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CLONE FAMILIES AND ZOMBIE CHILDREN

The Demise of the Nuclear Family in Dystopian and Postapocalyptic Narratives

ABSTRACT: Although dystopian and postapocalyptic narratives tend to be discussed primarily in terms of their exploration of society, they also prove to be an interesting, so far largely underestimated, context for examining cultural responses to fluctuating discourses on the family. Due to their characteristic range of themes and premises, both dystopian and postapocalyptic narratives may challenge notions of what “normal” family life looks like and what “family” means in the face of changing social realities, legal frameworks and reproductive technologies. The article discusses (re-)interpretations of what families may mean in a number of British and American dystopian and postapocalyptic novels (in particular recent ones) as well as in the successful TV series *The Walking Dead*.

KEYWORDS: *Brave New World, Never Let Me Go, The Road, The Walking Dead*

Introduction

Although dystopian and postapocalyptic narratives tend to be discussed primarily in terms of their exploration of human nature and society, they also prove to be an interesting, so far largely underestimated, context for examining cultural responses to fluctuating discourses on the family. Due to their characteristic range of themes and premises, both dystopian and postapocalyptic narratives may challenge notions of what “normal” family life looks like and what “family” means in the face of changing social realities, legal frameworks and reproductive technologies. In their visions of alternative societies, dystopian narratives do not only speculate on the consequences of various types of government; they also include reflections on the family and family-like structures (or the lack thereof), at times coming up with more or less radical alternatives to the model of the nuclear family. Postapocalyptic narratives do not only show

individuals in their struggle for survival, but also focus on the ways in which the radically altered, hostile circumstances affect families.

In dystopian worlds, a demise of the nuclear family may turn out to be *programmatic*; in other words, a lack of family-like social units may be the immediate consequence of ideological principles that undermine the traditional concept of the family deliberately. Cases in point include the rigorous abolition of the family in the World State of Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932), which will provide the starting point of the discussion below, and the principle of choosing "factions" over families in Veronica Roth's young adult dystopian novel *Divergent* (2011). In the society sketched in George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949), the nuclear family as such survives. Still, the fact that marriages among Party members are supposed to be loveless unions that exist for the sole sake of procreating offspring all but precludes any idealized presentation of the family. Moreover, the (comparatively rare) glimpses of family life in Orwell's novel include the information that political indoctrination encourages children to spy and report on their own parents, even if this means imprisonment, torture and death for their father and/or mother. Undercutting the significance of the family for the individual consolidates the power of the Party. While this idea is reminiscent of reality in totalitarian systems such as the one in Nazi Germany, it also serves to challenge the widespread notion of the family as a (temporary) sanctuary in a hostile environment.

In postapocalyptic narratives, the demise of the family appears to be not so much programmatic rather than a consequence of conditions that are hostile to human life. Postapocalyptic narratives often lack the "most prominent topos of utopian/dystopian literature" (Toker and Chertoff 2008, 164), i.e., "the presence of a *foundational principle*, a philosophical or sociological idea which forms the deep structure of a utopian setting but which may take somewhat debased surface forms" (164). The premises of a genre dwelling on the devastating impact of pandemics, global ecological disasters and other circumstances causing the end of the world as we know it, which typically include an extreme scarcity of both food and medical care as well as the dissolution of law enforcement, imply that the likelihood of losing family members increases exponentially. Indeed, orphanhood, single-parent families and the death of children are recurring features in depictions of the postapocalyptic struggle for survival, as Cormac McCarthy's novel *The Road* (2006) and the TV series *The Walking Dead* (2010-) illustrate. Simultaneously, "a fictional world in which the pervasive threat of violent death forces characters to reevaluate what they are willing to do in order to survive and what constitutes meaningful existence" (Tenga and Bassett 2016, 1281) also raises questions concerning the importance of the family in a purely "survival-driven existence" (1286).

