonation: "Lead the way" (*TLOU,* Pittsburgh).

On discovering a number of raiders roaming the streets when exiting the hotel, Joel is once again shown that he cannot ensure for their survival if such responsibility rests on his shoulders alone. Therefore, in a sudden change of mind, Joel assigns Ellie the duty to support him by killing those raiders via a rifle which can be seen as an implicit apology for belittling her previous efforts. As such, he implicitly admits his fault towards Ellie in mirroring her previously uttered phrase ("You know what? No. How about 'Hey, Ellie. I know it wasn't easy, but it was either him or me, thanks for saving my ass.' You got anything like that for me, Joel?"): "Just that we're clear about what happened up there – it was either him or me" (*TLOU,* Pittsburgh). After having managed to take the raiders down collaboratively, Ellie eventually receives

another sign of approval as he equips her with a gun, taking her role as a valuable and capable companion further.

While Joel clearly perceives Ellie's presence as an advantage by the time they meet Henry and Sam, Ellie has grown to Joel's company to a greater extent than he has. This can already be observed in the "Bill's Town" chapter in which Ellie frequently discloses to Joel what is on her mind, be it events or trivia about her past life or commenting on their experience. In gradually entrusting herself to Joel, she facilitates the growth of feelings towards him, meaning that, from her perspective, her affiliation with Joel extends beyond a purposive relationship already at that point. Hence, when Joel is abandoned by the two brothers Henry and Sam on their escape from Pittsburgh as a ladder collapses, Ellie, although having reached the top of the construction with the brothers, jumps down to Joel safety: "We stick together." (*TLOU*, Pittsburgh). This turns out as vital since without her support, Joel would have most likely been overwhelmed and killed by the turret-equipped truck. Despite Joel's and Ellie's more mutual relationship after exiting Pittsburgh, the tragic end of Henry and Sam highlights the danger of tying one's existential purpose to the well-being of another person. As Henry has fully dedicated himself to the survival of his younger brother Sam ("[C]oming back for you meant putting him at risk.") (*TLOU*, Suburbs), his life's purpose is lost when Sam turns into an infected and has to be shot by Henry. Due to this, Henry's approach is very similar in comparison to the man in *The Road* whose existence is described as utterly meaningless in case his son dies: "If you died I would want to die too" (*TR* 11). Joel is obviously aware of the traumatic implications the loss of a strong caretaker-child relationship bears as he has been exposed to the trauma that has governed his life from Sarah's death onwards. The brutal nature of Henry's shooting his brother as well as committing suicide right after once again recalls the peril of extreme emotional attachment.

When Joel is offered an old picture of him and his daughter Sarah by his brother Tommy after reaching his community, Joel begins to understand the extent that his relationship with Ellie has developed into:

> When he realizes that he cares about her (or that he is starting to care) he get's scared (maybe of the possibility of losing another daughter or maybe he feels as if he was betraying his own daughter by caring about Ellie) and he decides to hand the responsibility over to Tommy (Triana)

Despite Tommy's initial reluctance to Joel's suggestion, he begrudgingly agrees, catching Ellie unaware and causing her to flee by horse in utter disappointment. After she has been retraced in an abandoned house, Ellie confronts Joel with her disillusionment: "Admit that you wanted to get rid of me the whole time" (*TLOU*, Tommy's Dam). Though Joel argues that his decision

is based on Tommy's superior knowledge regarding the Fireflies, meaning that teaming up with him results in a greater chance of discovering them, Ellie infuriatedly objects: "Agh, fuck that-stop with the bullshit, what are you so afraid of? That I'm gonna end up like Sam? I can't get infected, I can take care of myself" (*TLOU*, Tommy's Dam). Additionally, she "opens Joel's eyes to the fact that she has suffered too" (Triana): "Everyone I have cared for has either died or left me, except for fucking you. So don't tell me that I would be safer with someone else because the truth is I would just be more scared" (*TLOU,* Tommy's Dam). While it takes Joel time to fully process their conversation, even prompting him to proclaim that as she is not his daughter, they are going their "separate ways" at the end of their conversation (*TLOU,* Tommy's Dam), he eventually "accepts […] that he *does* care about her" (Triana) and proclaims to both Ellie and his brother that they staying together in their search for the Fireflies. Triana therefore assumes that Joel's character progression is governed by acceptance rather than redemption as in embracing Ellie as someone he deeply cares for, he "shows acceptance of the course of nature, of the world they live in [as well as] peace of mind and willingness to move forward" from Sarah's death. However, as it has been highlighted in the chapter on ethics, it should not be neglected that as much as Joel's acceptance of his past factors in his decision to continue in their search for the Fireflies, maintaining their relationship provides him with a second chance in ensuring for the safety of his newly-gained surrogate daughter. As a result, the notion of redemption is of equal importance.

The genuineness of Joel's decision becomes apparent once they have reached the university campus where the Fireflies are supposedly situated. Unlike previous instances in which Ellie asks Joel something only to be cut short by a statement such as "let's stay focused", Joel has become transparent and personal in his answers, sharing his thoughts on their current situation and, even more crucially, also sharing details about his past without elicitation, for instance that he aspired to become a singer as a child. While their relationship is now at its closest, this condition is only of short-lived nature when Joel is "impaled on a piece of rebar at the end of the […] chapter" (Green 756) on falling down from a window due to a fight with one of David's men. This is a crucial cesura for both characters: Realizing Joel's grave injuries after he collapses and falls down from the horse, Ellie desperately tries to get him up in fear of losing his leadership: "Get up, get up, get up... You gotta tell me what to do. Come on... You gotta get up... Joel?" (*TLOU,* University). This highlights the importance Joel occupies in Ellie's life, further indicating that Joel functions as a parent figure in Ellie's eyes. Concerning Joel, the implications of his critical injury are equally severe: Not only does it render him helpless and reliant on Ellie's support in order to escape from the campus but, more importantly, in surviving

the winter, which, according to Kwan (31) is another instance of humiliation regarding Joel's masculinity. The situation also demonstrates that unlike in a conventional parent-child in which the parent is responsible for the safety and well-being of the child, Ellie is displayed with a high degree of independence, competence, and maturity, rendering her in binary opposition to the often-employed "damsel in distress" trope. As a result, she demonstrates her skillful behavior in hunting down a deer, successfully negotiating with David as well as fighting off both infected and David's men, eventually escaping from their leader and killing David in the end. Hence, the question is raised whether Ellie requires a father figure in her life when she is perfectly capable in ensuring for her own safety after all. Indeed, it is actually taking care of Joel that is the main reason for Ellie's endangerment as it causes David's men to discover Joel's and Ellie's hideout and subsequently hunting her down, capturing and almost killing her (*TLOU,* Winter).

Nevertheless, Ellie chooses not to neglect Joel although she is most likely better off without him at this stage. Despite the fact that she, as David fittingly states, has "heart" and is "loyal" to the ones she cares for (*TLOU,* Winter), her altruistic readiness to risk her individual safety for Joel's yet unknown fate "indicate[s] that Joel is not the only one invested in the relationship" (Triana). As a result, Ellie is in full service of the individual she defines as her father figure, "[helping] Joel to recover, to heal, and to become whole again" (Triana). Even though these transitions mean that "Joel's masculinity is briefly passed along to Ellie, he regains his masculinity when he awakens", chasing, torturing and killing a large number of David's men in order to find and rescue Ellie who has been captured David. Whereas Joel's brutality throughout the game has been well-documented, going as far as labelling him a sociopath (Stuart, Plante), the characterization of David as an anti-father (Lucat 7) is the one of the main reasons as to why Joel's and Ellie's brutality towards David and his men is depicted as explicitly as it is. Despite David's initially "warm, paternalistic, and empathetic demeanor towards Ellie" (Lucat 7) in their first encounter which is "reminiscent of the bond that eventually develops between her and Joel" (Lucat 9), these behavioral traits are shortly later demasked as the mere means to attain her as "an object of [his] sexual desire" (Voorhees a). Even more shockingly, as she defies his sexual advances, breaking one of his fingers, David promises to chop her into "tiny pieces" as a form of capital punishment, most likely in order to be utilized as food since him and the group are cannibals (*TLOU,* Winter*).* As such, Ellie's manical stabbing David to death and reintroducing Joel at the same moment ensures that Joel is emphasized as the true and ideal father figure for her. In "[echoing] the way he spoke to his daughter in the game's opening", (Lucat 10), Ellie is simultaneously christened his new daughter as Joel uses the words "baby girl" in order to reclaim and replace Sarah. This is also reinforced through the scene's

extradiegetic soundscape: As the music that accompanies the scene is a rendition of the same theme that is played during Sarah's death scene, its reappearance reinforces the symbolic meaning of this scene, meaning that Joel has eventually overcome his loss.

