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Politics of Apocalyptic Vision in Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*

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Letter of Recommendation

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Letter of Approval

This thesis entitled “Politics of Apocalyptic Vision in Cormac McCarthy’s *The Road*” submitted to the Central Department of English, Tribhuvan University, by Prakash Pant has been approved by the undersigned members of the Research Committee.

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Abstract

This thesis examines and analyzes human-nature relation in Cormac McCarthy's The Road (2006) and argues that the author intends to highlight the survival crisis of human beings through the apocalyptic portrayal of the world the characters live in. Such apocalyptic projection of the environment employed as a strategy for raising environmental awareness to carry out environmental friendly actions to mitigate the possible crisis. An imaginative sum up of the future life of the earth in novel makes each individual have a deep thought on significance of environment on its genuine ground and underpinning of this fact would no longer support the life of creatures. In the novel the major characters father and son are unable to escape the nature and are on consistent move observing the destroyed environmental situations of which both of them are the victims. This thesis analyses the novel using ecocriticism as a theoretical tool basically taking the idea of Lawrence Buell and Arthur Schopenhauer in order to make the research authentic and reliable.

Politics of Apocalyptic Vision in Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*

This thesis examines and analyzes the issue of human-nature relationship particularly, an absolute dependency of human to nature in Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* (2006). The sustainability of race is solely dependent on nature which if goes wrong can bring the whole survival into crisis. The same situation has been depicted in the novel where major characters, son and father, have been suffering due to the dilapidated natural conditions. The novel is an effort to persuade humans to take right initiatives in order to avert the possible hazards that would be caused due to the damage of environmental components.

This thesis primarily tries to investigate the reason why the novel uses apocalyptic vision to present human-nature relationship. It shows the bleak picture of the world that has been resulted due to unfriendly and irrational misconducts of human beings. It depicts the image of a deterred, barren land, in which the few survivors of a suggested cataclysmic natural disaster struggle to survive. In this literary work, nature is presented as the setting that is representing ecological changes resulting miseries on earth. The world which is the foundation of all creatures is not convenient when it is being rapidly and unwisely devastated.

The novel taps directly into a set of concerns those, in a time of climate change, have imperceptibly crept the whole world into a struggle against the consequences resulted due to the damage into the components of the nature. What makes *The Road* an expression of human experience in an era of desperate damage to the nonhuman environment? On motion to the same, the novel projects the bleak

picture of post apocalyptic world. McCarthy shows the hardships and sufferings of the major characters; the father and the son in the novel. Despite their tough struggle, they are found to have failed to reach to their destination successfully. The father has died on the way. In this regard, what are the major obstacles those the characters have faced and what could be the reasons of suffering and hardships in their journey? And above all, what would be the politics of McCarthy behind the projection of the environmental apocalypse in the novel? The present research centers on those issues.

This thesis aims to probe the politics of McCarthy projecting an apocalyptic situation in the novel and to illustrate the need of inter connectedness of human beings to nature. In the absence of sound ecological balance, human beings have a threat of their own existence. Human exploits nature for so called advancement and economic prosperity but in turn, the environmental degradation makes human survival harsh and impossible. The suffering and hardship of the major characters in the novel is the repercussion of ecological imbalance. The end of the world and the civilization is the outcome of human clash with nature and the overexploitation of natural resources. And McCarthy's projection of the environmental apocalypse is to warn about the possible crisis that may occur due to human insensitivity to nature. He warns the human beings that such apocalypse is not too far from us and there could be any form of catastrophe in the world if the irrational human behaviors are not checked.