To what extent does the (nuclear) family continue to provide a meaningful existence for individuals in radically altered (dystopian or postapocalyptic) circumstances? Does the traditional family remain a privileged social group inside, or next to, other social units,

some of which may only emerge in the struggle for survival? These are some of the core questions I seek to explore in the following, focusing primarily on recent dystopian and postapocalyptic narratives. First, however, I will have a look at Aldous Huxley's dystopia *Brave New World*, which is still an important reference point in debates on the representation of artificial reproduction in dystopian fiction.

From a World without Families to Clone Families

Brave New World imagines a future in which the nuclear family is essentially defunct. In vitro fertilization, ectogenesis and State Conditioning Centres have replaced families, which were abolished to create a more efficient and happier society and which are merely an obscene barbarism for most inhabitants of the World State. Individuals are brought up to feel embarrassed when fathers, mothers and “the old viviparous days” (Huxley 2007, 4) are mentioned. According to the pseudo-Freudian reasoning the social order in the World State is based on, families are tantamount to a lack of emotional stability and thus endanger the individual's well-being: “Our Freud had been the first to reveal the appalling dangers of family life. The world was full of fathers – was therefore full of misery; full of mothers – therefore of every kind of perversion from sadism to chastity; full of brothers, sisters, uncles, aunts – full of madness and suicide” (33). As Brad Buchanan (2002) points out, “the active suppression of the Oedipus complex is the principal tool of social stability practiced in this future” (76). The abolition of kinship networks is also regarded as being conducive to erasing all kinds of deep emotional bonds, which are thought of as factors prone to destabilize both the individual and society as a whole: “An ‘only love’ is an incestuous love, in Huxley's futuristic world, because it tends to work against the social solidarity which is the key to peaceful life” (77). While the World State has abolished families as well as lasting relationships, these still exist on the reservations, Foucauldian heterotopias that are deemed relics of a primitive past. In this way, the impression that the family as a social unit is not only outdated but actually part of an “uncivilized,” earlier stage of human development is reinforced.

Even if the recurring anti-family rants in *Brave New World* certainly seem to invite a satirical reading, the fate of John “the Savage,” who, contrary to normal World State biographies, was accidentally born “in the old way” on a reservation and grew up with his mother, raises interesting questions. The depiction of John's emotional dependency on his mother, which indeed seems to exemplify the Freudian Oedipus complex (Buchanan 2002, 78-9), and of his extreme reactions, which culminate in self-flagellation and suicide, might suggest that the negative way in which families are seen in the World State is not entirely unfounded after all. In this context, it is also worthwhile noting that a certain amount of criticism regarding the traditional closely-knit nuclear family is

expressed in some earlier utopian texts as well, including William Morris' Late Victorian utopia *News from Nowhere* (1890). Here, a more flexible family model is favored, which relies on temporary unions, where partners may separate without any legal procedure or social sanctioning, and on the community participating in the education of children. Moreover, a skeptical attitude towards the impact traditional family structures have on the individual, which equally echoes Freudian ideas, is apparent in novels by a number of British Modernists, such as D.H. Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers* (1913), May Sinclair's *The Life and Death of Harriett Frean* (1922), and Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* (1927). In other words, the anti-family rhetoric in Huxley's World State seems to capture the tenor of a widespread criticism of the nuclear family, at least among intellectuals, in the first decades of the twentieth century.