Due to the final events in the "Winter" chapter, Joel's and Ellie's relationship has finally evolved into a fully-developed father-daughter relationship as can be witnessed right at the beginning of "The Bus Depot" chapter. The progression can be described along three principal stages as it is similarly highlighted in this thesis' chapter on relationality: When, after Tess' death, Joel forbids Ellie to mention or discuss their past as well as other personal details, he excludes her from his emotional life entirely, treating her as little more than an undesired appendix and burden in committing to Tess' final wish and taking her to the Fireflies (*TLOU,* Quarantine Zone). After having witnessed the consequences of Bill's total seclusion, fearing that they might come true in case he continues to pursue a similar route, he is at least ready not to rebuke Ellie for thematizing more personal matters. And although he refrains from elaborated answers and avoids such conversations the moment they emerge, his appreciation of Ellie as a vital companion cannot be disputed. On realizing the importance Ellie's presence has gained in his life, fully embracing her as his surrogate daughter throughout the "Tommy's Dam", "University", and "Winter" chapters, he not only demonstrates his readiness in answering Ellie's personal questions, but, crucially, also initiates conversations regarding his past all by himself. This is exemplified in his calm and reflective reaction when Ellie talks to him about the fatal day of the outbreak as well as provides him with a photo of himself and Sarah together, to which he surprisingly replies: "I guess no matter how hard you try, you can't escape your past. Thank you" (*TLOU,* The Bus Depot). As a result, Joel suggests that they could return to Tommy's place and "be done with this whole damn thing" of taking her to the Fireflies because the comfort and company he has achieved through Ellie's presence in his life should not be risked any further. Even though Ellie appears distanced through most of the chapter, visibly uncomfortable with their immanent encounter with the Fireflies, she nonetheless commits to their initial plans: "After all we've been though. Everything that I've done. It can't be for nothing. Look, I know you mean well...but there's no halfway with this. Once we're done, we'll go wherever you want. Okay?" (*TLOU,* The Bus Depot).

Thus, it comes as a shock for Joel to be informed by Marlene that Ellie's life needs to be sacrificed in order to manufacture a cure for the cordyceps virus. Despite Ellie's commitment regarding her examination for the sake of the cure, going as far as sacrificing his newly gained "baby girl" is too much for Joel to take in. Subsequently, he embarks on a killing spree, taking down dozens of Fireflies and the doctors before carrying an unconscious Ellie to the exit where

is confronted by Marlene. The latter asks him to refrain from exiting the lab with Ellie: "It's what she'd want. And you know it. Look… You can still do the right thing here. She won't feel anything" (*TLOU*, Firefly Lab). However, this does not leave an impression with Joel who proceeds to shot Marlene to death and leaves for his brother's community together with Ellie. Even though Joel's decision has been scrutinized in terms of its ethical implications, it is also vital not to neglect the notion of parenthood when assessing his conduct. On identifying Marlene's journal that documents her relentless search for Ellie as well as listening to two audio logs that can be discovered in the "Firefly Lab" chapter, both Joel and the player learn about Marlene's perspective regarding her relationship with Ellie. The first of these logs features Marlene disclosing her emotional reaction ("yelling at the surgeon") after she has been informed that the extraction of the virus involves Ellie's death, talking about her struggle of being the responsible entity to give permission to the surgery. The second recording depicts Marlene talking to Ellie's late mother Anna about her "go ahead to proceed with the surgery" (*TLOU*, Firefly Lab). She bases her decision on the greater collective goal of potentially providing humanity with a cure which, according to Marlene, is exactly what Anna has supposedly envisioned. Although the nature of Marlene's argumentation is questionable and cannot be confirmed due to a lack of evidence, (*TLOU*, Quarantine Zone), her decision is not taken lightly as it is indicated by Marlene's high level of agitation. Hence, Green's assertion that both the Fireflies' and Marlene's behavior showcase "lack of moral and ethical judgment […] [as well as] little conflict about sacrificing Ellie" is not entirely justified. To the contrary, sacrificing someone dear for a greater goal can be very much seen in a positive light since "the notes and recording[s] Joel finds in the hospital depict Marlene's struggle with her conscience, culminating in her 'heroic' decision to sacrifice Ellie" (Voorhees b). Taking Joel's stance into consideration, it could therefore be claimed that "Joel is too weak, too sentimental, too defined by his relationship with Ellie to be the hero."

Nevertheless, Joel's weakness is exactly the reason why he, and not Marlene, acts out of parental affection in saving Ellie. Irrespective of the journal's and recordings' justification for Marlene's decision, her claim that "it's okay to kill Ellie for science 'because she would have wanted it' […] [is] a sleezy bit of moral cowardice" (Young). What is more, "killing a kid, [regardless of a heroic cause], is murder" (Young) which too is an adequate assertion since Ellie is not asked for consent, which is revealed through her lack of recollection when she is asking Joel about the events in the car. Besides, the game's climax conspicuously mirrors the events occurring in the prologue which is why Joel's decision to save Ellie is consistent with his character development and the closure of the narrative's structure in eradicating his loss:

> The whole ending sequence seems to mirror the beginning, but the situation is reversed, at the beginning Joel and Sarah get out of the house and into a white car to escape the infection, the sequence culminates on Sarah's death. The Ending is a reversed sequence that begins with Joel carrying an unconscious Ellie a situation reminiscent of dying Sarah and culminates with them driving home in a black car. (Triana)

A similar stance is also offered by Lucat (5) who notably points out:

> Playing as Joel, with Sarah in his arms, the player is powerless to alter the course of the cinematic in which the soldier shoots the two of them, fatally wounding Sarah. This restriction of player agency is combined with Joel's trusting and passive attitude to authority, which this encounter clearly alters. […] In this context, the professionalization of Joel's violence and the considerable degree to which he relies upon it during the rest of the game is one of the means by which he attempts to atone for his initial failures as a father. This violence is also, as it is in the other two games, a defining characteristic of that surrogate father-daughter relationship.

Because the entire game focuses on Joel's journey from loss to his difficult transition to acceptance of both his past and redemption in being able to make things right again, sacrificing Ellie would refute everything that Joel has experienced and done throughout the game's narrative.

4.3. Discussion

Even though both works rely on the depiction of the relationship between a father figure and their child, they could not be more distinct from each other. Concerning *The Road*, the father's understanding of parenthood derives from his ethical beliefs. Since he is convinced of the importance in sustaining the boy's life in order to constitute for humanity's future, he dedicates his entire self to the education and survival of the boy, no matter the cost. By declaring the boy a messianic figure, he too benefits from his efforts in that he is convinced that his existential purpose of representing the boy's father is tied to a divine plan. *The Last of Us*, in comparison, centers around the journey of Joel in overcoming his trauma to the gradual embrace of Ellie as his surrogate daughter. Unlike *The Road's* father, his relationship with Ellie is completely self-centered and egotistical, going as far as prioritizing his individual desire of fatherhood over the potential of saving humanity through her sacrifice. However, allowing for Joel's growth into an empathetical and caring human being due to Ellie highlights the importance of her presence which is why keeping Ellie by his side cannot be risked. Although it is Joel who benefits most from his relationship with Ellie in overcoming his trauma of loss, it does not mean that Ellie is exploited only since Joel's presence in her life provides her with the constant company she has sought for a long time. Therefore, although she is capable of ensuring for her own well-being without having to rely on Joel's leadership, she is fully dedicated towards her surrogate father, going as far as risking her life in order to save his.