Through the journey of unnamed father and son and their quest to reach the coast some years after an unspecified catastrophe, the writer vividly projects the destruction of nature and its consequences. They set off to the southern part. The landscapes they pass through are grey and dead; everything is covered with a fine falling ash. They scavenge what they can from the ruins of the towns and cities, carrying their little possessions in knapsacks and a grocery cart. The father

continually revives the rites he believes once brought beauty and grace to the world. He ruminates on the loss of the world and the humanity he once shared. They eventually reach the sea, but it is more of the same: grey, desolate and lifeless. They stay near the beach after finding supplies on a beached boat, but the man's condition worsens and he begins coughing of blood. They move on to try to find respite from the encroaching winter, but the man is shot through the leg with an arrow during an incident. Wounded and weakened by his respiratory ailment, he can eventually go no further and urges the boy to continue on before dying. The boy grieves over him, but has no idea where to go or what to do without his father.

Cormac McCarthy's inspiration to write *The Road* came from when he and his son went on a vacation to Texas. In an interview, he states that "while his son was sleeping, he stood and looked out the window at this town...[he] could hear the trains going through and that very lonesome sound...and he had an image of what town would look like in fifty of a hundred years"(qtd. in Winfrey in interview). McCarthy affirms that he has imagined him and his little boy while he is thinking of the hills burning. McCarthy is basically telling the story of *The Road* imagining the two main characters are himself and his little son.

McCarthy's *The Road* has received several critical appraisals as it has been a subject of fascination for readers and critics since its publication. *The Times* has ranked the novel on its list of the hundred best fiction and non-fiction books of the last ten years. The author has been increasingly mentioned as a candidate for the Nobel Prize for Literature. Many critics and reviewers have interpreted this work from various angles.

Alan Warner observes the trust and parental bonding between the man and the boy in the abandoning circumstances by emphasizing on the existential setting:

The Road is a novel of transforming power and formal risk.

Abandoning gruff but profound male camaraderie, McCarthy instead sounds the limits of imaginable love and despair between a diligent father and his timid young son, “each other’s world entire”. The initial experience of the novel is sobering and oppressive; its final effect is emotionally shattering. (4)

Warner claims that the man has shown his parental love diligence to his son in the adversity. He talks of emotional attributes in the apocalyptic world though the initial experience is something harsh.

Ron Charles states that McCarthy’s work has given a new drive to the Western novels depicting existential features such as bloodbath, violence and apocalypse in his work:

In Cormac McCarthy's new novel, *The Road*, the bloodbath is finally complete. The violence that animated his great Western novels has been superseded by a flash of nuclear annihilation, which also blasts away some of what we expect from the reclusive author’s work. With this apocalyptic tale, McCarthy has moved into the allegorical realm of Samuel Beckett and José Saramago and, weirdly, George Romero. (1)

Charles contrasts the work of McCarthy with the work of Samuel Beckett and José Saramago. Like Saramago’s writing style, he also writes the entire conversation in one long sentence. This style is effective in telling a story orally. Charles claims that McCarthy has talked about the history and tradition of Western literature related to apocalypse.

The devastation of environment caused by human beings is reflected in McCarthy's *The Road*. Tim Edwards suggests, "The Road offers ... the nature with its

grey, cold and lifeless post-apocalyptic world" (2). The gloomy world portrayed by him shows how human beings have exploited nature and made the beautiful world a real hell. Human greed for prosperity has deteriorated the environment. They think they are the masters of the nature and they certainly have the rights to do anything they want to satisfy their desires. In order to gain more resources and interests, people do not hesitate to exploit and damage the environment. They unlimitedly plunder and break the balance of the nature.

McCarthy's *The Road* reflects much more of an ecological aspect, engaging in the failing survival of not only humankind but also of nature. It narrates the journey of a father and a son in a post-apocalyptic decimated world, bereft of natural life and regeneration. The ambiguous ending of the novel refuses the readers' expectations to be reassured and gives the impression that once the nature is destroyed there is no turning back or a regeneration process. Dominic Head argues that "novel's tendency to focus on the social, which has been increasingly concentrated on urban spaces, creates a disjunction with and alienation from nature, ... one that calls for the imagination and discussion of environmental problems" (236). It portrays very darker aspects of environmental crisis. It successfully evokes a post-natural world in which no living entity will be able to survive for long. Instead of giving pastoral details, the natural world of the novel gives the impression of a wasted country filled with dead trees falling, ashes blowing in the wind. All the living things in nature have died; manmade creations such as buildings, billboards, supermarkets, oil stations, roadside billboards and most importantly the road itself seem eerily unharmed by the catastrophe, continuing to exist even though there is hardly anyone to utilize them.