Although the demise of the family in Huxley's World State has its ideological foundation in a pseudo-Freudian anti-family ideology, it also takes a highly advanced reproductive technology to make the vision of a society without families come true. It has been argued that *Brave New World* does not necessarily imply criticism of eugenics as such (Congdon 2011). Still, the depiction of artificial reproduction in Huxley's novel is likely to trigger decidedly negative associations right from the start. In the description of the Fertilizing Room at the beginning of the text, various references to death are at odds with the notion of fertility/new life. The novel tells us that inside the Fertilizing Room, "[t]he light was frozen, dead, a ghost", and the workers wear gloves made of "a pale corpse-coloured rubber," which conjures up a death-in-life scenario (Huxley 2007, 1; emphases added). The matter-of-fact sketch of the technicalities of "the modern fertilizing process" (3) is not apt to endow the beginning of human life with a sense of wonder. Instead, the efficiency-oriented approach reaches its climax in the description of Bokanovsky's Process, which alludes to "contemporary state-of-the-art scientific and technological inventions (e.g. Hermann Muller's sensational experiment with X-rays to increase the mutation process in 1927)" (Tripp 2015, 35) in so far as it involves exposing fertilized eggs to "hard x-rays" (Huxley 2007, 4): "a bokanovskified egg will bud, will proliferate, will divide. From eight to ninety-six buds, and every bud will grow into a perfectly formed embryo, and every embryo into a full-sized adult. Making ninety-six human beings grow where only one grew before. Progress" (3-4). Instead of generating awe at the possibility of creating new life, the description of the artificially induced multiplication of eggs seems revolting and serves as a reminder of the fact that the World State does not cherish individuality. While the *doppelgänger* motif may call forth the notion of the uncanny (Freud 2003, 141), the thought of 96 identical human beings is a monstrosity. In a society regulated by the maxim of efficiency, human beings are not born as individuals into the private sphere of a family but into a society where they are physically equipped and psychologically conditioned to fulfil their predetermined role without any qualms. The loss of the family, thus, may mean less emotional turmoil, but

it also goes hand in hand with life trajectories that have been predetermined and deprive the individual of the right to choose freely.

In the alternative world sketched in Nobel Prize Laureate Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go* (2005), families as such still exist, but there is a group within society that is excluded from experiencing family life in the traditional sense: clones, who have been created as infertile beings for the sole purpose of serving as organ donors. The focus on cloning in Ishiguro's dystopian novel certainly responds to the increased interest in this type of artificial reproduction in the wake of the creation of clone sheep Dolly in 1996 and the ongoing debates about the ethics of stem cell research. In *Never Let Me Go*, artificial reproduction means being able to cure previously fatal diseases like cancer by creating a group of human beings who are deemed expendable by the rest of society. The clones' organs are harvested while they are in their twenties or early thirties, which means that their lives are inevitably curtailed by having to serve the needs of others. In this case, a lack of parents and of a family is tantamount to being ruthlessly exploited by society and having no human rights.

In contrast to Huxley's *Brave New World*, *Never Let Me Go* does not dwell on the scientific aspects of artificial reproduction; instead, the novel explores the psychological implications of the role society has determined for the clones. This is achieved by means of granting the readers insight into the thoughts and memories of one of these disenfranchised human beings, the protagonist and first-person narrator Kathy H. She was brought up in Hailsham, an institution that resembles a boarding school in some respects, but that also serves to isolate the clones from society, which means that during her childhood "any place beyond Hailsham was like a fantasy land" (Ishiguro 2010, 66) for Kathy. This isolation appears to be conducive to making the clones accept their fate with surprising calm. Temper tantrums, such as the ones experienced occasionally by Tommy, one of the main characters, which might be read as a sign of rebellion against the clones' predetermined role, are rare and are frowned upon even among the clones. Accepting the fate that society imposes upon them seems to be facilitated by a subtle variation on the more straightforward and aggressive type of psychological conditioning practiced in Huxley's *Brave New World*. The clones appear to be regularly fed (partial) information by their "guardians," i.e., the people in charge of taking care of them, which makes them grow accustomed to a future as "donors." In retrospect, Kathy speculates that "it's possible the guardians managed to smuggle into our heads a lot of the basic facts about our futures" (81), thus in the long run causing the clones to accept their fate without questioning.