5. Patriarchy

Because parenthood and an understanding of fatherhood is closely linked to conceptions regarding patriarchy, the following chapter is going to center around the question how patriarchy is depicted in both *The Road* and *The Last of Us*. On examining both works on the surface level only, their remarkable differences become obvious: While *The Last of Us* depicts a number of different female character types, ranging from daughter to wife to partner to leader of a paramilitary group, the opposite is true for *The Road* in its absence of woman for most of the narrative. Also, the way both works depict women is of very different nature: Whereas two out of the three women in *The Road* are characterized in a predominantly negative manner, *The Last of Us* is more varied when it comes to the depiction of female figures, and presents females as powerful agents, capable of driving their own agenda. Thus, the subsequent analysis emphasizes those differences as well as aims to uncover the choices that lie behind the starkly different depictions.

5.1. "Each the other's world entire": Male Self-Sufficiency and The Eradication of the Female in *The Road's* Patriarchal Universe

When it comes to Cormac McCarthy's works, it is pointed out that "they are all about men and their struggle to understand the world and themselves" (O'Connell 10; Lofquist 17). Even further, McCarthy has been accused of advertising misogyny due to the frequent depiction of "the death of female protagonists […] [as well as their association with] necrophilia and keeping [dead women's] corpses as girlfriends (Åström 117). This is why Sullivan (73) goes as far as describing McCarthy's tendentious depiction of females as "the lethal conflation of female sexuality with death." These infamous notions also applies to *The Road* in that there is an overarching tendency to connotate women with negative concepts such as death, infidelity, egotism and ungodliness although, as will be later shown, there is one major exception at the novel's end through the veteran's wife which also needs to be taken into the equation.

Concerning the man's wife, she is not physically present throughout the novel because she has committed suicide before both protagonists embark on their journey towards the south. Her suicide is the reason why she can only be experienced through the man's recollections, meaning that there might be a certain bias in the way she is rendered as a character; she cannot be encountered in the same manner as other characters. The woman's initial appearance occurs in the early stages of the novel in one of the father's dreams and, since she appears as a zombie-like corpse, is much in vain with McCarthy's notorious tendency of depicting women in his works. The juxtaposition of images the man experiences is of contradictory nature: "[H]is pale

bride came to him out of a green and leafy canopy. Her nipples pipeclayed and her rib bones painted white. She wore a dress of gauze and her dark hair was carried up in combs of ivory, combs of shell. Her smile, her downturned eyes" (*TR* 18). The father's yearning for the past can be inferred in that unlike the monochrome nature of the planet's current state, elements of green are of vivid contrast and lure the father in, hinting at his nostalgia. Also, the presence of his wife is a major factor in contributing to the attractive nature of his dream vision: Despite his wife's appearance representing the very opposite of vividness, emerging as a pale, zombie-like, yet sexualized creature, Morgenstern (42) offers a credible interpretation concerning the impact of those images: "There is not much to unpack here! The woman is she who would call "you" seductively to your death, to traumatic dissolution (jouissance) and eternal nothingness. Woman is a dream that calls the man to "languor and death. (*TR* 18)." Stark (81) arrives at a similar conclusion: "[The] sexualized vision's [the man dreams of] in which she is framed as a temptress are drawing him toward death." The father is indicated as resenting those dreams as it is the sharp contrast between the bleak and dreary reality and the colorful and vivid past that bears the danger of giving in to the notion of giving up. As such, the narrative discloses the father's coping mechanism in that he has acquired the ability to himself up "from just such siren worlds" (*TR* 18).

The danger of the father to succumb to the mental and physical remnants of a vanished past manifests in his early thoughts and actions. For instance, his tendency towards nostalgia is present in the wish to visit his old home despite the son's repeated skepticism, pointing out that it is potentially dangerous. According to O'Connor, his visit signifies the "desire to arrest the past." Fittingly, on walking through the house, he suddenly recalls early childhood memories of doing his homework with his siblings at the fireplace in case of a blackout or celebrating Christmas together, "finding marks where Christmas cards hung from a mantelpiece" (O'Connor). The son's indifferent behavior regarding the father's home and his repeated urge to leave ("We should go" (*TR* 25-26)) due to his being scared is an indicator of the son's future-oriented self that does not allow for nostalgia to interfere with their current endeavors:

> The son's resistance to entering the old family home expresses his reluctance to luxuriate in lost memories, but also that he sees possibility rather than a simple past, or hopeless present. What the father fails to see is the boy's own form of pragmatism. This pragmatism manifests in the boy's moral armature; the boy is always other-focused and forward-looking. (O'Connor)

The father's initial struggle to dwell on the past is highlighted further when, on seeing the orange-illuminated snow due to the glimmering coals, "[t]he color of it moved something in him long forgotten. Make a list. Recite a litany. Remember" (*TR* 31). While it is of course possible to denote the father's nostalgia as a pathetical act of defiance (O'Connor) and denial

of the present circumstances, it bears the risk of culminating in a loss of focus, or, even worse, loss of purpose as the post-apocalyptic landscape of the novel does not allow for the continuation of routines and rituals as it was formerly known: "No list of things to be done. The day providential to itself. The hour. There is no later. This is later" (*TR* 54). Therefore, the father wisely copes with the loss of old duties and regularities and assigns himself the task of being the protector of his son, thereby providing for the ethical foundation of a future humanity.

In order not to be conflicted about his present commitment, the man gradually abandons anything that is related to the past, due to which it becomes possible for him to endure the current state and its predicaments. This very much applies to his mental and physical abandonment of his wife: When he dreams of her shortly after having visited his childhood home, he lucidly interferes with the dream's narrative in order to alter its outcome: "In his dream she was sick and he cared for her. The dream bore the look of sacrifice but he thought differently. He did not take care of her and she died alone somewhere in the dark and there is no other dream nor other waking world and there is no other tale to tell" (*TR* 32). In reversing their roles in that it is him that leaves her and not her leaving them, he thereby mentally disposes of the traumatic burden of not having been able to convince her to continue with them and thus turn her away from her suicidal agenda (*TR* 57-58). Yet, more importantly, in gaining interpretational sovereignty he establishes his authority of their family history and reinforces his role as a patriarch. In order to complete the mental ritual of abandoning his traumatizing past, he eventually resorts to leaving his wife's picture behind as a physical representation of the mental change that he has recently experienced (*TR* 51). However, he is haunted by a number of wife-related memories soon after when the man recalls pivotal dialogs that depict the woman's decision to abandon them and commit suicide (*TR* 55-58) and repeatedly topicalizes his failure to stop her from doing so (*TR* 53, 57). Still, after having lived through his trauma, the man is eventually freed from being haunted in his dreams which, although he experiences two more recollections about her (*TR* 87, 219) demonstrates that he has successfully abandoned his emotional attachment towards her and the past.