The picture McCarthy presents us about the future is a horrid yet a cautionary one. It seems apparent that if the modification of nature and the recklessness of the

humankind continue at this rate, there will be hardly anyone of us left in the future to utilize our creations that we worship. Brian Donnelly suggests that " the presence of the country's state roads reaching in total four million miles appears as an endless, horizontal monument to the techniques and hubris of the twentieth century" in *The Road* (18). It is all due to human greed for materialistic gain and prosperity for which they rape and loot the nature.

Our complete dependency to biology and nature becomes even more pronounced in their journey on the road and in the cities the duo pass in hopes of finding food, since the novel shows that for all their grandiosity, the centers of human civilization cannot provide enough for the survival of the species. Ben de Bruyn suggests that "by rendering culture and nature devastated in the novel McCarthy asks us to imagine how the human world would be affected by this change of balance" (781). The world is shrinking down. The old world as much as the father does, the father's efforts to protect his memories of it seem even more poignant and hopeless. Without nature to support life, human civilization seems impossible.

In *The Road*, McCarthy describes natural world of a post-apocalyptic one that does not seem to have the total ability of regeneration. The picture McCarthy presents is horrible. McCarthy appeals us environmental imagination and asks us to imagine a world that no longer supports survival of any species. By doing so he seems to imply that we are not as far away from nature as we think we are, our dependency on nature has never been and never will be optional. Triggering a sense of guilt or consciousness in the reader, *The Road* adopts a pre-emptive attitude about the environmental problems, one that utilizes environmental imagination and post-apocalyptic narrative to its fullest. It makes it clear that in this world, without the nature, survival is a hopeless dream. *The Road* does not offer any hope but just plays

on the concept of it in order to make us realize how hopeless the situation is. As Michael Chabon suggests, “Although we worry about the duo and root for their cause of reaching the South, we realize that the overall purpose of their journey that is to survive is nevertheless an illusion, one that cannot be sustained considering the present situation of the nature in the novel” (11).

By playing with our passion for survival and showing hollowness of the hope in a post-apocalyptic world, McCarthy tells us a precautionary tale about environment.

In this way, numerous critics have viewed *The Road* from their own ways basically being based on the importance of ecology, existentialism, father-son relation etc. But none of them have touched the topic of the reasons of McCarthy behind projecting apocalyptic vision in the text. Therefore, the present researcher deals with how McCarthy has imagined apocalypse in the novel and the reasons of projecting so.

Since prehistory, literature and the arts have been drawn to portrayal of physical environments and human-environment interactions. This inane fact that during the last few decades, the environment issues have become major concerns as public tends to believe that catastrophes will take place by unintended environmental disaster caused by human beings. The productions of poisonous gases, use of harmful chemicals and overexploitation of natural resources have caused so many ecological problems. Indiscriminate deforestation is common in many parts of the world which cause global warming and climate changing. So, it has burgeoned and public starts to concern about fate of the environment worldwide. The changes in environment in turn cause so many catastrophes. So, the environment is becoming an increasingly significant public concern and a major topic of research.

Arthur Schopenhauer in his essay “On the Will in Nature” argues, “Everything is entirely in nature and nature is entire in everything. She has centre in every

creature. It has surely found its way to existence, and it will surely find its way out of it” (397). This assertion embraces the notion that nothing in the world can be outside of the nature and furthermore, nature does not have its isolated existence. Every biotic and abiotic component prevalent in nature have close connection to each other. In the absence of even one factor, the whole ecosystem comes to be halted for the smooth running. To highlight this relationship Barry Commoner writes, “Everything is connected to everything else” (33) on this earth. He explains, “It reflects the existence of the elaborate network of interconnection in the ecosphere: among different living organisms and between populations, species and individual organisms and their psycho-chemical surrounding” (33). This interconnected ecological conception takes the entire earth as an organism, where one thing, either livings or non- livings, is closely connected with the other in some overt and covert way.