While the inhabitants of Huxley's World State do not miss family structures and are in fact horrified by the very thought of fathers and mothers, Ishiguro's clones appear to have a desire to form meaningful family-like relationships. Though the clones have never known ordinary family life, they are still longing for the kind of exclusive and close

emotional bond, the “only love,” that is a taboo in the society of *Brave New World*. This desire is apparent in their friendships, in the way they form couples and in Kathy’s musings about what having a child might mean. She (mis)interprets the lyrics of her favorite song “Never Let Me Go” as portraying a woman’s deep-seated love for her baby, an emotion that Kathy apparently can identify with: “what I’d imagine was a woman who’d been told she couldn’t have babies, who’d really, really wanted them all her life. Then there’s a sort of miracle and she has a baby, and she holds this baby very close to her and walks around singing: ‘Baby, never let me go ...’ partly because she’s so happy, but also because she’s so afraid something will happen” (70). The clones’ search for “possibles,” i.e., humans whose DNA they might share, serves as a reminder of the importance genealogical information generally has for human identity: “we all of us, to varying degrees, believed that when you saw the person you were copied from, you’d get *some* insight into who you were deep down, and maybe too, you’d see something of what your life held in store” (137-38). The intense interest in their guardians, who are invested with a high degree of authority, may be seen as an expression of a search for parent substitutes. Yet, the children’s hope of getting “special” attention by one of the guardians is disappointed. Instead, growing up for them involves becoming aware of the fact that even the guardians are likely to “shudder at the very thought of you – of how you were brought into this world and why – and ... dread the idea of your hand brushing against theirs” (36). Society prefers to ignore the clones, and the guardians, who meet and teach the clones every day, keep their distance and even feel revulsion.

This means that the peer group is the only substitute the clones have to fill the void that the absence of a family (and the prospect of never having one) seems to cause. The clones fall in love, but that experience fails to stir any truly rebellious feelings in them, contrary to the conventions of dystopian fiction, where “[a] sanctioned partner choice often leads to a crucial turning point in the narrative” (Glaubitz 2015, 320) when characters suddenly challenge conditions they hitherto took for granted. Instead of dreaming about spending the rest of their lives together, the clone couples in Ishiguro’s novel at most dare to entertain the hope of getting a “deferral,” which would make it possible for “donations to be put back by three, even four years” (Ishiguro 2010, 150). This extremely modest hope turns out to be based on an illusion, however, which reminds the readers once more that there is no interest in the clones’ happiness on the part of society. Their sole function remains supplying organs for others, and most people are apparently more than eager to forget about the fate of the clones as long as “their own children, their spouses, their parents, their friends, did not die from cancer, motor neurone disease, heart disease” (258). Protecting loved ones, family and friends is important in this dystopian world, and it leaves the clones, who are not part of a kinship network, without any advocates for saving their lives, let alone legal protection. The principle of using the clones as “carers” before they start their own “donations” (and thus rapidly approach their premature death) appears to be situated in between family-like

structures, i.e., the traditional notion of taking care of “aging, sick, dying parents, siblings, or spouses” (Toker and Chertoff 2008, 172), and an official, group-specific infrastructure providing palliative support. At any rate, the system of carers certainly makes it easier for the rest of society to ignore the plight of the clones.

Even though relationships among the clones are shown to be rife with jealousy, rivalry, and misunderstandings, personal bonds are what ultimately provide them with a meaningful existence from their childhood up to the time when they “complete,” i.e., when the harvesting of their organs causes their death. As the narrative of Kathy’s life shows, her relationship with her childhood friends Tommy and Ruth has a lasting impact on her sense of who she is. The novel ends with Kathy mourning the loss of Tommy and getting ready to start her own donations, which are bound to lead to her death in the very near future. This ending, full of sadness, resignation as well as cherished memories of her friends, once more confirms the importance of family-like, lasting emotional bonds for the individual.