Since the novel confirms that both the man and the woman have shared a substantial period together after the event (*TR* 59, 87), it is remarkable that their shared experienced has led to starkly different conclusions regarding their futures. While the man successfully attains his life's purpose in taking care of his son as a divine task (*TR* 77), the woman commits suicide due to her inability to share the father's sentiments which is why her decision is easily dismissible as an egotistical neglect of her family. In patriarchal terms, this means that the man *can* what the woman *cannot*. Despite the man's skillful behavior in ensuring their survival up

to their point of separation, which is both shown through the mother's admittance that he has been a crucial factor in making it as far as they have together and is present throughout the novel as well, she does not feel equally optimistic about their chances.: "Maybe you'll be good at this. I doubt it, but who knows. The one thing I can tell you is that you wont survive for yourself. I know because I would have never come this far" (*TR* 57). Clearly, the woman underestimates the man's survivalist competence, as Åström (121) notes:

> Not only does the man have an 'incredible knack for anticipating danger' on the road […], but he is also very skilled in foraging for useful items and repairing the ones they already have […] (*TR* 16–17). There are numerous scenes that demonstrate his ingenuity, quick-thinking, foresight, courage and strength of will […] (*TR* 66, 95, 103, 122, 129, 266) [...] which establish the father as a good guardian for the boy. His skills and awareness of danger are contrasted with his wife's ineffectualness and impracticality. For example, when the disaster strikes, the man immediately understands the gravity of the situation and, anticipating that there will be a water shortage, fills the bathtub with water. His wife wonders why he intends to have a bath in the middle of the night (52). Throughout the narrative, the mother's apparent lack of awareness of, and readiness for, dealing with disaster is juxtaposed with the man's preparedness; her emotional weakness contrasts with his dogged determination.

Carlson (56) attributes the woman's pessimistic attitude to her "[questioning] of world and time and their founding conditions in the openness of a possibility, which means a futurity and its past, that simply no longer appears to her." This goes as far as replacing her former belief in God and a future with "the total presence of death", meaning that in the light of its presence, there is "nothing more to say, no story still to tell" (Carlson 56): "We used to talk about death, she said. We dont do that anymore. Why is that? […] It's because it is here. There's nothing left to talk about" (*TR* 56).

Hence, it has been pointed out by a number of researchers that the woman's pessimistic attitude displays her in an unmistakably negative manner and can only be understood as the elevation of patriarchy, which this thesis subscribes to as well. However, for the sake of completion, a number of researchers have pointed out that the woman's decision is not as straight-forwardly negative as it might seem at first glance. Bellamy (44) states that the woman plays a vital role in narrative terms as her suicide triggers everything that ensues from that point onwards. Greenwood (78) goes even further in arguing for a positive stance, claiming that the woman's choice to abandon them should be seen as a sacrificial act in order "to improve her son's and husband's odds of survival." Another similarly mitigating position is offered by Wilhelm (135) who concedes that "the wife's reasons for committing suicide and merciful murder […] seem[s] logical, even rational, given the potential threats of rape, torture and cannibalism." In terms of the woman's narrative importance, it can further be argued that her death is a necessary narratorial trope to reinforce the special, divine relationship between father

and son (Morgenstern 38, O'Connell 163) which would not be as pronounced if the two were accompanied by a maternal figure. Hence, Morgenstern states:

> [Getting] rid of the mother, I would contend, partakes both of the desire to produce a kind of eternal logocentric-transcendent-present-time of masculine relation (for which reproduction is both required and disavowed), and at the same time betrays an identification with—of all things!—mothering. The rewarding surprise of *The Road*, for many readers, seems to be the record of intimate care provided by the man for his son (as he washes his hair, gives him swimming lessons, feeds him, and more generally reassures him). And this is a father who must manage, in the most charged of circumstances, the end of the world, the work of orchestrating separation and individuation. Certainly, *The Road* is a text for our time as we encounter the triumphant rugged masculinization of child care. (Morgenstern 42)

Essentially, what Morgenstern claims is that the text's lack of a mother figure is ill-described as the victory of a patriarchal universe and rather represents the advertisement of a modern, post-feminist fatherhood in which taking care of a child is not seen as a mother's primary task anymore. As such, the novel could be viewed as presenting its readers a progressive take on family relations instead of the utter eradication of femininity.

Still, even when considering the totality of mitigating factors presenting the woman in a better light, the overarching tendency by the narrative to encode her decision as fundamentally wrong cannot be ignored: Chavkin & Chavkin (197) note that the mother's behavior in going down the suicide road is portrayed as the opposite of heroism. Due to this, the behavior that is displayed by father and son in not only "refusing to take the way out that the mother does but also abiding by their moral code when the vast majority of survivors have jettisoned all civilized behavior" makes their choice seem much more heroic. This is contrasted with the mother's obsession with death (Carlson 56): "We're not survivors. We're the walking dead in a horror film. […] You can think of me as a faithless slut if you like. I've taken a new lover. He can give me what you cannot" (*TR* 55-57). Nevertheless, her hopelessness is not irrational as she is pragmatic about the circumstances they have to contend with. The various close calls both the father and son have on their journey and the constant threat of being enslaved, raped and killed (*TR* 56) means it is likely only a matter of time until those fears become reality. Thus, the woman implies that it is she who makes the reasonable choice, prophesying that her husband will fail to acknowledge their eventual misery and fail to kill them as their last resort: "[You] wont face it. You'd rather wait for it to happen. But I cant" (*TR* 56). And indeed, her projection turns out to be right when, after he has shot the vagabond, leaving the man with only one remaining shot in the pistol, he admits to himself: "You will not face the truth. You will not" (*TR* 68). Wielenberg (3) interprets the scene as follows:

> Perhaps the man recalls his wife's accusation because at that moment, he regrets not following her example. But it is also possible to see the man's thoughts here not as a despairing admission but rather as an exhortation to himself not to face the truth. He realizes that if he faces reality he

> is likely to despair entirely, so he turns his wife's accusation into a rallying cry. Facing the truth means giving up, so he urges himself not to face the truth.

In the light of further evidence regarding the women's decision, her controversial moral position is exacerbated further:

> In her final conversation with the man, the wife tells him: "I'd take him with me if it werent for you. You know I would. It's the right thing to do" (56). With these words, the wife declares not only that there is nothing wrong with committing suicide but that she and the man ought to kill the child as well (Wielenberg 9).

Yet, the fact that her prediction turns wrong in several ways pinpoints the inappropriacy of the woman's mentality. Even though the man dies, he is neither enslaved or eaten and the fact that the son is adopted by what professes to be a family of "good guys" means that "[t]he horrible fate she saw as inevitable and imminent was not" (Wielenberg 9). This contributes to the already negative impression of the main female character, adding to the notion of misogyny and the celebration of male devotion and self-sacrifice.

Centering less on the wife's narrative function, Åström and Grossman argue that the novel itself is thoroughly traversed by the advertisement of patriarchy and misogyny. Åström in particular points out that the mother's presence is to advocate for the principle of post-feminist fatherhood, advocating that men are better off taking care of boys than women are. And indeed, *The Road's* father employs a stereotypical masculinist attitude. Grossman (104) asserts that "[t]he man clearly feels that ensuring [the boy's] survival at any cost trumps an emotional connection with his son", meaning that he repeatedly "pushes the boy to the side in favor of his own decisions." This, for instance, occurs whenever the boy feels emotionally inclined to help strangers or shows compassion for their behavior and situation, yet the father forces the son to do otherwise. Thereby, he "relives the expectation that men suppress emotions in order to appear capable, and distorts love as emotional engagement into love as martyrdom" (Grossman 104). Despite the adequacy of Grossman's stance, this take on the father's behavior is one-sided. Åström notes that because the father displays a number of typically motherly characteristics (Morgenstern 42) (e.g. washing the son after shooting the roadrat (*TR* 74), washing him and cutting his hair in the bunker (*TR* 146, 151), kissing him in order to console him or show reassuring affection (*TR* 82, 114, 117, 137, 223)), the novels promotes the idea of masculine self-sufficiency, meaning the man and the boy are "each and the world's entire" (*TR* 6, Åström 117). Therefore, it is the combination of the two effects that is of pivotality when it comes to identifying *The Road's* entrenchment in patriarchy, namely in the father's embodiment of stereotypically female traits as well as neglecting the boy's emotionality in order to transform him into a more masculine being.