Similarly, Lawrence Buell, in *Environmental Imagination* defines ecocriticism as “a study of the relationship between literature and the environment conducted in a spirit of commitment to environmentalist praxis” (20). Buell, furthermore states that “creating images of doom to avert doom could play an important part in evoking a sense of environmental consciousness”(295). It is the strategy of ecocritics to project the devastated situation of the world. In fact, through such bleak picture, they want to avert the possible doom in the future. Environmental consciousness to the human is the prime concern of them.

Regarding apocalyptic vision, Buell states that “so far I have identified four modes of perception that can subserve environmental apocalyptic ends: interrelatedness, biotic egalitarianism, magnification, conflation. Yet these would not interact to that end without an addition ingredient, the sense of imminent environmental peril” (305). For Buell, apocalyptic imagination is the most powerful

master metaphor and, he has envisioned the five modes of perception that help to promote environmental apocalyptic ends. Here, interrelatedness means all the components of environment is interconnected to each other. Similarly, the term biotic egalitarian refers the equal condition or status of all the components in environment. By the term magnification, he means to say the act of making something look larger than it actually is. Conflation is also the next perception that means to combine or associate of living beings in environment in order to bring harmonious effects. He also puts forward the perception of imminent of environmental peril. He advocates the possible danger in nature soon.

Ecocriticism is a response to the need of for humanistic understanding for our relationship with the natural world in an age of environmental destruction. In large part, environmental crisis is a result of humanities' disconnectedness from the natural world, brought about not only by increasing technology but also by particularization that fails to understand the interconnectedness among living and even non-living things.

On the one hand ecocriticism looks at how text represents the physical world on the other hand, more importantly, it examines at how literature raises moral questions about human interaction with the nature. Most ecocritical works shares a common motivation: the awareness that we have reached the age of environmental limit, a time when the consequences of human actions are damaging the planet's basic life system. This awareness sparks a sincere desire to contribute environmental restoration. So, ecologically-focused criticism is a worthy practice to improve the degrading condition of the modern world. It ultimately helps to direct attention to the conservation of environment.

Cormac McCarthy's novel *The Road* is a post-apocalyptic narrative in which death, desolation and horror are so overwhelming, and hope and beauty are sparse. The major characters the father and the son are unnamed, and they set off to the southern coast in order to find better place for their survival. The father belongs to the old world where as the son is in the post apocalyptic world. They try to reach in their unspecified destination. On the way, they face numerous challenges. The world described in the novel is extremely bleak, and the events witnessed are nothing but a series of hardships. *The Road* is a novel without nature. The green trees are turned to be gray, dead and leafless trees as they have lost their aesthetic beauty; they are a denatured environment in a narrative driven by a focus upon the survival of the human protagonists. It can be proved via the given lines:

They set out through the dark woods. There was a moon somewhere beyond the ashen overcast and they could just make out the trees. They staggered on like drunks. If they find us they'll kill us, wont they Papa. Shh. No Talking. Won't they papa. (122)

In a sense, it is only in the current social conditions, which foreground environmental concerns that McCarthy can assume the reader will not only notice the absence of Nature, but will be shocked by its absence.