The Transformation of the Family in Postapocalyptic Narratives

Cormac McCarthy’s Pulitzer Prize winning novel *The Road* (2006) evokes a postapocalyptic future in which all animal and plant life on the planet has become extinct due to an (unspecified) catastrophe that has left a thick layer of ash and dust on the earth and in the atmosphere. In a world where hardly any food remains and where some humans have even resorted to cannibalism in order to survive, a father and his son, who was born shortly after the apocalyptic event, desperately search for food while making their way south, to the sea. The incredibly bleak scenario of a postapocalyptic America inevitably raises the question of whether survival in such a world is desirable at all. The boy’s mother decided to commit suicide because she could not bear this miserable existence anymore, as a flashback reveals. For the father, however, suicide is unthinkable, since the close emotional bond with his son continues to provide his life with meaning: “the boy was all that stood between him and death” (McCarthy 2007, 29). Every single day, the father does his utmost to live up to the role of provider, protector, and caregiver for his son. Moreover, his interaction with his son is invariably indicative of a profound love for the boy, which consistently shines through their laconic dialogues and which arguably establishes “an intensely uplifting relationship that captivates and transports the reader beyond the charred settings of the novel” (Gilbert 2012, 40). Throughout the novel, the readers witness a high level of mutual attachment between father and son, which results from “the physical presence and emotional availability of the caregiver” (Huff, Stamper and Kelly 2016, 325), from the father “listening carefully and watching for emotional cues that may necessitate a response” (326) and the emotional consistency characteristic of their communication (326). The nurturing relationship between father

and son, who are “each the other’s world entire” (McCarthy 2007, 6), creates a stark contrast to the brutal daily struggle for survival. To a certain extent, the postapocalyptic narrative of *The Road* even reiterates domestic ideals celebrated in the nineteenth century, which involved parents who are “devoted to the moral and/or spiritual well-being of their offspring, [...] ever-present and ever-mindful of their duties” (Thiel 2008, 5).

An idealized notion of the family is also briefly conjured up when father and son visit places that the father remembers from his own childhood. In what used to be his home, he tries to reconnect with a world of ordinary family life that is lost forever: “He stood there. He felt with his thumb in the painted wood of the mantle the pinholes from tacks that had held stockings forty years ago. This is where we used to have Christmas when I was a boy. ... On cold winter nights when the electricity was out in a storm we would sit at the fire here, me and my sisters, doing our homework” (McCarthy 2007, 26). The father’s longing for a lost world in this scene revolves around Christmas, perhaps the most family-centered holiday in the year, and evokes an idyll that would not be out of place in a nineteenth-century domestic novel such as Louisa May Alcott’s classic *Little Women* (1869), which idealizes the family and its meaning for the individual. The allusions to family life before the apocalypse in *The Road* serve as a shorthand for an entire world that is lost, which arguably is one of the basic functions of references to the family in postapocalyptic narratives.

While the father’s demeanor emulates traditional notions of parenting, the portrayal of the boy has been associated with another old motif, which is apparent in “the literary tradition of legends about saintly children” (Hollm 2015, 386). In a world that seems to be apt to call forth the survival instinct in everyone, the boy is unwaveringly altruistic, eager to help strangers they meet during their journey and willing to share what little food they have, even if this means putting his own life at risk. This type of innocent, unprejudiced, and compassionate child, whose miraculous incorruptibility appears to hark back to nineteenth-century literary figures such as Charles Dickens’ Oliver Twist, seems to emerge as a potent trope in recent postapocalyptic narratives. Another case in point is the little mute girl Nova in *War for the Planet of the Apes* (2017). The genuine goodness of the boy in *The Road* or Nova in *War for the Planet of the Apes* seems to hold the promise that there is hope for a better future yet. Hope does not only reside in these saint-like children, however, but also in the survival of the family as a social unit offering protection and nurture. Postapocalyptic families are not necessarily based on biology, though, but on caring for each other. Nova is “adopted” by the tribe of apes, and the boy in *The Road* finds a new family immediately after his father’s death. Somewhat surprisingly, this family corresponds exactly to the traditional “‘natural’ and ‘complete’ family of husband, wife and children” (Thiel 2008, 8) and is ready to take care of yet another child. This *deus ex machina* ending, which appears to reward the boy’s inherent

goodness, clearly bears religious connotations: “She [the boy’s new ‘mother’] 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 time” (McCarthy 2007, 286). The obvious religious tenor of the ending also suggests that the strong belief in the survival of the traditional family rests upon Christian notions of the sanctity of the family.