Irrespective of the distinctively negative characterization of both the boy's mother as well as the cannibalistic pregnant woman who feeds on her own child (*TR* 198), the novel features a binary opposite and therefore thoroughly positive example of a female figure. When the son meets the veteran's wife after being adopted by her husband, her motherly affection distinguishes her from his actual mother: "The woman when she saw him put her arms around him and held him. O, she said, I am so glad to see you." More importantly, unlike the boy's mother, her language is full of godly speech rather than obsession with death: "She would talk to him sometimes about God. […] She said that the breath of God was his breath yet though it pass from man to man through all of the time" (*TR* 286). The motherly embrace of the boy by the veteran's wife deserves particular attention in comparison to his mother's reaction of his birth as well: "My heart was ripped out of me the night that he was born so dont ask for sorrow now" (*TR* 57). This is why the juxtaposition of both women has been characterized as "the archetype of woman as a Madonna [versus] a whore (Stark 81).

Regarding her function in the novel, the veteran's wife plays a crucial role in reinforcing a patriarchal stance concerning the appropriate role of women within the novel's universe. While Åström argues that the novel proclaims women to be of irrelevant nature due to male self-sufficiency, this is not entirely true since the example of the veteran's wife indicates that there is indeed a place for females if they abide by the scheme of a prototypical maternal figure. As stated earlier, considering the veteran's wife association with God, it is prominently emphasized in which light her warmhearted behavior towards the son should be seen. This too refutes Grossman's (103) claim in that *The Road's* universe does not allow for the presence of women due to their inability "to exercise an acceptable form of parental love" as well as "to handle children in this world." However, the final characterization of the good mother reduces the ideal female role to her reproductive and motherly functions: She is only described as a good mother because she bears and raises her children, thereby ensuring that they are not corrupted or, more literally, consumed by their hostile environment. Consequently, it is a disturbingly patriarchal view on what makes a woman's life meaningful in the end.

5.2. Patriarchy's Triumphal March in *The Last of Us*

Concerning *The Last of Us,* most analysts have emphasized Joel's and Ellie's relationship in order to attain a perspective on how the game depicts fatherhood, masculinity and patriarchal elements. However, what has gone under the radar are other characters and circumstances which also contribute to the way these aspects are portrayed within the game. The chapter's initial cutscene after the title screen features Joel and his smuggling partner and possible

(former) girlfriend Tess who is depicted as the active provider of the two and informs him about latest developments. On her arrival, Joel is shown sleeping before she returns slightly bruised from a job. However, as Tess points out on Joel's observation that she could or should have taken him with her in order to be protected more optimally: "Look, I managed" (*TLOU*, Quarantine Zone). This indicates that Tess is not in constant need of a male bodyguard, ensuring that she is portrayed as an emancipated character from the very start. In addition to that, Joel's passivity when it comes to Tess' initiative to track down Robert, a rival smuggler, who has stolen some of their gun merchandise, indicates that their partnership is not one of equals. Instead, both characters complement each other, with Tess representing the cerebral entity while Joel makes up for his passivity by means of his physical capacity, however not being in the position of a fully independent agent. This becomes quite apparent when the pair encounters other individuals on their way out from the quarantine zone: Joel is either ignored or hindered from entering certain areas which is only resolved once Tess appears or steps in. Thus, in terms of their relationship, there is an inversion of prototypical gender and video game representations, with Tess representing the leader and agent whereas Joel functions as the opposite. As such, it serves as the perfect antithesis of the common stereotypization that is found in popular video game culture. Kondrat (172) summarizes several studies on gender representations in digital games that have pointed out a high statistical frequency of featuring women either as a so-called "damsel in distress" as well as having a low degree of relevancy with regard to the plot other than functioning as hypersexualized objects subject to the male gaze. Neither is true for Tess: Although the pairing of a physically capable man with a woman functioning as the cerebral entity is not of particularly unique nature, it is surprising that Tess displays stereotypically-coded male behavior in sovereignly confronting anyone standing in their way. As such, Tess represents the opposite of a subordinate or dependent female character since it is her that initiates the interrogation, punishment and eventual shooting of Robert and his men in which Joel, once again, only plays a minor role. McShea summarizes her character in those early moments tellingly: "Tess is a badger let loose from a cage. To cross her path is to sign your own death warrant. […] Her independence and ruthlessness are thrust to the forefront; empathy and humanity are nowhere to be found." Furthermore, Kwan (48) draws on the fact that Tess "is the only one holding a gun [when interrogating Robert], which can be understood as a symbol of power." Tess' emancipated behavior can also be observed as the pair is on the way to the capitol building in order to deliver Ellie to a group of Fireflies. Tess once again confidently takes the lead, ignoring Joel's concerns regarding their escorting mission and not even bothering about futile discussions to convince him of the opposite (*TLOU*, Outskirts).

This means that when it comes to the introductory moments of the game, *The Last of Us* reverses familiar gender scripts overtly, offering an intriguing alternative to conventional norms found in digital games as well as popular culture.

This reversal of gendered roles is also present in the introduction of yet another female character, Marlene, who, as the leader of the Fireflies, a militia controlling important areas of the country, possesses a significant amount of influence regarding the in-game society as well as triggering pivotal moments of the game's narrative. In learning about the fact that Robert has sold the guns to the Fireflies, Tess and Joel are utilized by Marlene to smuggle something out of the city in order to have their guns returned and receive an additional provision which puts Marlene into a position of power in comparison to the pair. This is of unorthodox nature in that it not only "show[s] two strong women characters […] [challenging] one another for leadership" (Kwan 47), but also in that Joel's stance does not play a role in their negotiating power, with a black female figure seemingly coming out on top. While Marlene's power position in terms of the narrative is hardly disputable as her asking Tess and Joel to smuggle Ellie out of the city is the precondition for everything that ensues from this scene onwards, Kwan (47-48) is of another opinion:

> It is clear that Tess has the upper hand. Marlene is introduced with a gun wound, which instantly puts her in a vulnerable position […] [in comparison to Tess] who has just killed someone in cold-blood, […] shown […] with a gun in hand, […] uninjured."

This is why Marlene, even as the leader of a paramilitary group, is not displayed as entirely superior over Tess in the game's introductory events although her leadership position has to be considered unusual in the light of a typically patriarchal depiction of females in video games nonetheless. Even more so, her emancipated role is emphasized in her "[claiming] the moral ground throughout, both in her resistance to the government and in her choices regarding Ellie" (Green 757).

Despite Marlene's role as the leader of the Fireflies, later events in the game emphasize that she consistently ends on the losing side of the spectrum. Even though she represents the leader of the Fireflies, it is pointed out multiple times that the Fireflies are on a rough patch. This becomes apparent when the Fireflies Tess and Joel are supposed to deliver Ellie to are found dead at the end of the "Quarantine Zone" chapter. Further evidence is provided when Joel and Ellie discover that the Fireflies had to abandon their research facility at the campus (*TLOU*, University) as well as through Marlene's own admission that she "has lost most of [her] crew crossing the country" (*TLOU*, Firefly Lab). And though she initially has the final say on the game's most important moments such as sending Ellie, Joel and Tess on their journey and

also concluding it in allowing for Ellie's sacrifice, the game devalues her decisions in having Ellie state that Marlene was merely a "friend" (*TLOU*, Quarantine Zone) (Triana). While her decision concerning Ellie's sacrifice might be described as "diplomatic" (Kwan 37) or even "heroic" (Voorhees b) on the surface, it eventually demonstrates a lack of true and affectionate maternal responsibility. As a result, despite Voorhees (b) acknowledgment of Marlene's struggle to sacrifice Ellie due to her affection towards the girl, she justifies killing an innocent child for the greater good of humanity. Although Joel's decision to counteract Marlene's sacrifice of Ellie might deviate from the stereotypical heroic behavior of a male protagonist, he only fails to behave according to such expectations because unlike Marlene, he "is […] too defined by his relationship with Ellie to be a hero" (Voorhees b). The game's narrative seems to be in favor of Joel's stance as Marlene is brutally killed by Joel, marking her choice as the wrong one. Therefore, even if Marlene "may have challenged Joel's masculinity temporarily" in overruling Joel's desire not to sacrifice Ellie, she eventually "[pays] the price for it" (Kwan 48).

