

A Post-apocalyptic Playlist

[*Big iron but the song overlaps at every chorus*](#) - Marty Robbins edited by Jachuib

The structure of the post apocalypse is a concept that McCarthy dotes on through the pages of *The Road*, highlighting the repetitive, consistent pain of survival in the worst of times.

The first hundred pages of Cormack McCarthy's *The Road* build the beginnings of a slowly developing and repetitive plot. The lack of a plot repeats itself relentlessly like the chorus of *Big Iron*, adding meaning by compounding the same point onto itself. Against this backdrop, the plot progresses subtly under the consistent presence of cold and dark and gray. The setting and tone of *The Road* and *Big Iron* are constants, so the varied plot points are very hard to pick out or care about in the slightest because—without of the learned emotional context we carry into the book—freezing under a bridge, shooting someone in the head, and the end of the world, are written with the same emotional weight.

It all blends together, and it is art, and it is on purpose; the repetition contributes to the intended and unintended meanings in this book and this song. These are all things I'm aware of. These are things that make the structure of a rendition of *Big Iron* in which the song repeats and overlaps at the start of each and every chorus is so similar to the structure of *The Road*.

[*Gone But Not Forgotten*](#) - Hank Williams III

A disclaimer:

Hank III often uses Confederate imagery in his art as a symbol for rebellion and his heritage. There is an element of "Southern Pride" and the racist and queer-phobic undertones intertwined in even the most well meaning celebrations of white Southern heritage.

Actual Analysis:

Hank Williams III's song, *Gone But Not Forgotten* is about wandering through the present with a foot still stuck in the past. The man in *The Road* is experiencing the same conflict as he begrudgingly carries memories of the past into a time when they do more harm than good in his quest to give his son a good life. Being a living thing that remembers the past implies the existence of a future. Without a was, there can never be a will be. Despite the man's feeling that memories of a better past only inhibit his pragmatic strategies for survival, without them he would have no hope and would already be dead in the expansive meaningless sea of the present. That is what his wife was referring to when she said "We're not survivors. We're the walking dead," on page 55. To be a survivor there has to be a future state where you *have* survived. The walking dead only are. By living in the present, dropping the past, and with it the future, a person is already dead. The wife does think about the future, but only in the context of the world as it is.

The inevitability of a horrible death at the hands of cannibals isn't a future threat, it's the current reality that isn't ever going to change.

[Island Song](#) - Ashley Eriksson

A song about pleasant friendship in the present and future. This song aligns with the vision of the future that the boy's youth represents. He is empathetic and willing to share for the sake of others because he sees the warmth of approaching summer in them. He can't see the future himself because of the lingering vagueness of the past to him, but he is his father's view into the future. Without the boy, there is nothing to ground the man in the future. The man stretches out into the future to pull himself forward. He's seen warmth before and knows it can be seen again.

[I Want To Die In A War ♪](#) - Jreg "You say you'll die for us. What good is that?"

Death approaches, so why not live for it? It can be something to live for that doesn't have to be chased. It gives meaning to everything else by giving it all an end, an anchor to be measured off of. The man in *The Road* keeps living so that he can die for his son if it comes down to it. He doesn't want to live in the world as it is but he also can't stand to die in it. He can't get out of the hell that was built around him on his own, because he holds onto the past and future. The smallest piece of hope that tethers him to life, which he cannot snuff out on his own. The man lives and will die for the boy and the future that lives in him. Similarly the character in this song seeks death as an escape from the mundane tortures of slowly dying nationalist capitalism in the only internally acceptable way he sees.

[Dark is the Night - Soviet WW2 Song](#)

This song is sad and hopeless. Russian songs from World War Two work well with *The Road*, as the soldiers who wrote them and lived the experience behind them were often cold, miserable, and uncertain if there was any future for them. The night is dark, but the stars shine through: The world is dead but the boy lives, so maybe there is something to work for after all.