Over the course of its seasons, the AMC series *The Walking Dead* (2010–), which is based on the eponymous comic series by Robert Kirkman and Tony Moore, has presented a wide range of different constellations that explore potential meanings of the family in a postapocalyptic world. The series shows how several groups of survivors struggle with the threat caused by zombie hordes, who can only be defeated by shooting or stabbing them in the brain, as well as by ruthless groups of (human) raiders. All of the survivors have had to cope with the loss of family members at some point or other. In the postapocalyptic world of *The Walking Dead*, in which everyone who dies turns into a “Walker” due to a virus all people have been infected with, children are generally particularly vulnerable – due to their lack of physical strength and experience as well as in terms of the psychological impact the postapocalyptic environment has on them. The death of children and, perhaps even more, the need to shoot zombie children serves to stress the horrors of the postapocalyptic situation. In fact, the very first zombie viewers get to see in the pilot episode (“Days Gone Bye”) is a little girl who is horribly disfigured and who is eventually shot in the head by deputy sheriff Rick Grimes, one of the series’ protagonists. In season 2, the girl Sophia goes missing and only reappears several episodes later (in “Pretty Much Dead Already”) as part of a zombie horde; she eventually has to be killed by the very people who wanted to rescue her (including her mother). The psychological consequences of the aftermath of the apocalypse for children may be equally disturbing. From seasons 1 to 8, the viewers watch Carl Grimes, who was 12 when the zombie apocalypse began, grow up in a brutal struggle for survival, which turns him more and more into “a product of the new world rather than of the old” (Tenga and Bassett 2016, 1293). One of the things Carl is forced to do apart from killing numerous Walkers is shooting his own mother when the latter is about to turn into a zombie. While Carl follows the example set by his father Rick and turns into a fighter, whose demeanor is hardly childlike in the traditional sense, the fate of a girl called Lizzie depicted in season 4 could be read as a distorted version of the trope of the saint-like, unprejudiced, and compassionate child discussed above. Lizzie is convinced that zombies are “just different” and can even be harmless playfellows. She tries to prove this by killing her sister Mika. Like the children who turn into zombies, Lizzie, who has become a different kind of monster, is killed by one of the adult survivors for her transgression. In the postapocalyptic world of *The Walking Dead*, where childhood has been deprived of innocence and where children regularly turn into monsters, “parenting” apparently includes being prepared to kill children who threaten the survival of others – a development that radically contradicts traditional notions of the family.

To do otherwise in the future of *The Walking Dead* is madness, however, as the example of the “Governor” illustrates. The group’s main antagonist in season 3 refuses to let go of his little daughter Penny, who has turned into a Walker, but whom he still keeps hidden inside his house. This highly disturbing father-daughter relationship is introduced at the beginning of the episode “Say the Word.” Here, the camera shows the Governor brushing the hair of his little daughter lovingly. It is only when a piece of her scalp comes off and the girl starts to snarl and struggle that the viewers realize that her body is already decaying. The Governor tries to control her by means of a straitjacket, by putting a sack over her head, and keeping her chained most of the time. This perverted image of fatherly affection serves to stress the madness of the character, but it is also a reminder of the normality that is gone. When the camera zooms in on a photograph showing the Governor, his wife, and their daughter before the apocalypse at the end of the previous episode (“Killer Within”), the shot alludes to the loss many of the characters have experienced.