Although, unlike Marlene, Tess is shown as a very capable and strong survivalist and functions as a leader over Joel in the game's opening chapters, she too suffers a similar fate in that her time in the game's narrative is reduced to the initial chapters. On discovering the Fireflies dead at the Capitol building, Tess reveals that she has been bitten in the museum moments before meaning that, because she is not immune, she is predestined to die. Kwan (48) makes an important observation:

> Tess is generally portrayed as headstrong and capable, but when she reveals that she has become infected by the plague, Tess shows a vulnerable side, becoming irrational and fearful of her fate. Tess may have been portrayed as a dynamic and interesting character, but she eventually dies and resorts to being used an emotional plot device to propel Joel's story forward and shift masculinity back onto Joel's shoulders.

On highlighting Ellie's immunity that is now unmistakably evident through the comparison of the two bitemarks, she urges him to continue in their search for the Fireflies since Ellie's extraordinariness "is fucking real" (*TLOU*, Outskirts). Since it was Tess who, at least by what can be inferred by their sequences together, was the one who provided Joel with structure and guidance, it is obvious that Joel is left in a precarious position. As such, he faces the choice to either establish his own regiment over Ellie in taking her to the Fireflies or to return and continue where he left of, albeit without Tess. Neither are straightforward choices: Returning home without Tess means that he has to reconfigure his entire approach to life and survival as due to the complementary-based nature of their smuggling partnership. As such, returning home is neither a comforting nor reassuring prospect as it confronts Joel with significant restructuring

processes, to which there does not seem an intuitive and straight-forward solution. The other option, taking Ellie to the Fireflies, is of little more attractivity because Joel does not know where to take Ellie in search for a cure. Also, embarking on this journey does not yield him any benefits other than danger or death. In abiding by Tess' final wish due to his ethical commitment ("Look, there's enough here that you have to feel some sort of obligation to me."), he opts for the latter, meaning that he is now in charge and responsibility over both himself as well as Ellie. This leaves him with the responsibility to establish his position towards Ellie which is achieved in a stereotypically masculinist manner. When Ellie, who too is affected by Tess' emotional death, wants to discuss recent events, Joel shuts her off harshly, eventually enforcing his leadership over Ellie through a set of three rules:

> "Here's how this thing's gonna play out. You don't bring up Tess – ever. Matter of fact, we can just keep our histories to ourselves. Secondly, don't tell anybody about your condition. They'll think you're crazy or they'll try to kill you. And lastly, you do what I say, when I say it. We clear?" (*TLOU*, Outskirts)

Because Ellie as a 14-year old girl poses little threat to Joel's authority, it seems rather exaggerated to confront her in such a strong manner. However, on closer examination in patriarchal terms, it his way of ensuring that "the mantle of power shifts from Tess to Joel through […] Joel's new charge over Ellie" (Kwan 35, Joyce). Furthermore, in suppressing his past and present traumata which weigh heavy on his shoulders and rebuking Ellie as strongly as he does, he distracts from his cluelessness as to how Tess' final wish can be achieved. And finally, neglecting her repeated suggestion to provide her with a bow or firearm as she could support Joel in case he is overwhelmed (*TLOU*, Bill's Town) ensures that he attains patriarchal power over her as a protector which is another argument for the game's promotion of patriarchy.

Irrespective of how Joel's leadership over Ellie is described in their early moments alone together, the role she represents in the narrative does not exclusively subordinate her under patriarchal leadership and is of rather ambivalent nature, meaning she is portrayed as a highly independent agent and does not require constant babysitting and attention. Although both Voorhees (a) and Stang (169) are wrong in claiming that Ellie cannot receive damage in the game, they correctly state that Ellie "is [neither] a psychic [nor] a physical burden to the player." This can be attributed to her ability to defend herself or avoid enemies, but crucially also to physically support Joel in combat or through providing him with resources "such as health packs or bullets" (Voorhees). This means she defies the commonly-found "damsel in distress" trope (Kondrat 172) due to her independent and brave nature. Scholars have furthermore noted that Ellie's introduction and early moments in the game depict her as a naïve and scared young woman, only becoming more seasoned as the game progresses (Stang 168, Colăcel 47). This

initially seems to be backed up by Ellie's own admission later in the game, as she confesses to Joel on wanting to abandon her: "Everyone I have cared for has either died or left me. Everyone fucking except for you. So don't tell me that I would be safer with someone else, because the truth is I'd just be more scared" (*TLOU*, Tommy's Dam). However, McShea demonstrates that despite her admission that she is sacred,

> Ellie is not ruled by her fear. She talks like a girl in search of normalcy, whistling or humming during quiet moments, fantasizing about swimming lessons, and laughing about the problems that used to haunt girls before the outbreak. Boys? School? Problems that seem pitiful when your stomach has been growling for days and you have watched a zombie kill your best friend, yet Ellie remembers them. In her remembrance of the past, she exhibits a strength of will that most adults have lost. Ellie is both strong and vulnerable, smart and naive, and her humanity provides the impetus to push you through to the bitter end.

Ellies independence bears significant implications regarding the concept of patriarchy. In one of the previous paragraphs, it is argued that Joel subordinates Ellie in order to reinforce his position as a patriarchal leader. This is achieved in ensuring that she is not given the means to defend herself with a gun, creating a scheme of total dependency. The game's narrative however does not support Joel's intention which is why he is undermined in several moments: On being separated from Ellie in the Pittsburgh hotel due to a collapsing elevator, the player is presented with one of the most difficult gameplay sequences of the entire game in activating a generator without being killed by a multitude of infected. While this already suggests Joel's dependency on Ellie's presence in terms of gameplay, this extends even further: On returning to the elevator, Joel is ambushed by a marauder, only barely saved from being drowned as Ellie skillfully kills the man through a headshot (*TLOU*, Pittsburgh). Furthermore, Joel's critical injury in the "University" chapter, which he only barely survives and results in a significant period of recovery, means that his patriarchal leadership is subverted. As such, it is Ellie who very proficiently handles herself throughout the chapter in ensuring both her and Joel's survival, meaning that their relationship is one of equals in keeping each other alive. This is supported through gameplay as well in that the player controls Ellie throughout Joel's recovery period, roughly equaling a fifth of the entire game. Importantly, handling Ellie in the "Winter" chapter is not noticeably different from Joel. Voorhees (a) adequately summarizes this transition:

> [T]he player assumes control of Ellie as she hunts for food and then endures the company of dangerous cannibals to barter for lifesaving medicine. Soon after, when the cannibals are hunting her and Joel, Ellie leads them away from an incapacitated Joel. She fights the cannibals (with the same capability and effectiveness as Joel) saving Joel's life a second time before the player eventually regains control of him.

Irrespective of the instances that are easily seen as the challenge of Joel's masculinity and patriarchal leadership, Lucat (15) demonstrates that they are nonetheless both retained and enforced in this scene:

> Despite the development of Ellie's survival skills, her narrow escape from death at the hands of a cannibal and subsequent emotional breakdown in Joel's arms is used to emphasize the full realization of their father-daughter relationship, rather than as a strong marker of Ellie as a capable survivor."

Joel calling Ellie his "baby girl", the manner by which he used to refer to his late daughter Sarah, as well as embracing, caressing and consoling her after witnessing the persecution of David and his men (*TLOU*, Winter) advertises the notion that Ellie is only truly safe in the hands of a capable father. Taking into account her deeply troubled emotional state, it is the ideal moment for Joel to reassume his role as the father figure and protector of a young girl instead of elevating her to an equal state due to her accomplishments.