Still, the series refrains from simply idealizing the world before the apocalypse. This is made particularly clear by depicting deeply flawed, dysfunctional families. A case in point is Carol, who is introduced as a wife struggling to protect her daughter Sophia from being abused by her husband. After the husband was mauled to death by zombies, the way Carol hits him in the head with an axe suggests that she is not only trying to prevent him from returning as a Walker, but is also venting her bottled-up hatred. By showing scenes like this one, the series departs from one of the widespread tropes of (post)apocalyptic fiction, i.e., the idea that an apocalypse reunites even estranged family members, which informs, for instance, the movie *Deep Impact* (1998), which revolves around a comet threatening to destroy all life on earth.

Though *The Walking Dead* on the whole does not endorse the idea that the traditional nuclear family is likely to survive in a postapocalyptic future, it “depicts a return to a kind of tribalism” (Tenga and Bassett 2016, 1290) that provides room for the emergence of a new type of family, which is not based on biological kinship, but on shared experience and proven loyalty. At the end of the finale of season 7, the voiceover of Maggie, one of the main characters, recapitulates the journey of the survivors and recalls the origins of the group in Atlanta when Glenn, the father of Maggie’s child, who was killed at the end of season 6, came to Rick’s help:

Glenn didn’t know you, but he helped you. He put himself in danger for you. And that started it all, from Atlanta to my Daddy’s farm to the prison to here ... Not as strangers, *as family*. Because Glenn chose to be there for you that day a long time ago. That was the decision that changed everything. It started with both of you, and then it just grew. All of us. To sacrifice for each other. To suffer. To stand. To grieve. To give. To love. To live. To fight for each other. (“The First Day of the Rest of Your Life”; emphasis added)

What highlights this speech is its position at the end of a season, the fact that voiceovers are a relatively uncommon feature in *The Walking Dead*, and the calm and melancholic non-diegetic music accompanying the voiceover. Maggie's assessment of the current situation stresses the importance of a new type of family, a community of belonging that is held together by common suffering and solidarity.

Conclusion

References to families are virtually omnipresent in both dystopian and postapocalyptic narratives. Even the videogames *Fallout 3* (2008) and *Fallout 4* (2015), which are set after a nuclear apocalypse, use the player-character's search for family members as initial motivation for the main storyline. The loss of family members often serves to highlight the emotional and psychological implications of the radically altered circumstances and, more generally, the lack of "normality" in the new world. Some dystopian narratives imagine radical alternatives to the traditional nuclear family. To a certain extent, Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* (2009) follows in the footsteps of Huxley: The novel features a world where humankind has been all but wiped out by a virus developed by a scientist who wanted to replace a decadent society and highly dysfunctional families by a new, peaceful species that is no longer hampered by "unrequited love" and "thwarted lust" (Atwood 2013, 194) and for which it "no longer matters who the father of the ... child may be, since there's no more property to inherit, no father-son loyalty required for war" (195). Quite often, however, dystopian and postapocalyptic narratives confirm the significance of the family for the individual by depicting the emergence of new types of families, by showing nuclear families coming closer together and characters who are prepared to sacrifice their lives for family members. This tendency is, for instance, apparent in a number of young adult dystopian novels, such as Suzanne Collins' *The Hunger Games* trilogy (2008-10) and Veronica Roth's *Divergent*, where the parents of protagonist Tris sacrifice themselves to save their daughter. Elizabeth Thiel (2008) claims that the idealization of the family in Victorian Britain derived from a desire "to create a sense of permanence and stability in a country beset by social anxieties" (2). A similar claim could presumably be made for the depiction of the family in contemporary British and American dystopian and postapocalyptic narratives: For individuals exposed to horrifying situations (just as for readers and viewers in a world threatened by wars, economic crises, and ecological disasters), the family may be an anchor, offering something worth surviving and/or fighting for, which goes a long way towards explaining the omnipresence of families in stories about the end of the world as we know it.

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