Similarly, other challenges to Joel's masculinity are equally dealt in his favor throughout the narrative: Tess, Joel's leadership figure in the game's early chapters, is killed in order to initiate his patriarchal transformation. When Joel is put into a submissive role on visiting Bill's Town, being commanded around, the latter is humiliated in his aggressive and dominating behavior when he visibly shaken by encountering his partner's corpse. This goes to show that he is less in command of himself than he likes to believe, weakening his initially authoritative position towards Joel. Henry and Sam experience an even worse fate: Irrespective of their pivotality in ensuring Joel's and Ellie's escape from Pittsburgh, saving them from drowning, they are both eliminated from their leadership role over Joel when Henry commits suicide after having shot his infected brother Sam (Kwan 35-36). And finally, despite Marlene's heroic decision to sacrifice Ellie for the potential development of a cure (Voorhees b), the former is killed as sacrificing Ellie would refute Joel's development from trauma to acceptance to redemption. Therefore, irrespective of the fact that other characters might pose a temporary threat to Joel's patriarchal authority and leadership, their eventual death or neglect by the narrative indicates that their function is not to threaten and overcome Joel's masculinity but rather to be in full service of the true masculine leader who prevails in the end.

5.3. Discussion

All in all, it can be said that both works employ a distinctively patriarchal stance although this is achieved by completely different means. *The Road's* self-sufficient masculinity comes at the cost of females who are made redundant by the father's post-feminist behavior, embodying stereotypically female qualities, as well as the overarchingly negative depiction of women as

ungodly, egotistical, deadly and incapable. Although the introduction of the veteran's wife right at the novels suggests that there is a place for women in *The Road's* universe, her characterization as the perfect mother in bearing and educating children implies that a woman's worth can only be achieved through dedicating her entire existence to the embodiment of reproduction. *The Last of Us* features a more diverse and complicated picture in that Joel, the game's patriarch, is challenged in his masculinity throughout the entire narrative. This manifest in Ellie's strong presence as well as capable and tough females or other figures. As Joel's progress and success in the game is strongly tied to his reliance on others rather than his strong patriarchal leadership, it lacks self-sufficiency and can be described as weak. However, despite the frequency of Joel's undermined masculinity, either in being repeatedly saved from Ellie or commanded by others, those instances are only of short-lived nature. The game presents Joel's final victory in that he is the one who prevails and has the final say over every decision in the game whereas everyone else challenging his patriarchal leadership and masculine authority is either killed, subordinated, or fades into obscurity.

6. Conclusion

In comparing the relationship between a father figure and his child, various potentials of utilizing these narratives are demonstrated. Although *The Road* and *The Last of Us* initially appear to be of similar nature in their depiction of father and child on a journey through a post-apocalyptic landscape, they differ when it comes to the representation of ethics, relationality, parenthood and patriarchy.

Concerning ethics, the relationship between father and son in *The Road* offers both characters the necessary support and encouragement not to succumb to the evils and threats they are constantly surrounded by. In abiding by the code of "good guys", "carrying the fire", they are able to maintain fundamental human qualities such as love, empathy and benevolence. Because of the intricate circumstances, the father's responsibility in ensuring the son's survival is not without difficulty, resulting in prioritizing certain ideals over others depending on the situation. However, irrespective of these intricacies, both protagonists retain their ethical beliefs throughout the novel which is rewarded by the narrative in that they are taken care of by godly providence, going as far as providing the boy with a new father and family when the man dies at the novel's end. In contrast, *The Last of Us* offers a more ambiguous perspective on ethical behavior. This primarily concerns the notion of individualism versus collectivism, showing that, depending on the situational context, the application of either of the two is not universally appropriate. Thus, the game positions itself against individualism whenever it concerns close relationships as these provide individuals with hope, comfort, purpose as well as allowing for the development of loyalty and responsibility. Because his relationship with Ellie is the fundamental reason for his progress in those areas, Joel subverts Ellie's individual desire and the Fireflies' decision to utilize Ellie for the greater goal of providing humanity with a cure. Nevertheless, the game very overtly presents Joel's choice to declare and keep Ellie as his daughter as the right one. The Fireflies' questionable behavior throughout the game justifies Joel's lack of trust and hostility towards them in order to save his surrogate daughter.

In approaching both works from a relationality-focused point of view, the nature of the father-child relationships can be identified, demonstrating why the strong interplay of characters in a narrative is of pivotality. Concerning *The Road*, the son's presence assures him of his faith and allows him to maintain hope irrespective of all challenges he has to contend with. Although he repeatedly aims to assure himself that his and his son's survival is part of a divine plan to allow for a rebirth of society and human qualities through the son, his struggle with God means he is constantly on the verge of abandoning hope and following his wife's example in committing suicide. Therefore, he turns to Ely, a lone wanderer they randomly

encounter, in order to discuss the nature of his journey and life's purpose, thereby hoping to be recognized and confirmed in his endeavors. However, Ely's fatalism does not allow for an alleviation of the father's troubled state. Yet, the father manages to resolve his struggle when he recalls his earlier messianization of the boy, meaning that the latter serves as his moral compass as well as encourages the father to dedicate himself to their divine task. When it comes to *The Last of Us,* Ellie's presence is necessary for Joel's discovery of an existential purpose: Although Joel is very distanced towards Ellie initially since he is aware that a mutual, dialogical relationship between two selves involves his full presence and emotional transparency, his experience of mutual dependency in terms of their survival translates into his appreciation of Ellie. As she unselfishly saves Joel multiple times due to her affection towards him since, unlike everyone else, he has not abandoned her so far, he realizes the practical implications of what it means to be fully invested in another person. This results in the total revelation of his self before Ellie since he understands that gaining her trust maintains her company and keeps him safe from the dangers of *The Last of Us'* post-apocalyptic world, leading to his being a caring and devoted parent. This notion is also supported by gameplay elements: The careful examination of areas reveals a number of optional conversations in which Joel is depicted as much more emotionally-invested in his relationship with Ellie than it is disclosed by the narrative otherwise.

As far as parenthood is concerned, it denotes the application of the father's ethics in *The Road* while *The Last of Us* utilizes Joel's surrogate fatherhood in order to overcome the trauma of his daughter's death. In terms of *The Road,* this means that in abiding by the belief that ensuring for the boy's survival is part of a divine plan, with the boy representing a future messiah, the father is tremendously attentive of the boy's needs, going as far as surrendering his entire self to this task. However, this results in the father's violation of his moral conduct such as in lying to the son about their situation or failing to help others and showing empathy. Regardless of the challenge of representing a responsible father, his conviction that his deeds are the application of God's will means that his success in raising the boy against all odds translates into the belief that it is not his own competence but rather divine providence that keeps them alive. In contrast, Joel's fatherhood signifies the journey from loss and trauma to the gradual embrace of Ellie as his surrogate daughter. In experiencing Joel's lack of existential purpose, resulting in his passivity and subordination to others, the necessity for Joel to experience change is strongly emphasized. Through Ellie's presence, he understands the value of her company both in emotional as well as survivalist terms, meaning he increasingly embraces her role as a daughter figure. However, as his fear of loss is the origin of his reluctance to empathize and interact with others, his realization that he has attached to Ellie to such great

extent culminates in the plan to abandon her. Witnessing the success of Tommy's community which is essentially founded on the institution of family and the notion of a "second chance", he however aborts his plans, remains by her side and eventually fully christens Ellie his surrogate daughter after she saves his life in the "Winter" chapter. Ellie's value to Joel means that her life cannot be risked which is why his fatherly affection towards her is in opposition to Ellie's desire to help the Fireflies. Hence, out of parental love, he resorts to killing the Fireflies as well as Marlene since witnessing the death of his surrogate daughter would make a mockery of his development as a parent figure throughout their journey. While Joel is the main benefactor of his relationship with Ellie, she too profits from Joel's company: As she points out that everyone she has cared for has either left her or died, Joel's presence in her life ensures that she does not succumb to fear, even if she is presented as a very capable survivor herself

Lastly, the comparison of both works concerning patriarchy reveals that they both depict the masculine victory over the female. Regarding *The Road,* this materializes in the concept of self-sufficient masculinity and post-feminism. Despite the man's embodiment of stereotypically female character traits in interacting with the boy, the fact that his fatherhood does not require the complementation of a maternal figure renders women redundant. Additionally, the fact that the behavior of the boy's mother in abandoning their family due to her ungodliness and obsession with death, resulting in her suicide, is characterized as distinctively negative indicates the female inability to cope with the post-apocalypse. Even if it is wrong to claim that McCarthy does not allow for the existence of women within the novel's universe due to the inclusion of the veteran's wife, the fact that she is only allowed a role due to her reproductive qualities and family duties serves as a strong indicator of the novel's patriarchal stance. Meanwhile, *The Last of Us'* casts a more ambivalent light on patriarchy: Because of the strong presence of female figures and their challenging Joel's masculinity at several points, the game initially deviates from stereotypically patriarchal depictions. Furthermore, Joel's strong reliance on other figures such as Bill or Henry in order to survive subverts his role as a patriarchal leader even further. However, the fact that their challenge is only of short-lived nature in that these characters are either killed, abandoned or, in Ellie's case, subordinated, showcases that it is Joel, the patriarchal leader, who has the final say despite his temporary subordination.

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8. Appendix

8.1. References of Images

Images 1.1 – 3.2: Naughty Dog: *The Last of Us: Left Behind.* Sony Computer Entertainment 2014.

Image 1.1: Ellie listening to Joel‘s description (*TLOU*, Jackson).

Image 1.2: Ellie realizing Joel’s lie (*TLOU*, Jackson).

Image 1.3: Ellie turning her back to Joel (1/2) (*TLOU*, Jackson).

Image 1.4: Ellie turning her back to Joel (2/2) (*TLOU*, Jackson).

Image 2: By pressing the triangle button, the option conversation is triggered (*TLOU*, Bill’s Town).

Image 3.1: Joel’s sitting position is in opposition to his words (*TLOU*, Outskirts).

Image 3.2: Joel’s shifting eyes as an indicator of insecurity (*TLOU*, Outskirts).

8.2. Abstract (English)

This thesis examines father-child relationships in post-apocalyptic works. Since the post-apocalypse signifies the state after the world's end, either through world wars, environmental disasters, pandemics or undead armies, its subversive potential requires the surviving characters to adapt to the changes these disasters have resulted in and reassess their existential purpose in the light of fallen societies and hostile environments. As post-apocalyptic narratives frequently emphasize the role of masculine father figures and their relationship to children, it is of interest to uncover by which ideals and philosophies these relationships are governed and how the close interplay between father figure and child determines reciprocal influence. Since Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* and Naughty Dog's *The Last of Us* are considered seminal post-apocalyptic works due to their critical acclaim and popularity, as well as sharing a common denominator in centering around father-child relationships, these are compared and contrasted according to the four categories *ethics*, *relationality*, *parenthood* and *patriarchy*. Concerning *ethics*, it is argued that both narratives are of very different nature, with *The Road* focusing on what it means to retain fundamental human qualities in an inhumane world whereas *The Last of Us'* topicalizes the notions of individualism and its counterpart collectivism, showing that their appropriacy is not universal but rather context-dependent. In the section on *relationality*, it is pointed out that the strong interplay of father and child results in substantial benefits for the involved characters since turning to the other provides the self with recognition, confirmation, as well as moral guidance and reaffirmation, although this of greater importance for the father figures than their children. The chapter on *parenthood* showcases the starkly differing conduct of both father figures. This means that the relationship between father and son in *The Road* centers around the application of ethical beliefs, demonstrating how the father's convictions translate into his relentless dedication to ensuring his son's survival and education. In opposite to this, it is Joel's transition from trauma and loss to acceptance and recovery that governs the manner by which he approaches and finally embraces Ellie as a surrogate daughter in *The Last of Us*. Finally, this thesis argues for both works to be thoroughly traversed by the concept of *patriarchy*. This is linked to *The Road's* condemning depiction of female characters, their scarcity in the novel, and linking a woman's only purpose to her reproductive function. Although *The Last of Us* is less radical in its nature, meaning that while it allows for the repeated challenge of Joel's masculinity, the fact that he prevails whereas all of his challengers are either killed or subordinated points towards the game's celebration of patriarchal victory.

8.3. Abstract (Deutsch)

Die vorliegende Arbeit untersucht Vater-Kind Beziehungen in post-apokalyptischen Werken. Die Tatsache, dass sich die Post-Apokalypse mit dem Zustand nach dem Weltuntergang auseinandersetzt, welcher beispielsweise durch Weltkriege, Umweltkatastrophen, Seuchen oder Armeen von Untoten hervorgerufen werden kann, zwingt die überlebenden Charaktere dazu, sich mit den damit einhergehenden Veränderungen zu arrangieren und ihren Daseinszweck zu reevaluieren. Zumal post-apokalyptische Narrative häufig die Beziehung von maskulinen Vaterfiguren und ihren Kindern betonen, ist es von Interesse herauszufinden, durch welche Ideale und Philosophien diese Beziehungen charakterisiert werden und welchen gegenseitigen Einfluss das enge Zusammenspiel zwischen Vater und Kind aufeinander hat. Dies wird anhand Cormac McCarthys *The Road* und Naughty Dog's *The Last of Us* veranschaulicht, die aufgrund ihrer positiven Rezeption und hohen Popularität in dieser Arbeit Berücksichtigung finden. Die jeweiligen Vater-Kind Beziehungen werden anhand der Kategorien *ethics, relationality, parenthood* und *patriarchy* beleuchtet, um Gemeinsamkeiten und Unterschiede zwischen den Werken festzuhalten. Im Kapitel zu *ethics* werden erste Differenzen ersichtlich: Während sich *The Road* darauf fokussiert, was es bedeutet, menschliche Qualitäten in einer unmenschlichen Umgebung zu erhalten, werden in *The Last of Us* die beiden Herangehensweisen des Individualismus und Kollektivismus gegenüberstellt, wodurch hervorgeht, dass ihre Angemessenheit durch den situativen Kontext bestimmt wird. In *relationality* wird hervorgehoben, dass das enge Zusammenspiel zwischen Vater und Kind substantielle Vorteile für die involvierten Charaktere mit sich bringt, da das Selbst in der Interaktion mit dem Anderen Anerkennung, Bestätigung sowie moralische Anleitung erfährt, obgleich dies von größerer Bedeutung für die Vaterfiguren als deren Kinder ist. Das Kapitel zu *parenthood* veranschaulicht das sich signifikant voneinander unterscheidende Verhalten beider Väter. Das bedeutet, dass die Beziehung zwischen Vater und Sohn in *The Road* sich in erster Linie auf die Anwendung der ethischen Überzeugungen des Vaters gründet, die in der unablässigen Hingabe gegenüber dem Sohn, dessen Überleben und Ausbildung, resultiert. Im Gegensatz dazu ist es Joels Vergangenheit und Heilung von seinem Trauma, die die Art und Weise seines Verhaltens gegenüber Ellie beeinflusst und reguliert. Abschließend wird im Kapitel zu *patriarchy* davon ausgegangen, dass beide Werke zutiefst patriarchaler Natur sind. Das rührt aus der in *The Road* gegebenen verdammenden Darstellung weiblicher Charaktere, deren spärlicher Präsenz und der Tatsache, dass der einzige Daseinsgrund einer Frau in ihrer reproduktiven Funktion begründet wird. Obgleich *The Last of Us* eine geringere Radikalität an den Tag legt und Joels Männlichkeit wiederholte Anfechtung erfährt, ist die Tatsache, dass

sämtliche Herausforderer entweder umkommen oder ihm untergeordnet werden, ein Beweis für den Sieg des Patriarchats im Spiel.