In *The Road*, separation is largely created by the presentation of a world in which the physical environment has been transformed by mass destruction. The setting is strongly characterized by the silence and the void left by the absence of life; the country is characterized by the narration as "Barren, silent, godless" (2). It is reiterated throughout the novel that there is "No sign of life" (20). This sense of nothingness is heightened by the pared down, minimalist style and diction of the text;

the narrative is built of fragments and short sentences, monosyllabic words, and repetitions. The father looks at the landscape lying before them and tries to discern the presence of life, but there is almost nothing to see besides dead trees. The following paragraph illustrates regarding it;

Everything paling away into the murk. The soft ash blowing in the loose swirls over the blacktop. He studied what he could see. The segments of road down there among the dead trees. Looking for anything of color. Any movement. Any trace of standing smoke. He lowered the glasses and pulled down the cotton mask from his face and wipe his nose on the back of his wrist and then glassed the country again.(3)

But there is no color and it is repeated several times throughout the novel that there is no movement, “nothing moved in that high world” (31). There are “no tracks in the road, nothing living anywhere” (29). The absence of tracks on the snow and ash-covered ground is also mentioned frequently: the country is “dark and black and trackless” (215). These recurring references to the absence of ‘tracks’ stress the fact that both humans and animals are almost all gone or dead. In fact, the absence of animals, their implied extinction, is particularly underlined throughout the narrative. For example, when the father mentions crows, his son then asks:

There’s not any crows. Are there?

No.

Just in books.

Yes. Just in books. (168)

In this bleak world, animals only exist in books and in the memory of those old enough to remember the old world. At various points in the narrative, the father

remembers birds and fish, he recalls going fishing in his childhood, and many years later seeing the last flocks of birds fleeing in the weeks following the apocalyptic events, but the boy is too young to have such memories and may never see a fish or a bird in his lifetime. Fauna is thus represented as absent from the narrative's post-apocalyptic world, as extinct, and therefore as belonging to the past.

It can be connected with the notion of Arthur Schopenhauer, who argues that everything is entirely in Nature and Nature is entire in everything. Animals, birds, sea animals are the part of nature and when nature gets destroyed they too have survival crisis in nature. In this sense, nature is the central of all organisms.

Most of the time, the principal characters are on the road dead woods surround them, or they hide and camp in what is left of the 'woods'. Therefore, a lot of the descriptions of landscape are of the road and the surrounding dead forests: "Charred and limbless trunks of trees stretching away on every side. Ash moving over the road and the sagging hands of blind wire strung from the blackened light poles whining thinly in the wind" (6). Wherever they go, devastation is omnipresent. Everything is in ruins and dead trees are a constant in these descriptions:

They'd begun to come upon dead windfalls of pine trees, great swaths of ruin cut through the countryside. The wreckage of buildings strewn over the landscape and skeins of wire from the roadside poles garbled like knitting. The road was littered with debris and it was work to get the cart through. (293)

If we find the characters mostly in the woods, the countryside, or walking along some countryside road, as they get towards the end of their journey they nevertheless briefly glimpse "the mud stained shapes of flooded cities burned to the waterline" (179). The father and his son enter a city area on only one occasion and it is described as "mostly

burned”; there are “cars in the street caked with ash, everything covered with ash and dust. Fossil tracks in the dried sludge. A corpse in a doorway dried to leather” (11). The physical world is relentlessly characterized by death and devastation. There are numerous mentions of “the mummied dead everywhere” and “the bones of dead creatures” (189), while great emphasis is put upon the dead trees and the dead flora. References to “the barren woodland” (14) abound: “... everything dead to the root along the barren bottomlands”; “[o]n the hillsides old crops dead and flattened. The barren ridgeline trees raw and black in the rain” (20). Arriving at the top of a hill the father sees “Burnt forests for miles along the slopes” (29).

Indeed, everything is dark in the world of *The Road*. It is “a colorless world” (123) in which the nights are of a “starless dark”: “Nights dark beyond darkness and the days more gray each one than what had gone before. Like the onset of some cold glaucoma dimming away the world” (1). That it is not a temporary situation is implied frequently. For instance, it is repeated throughout the book that the sun and the moon cannot be seen anymore because of a dark and thick overcast, leaving the earth in unusual cold and darkness: “Dark of the invisible moon. The nights now only slightly less black. By day the banished sun circles the earth like a grieving mother with a lamp” (32).

Again, the physical world is largely portrayed in terms of what is missing from it: the sun, daylight, and colors. Indeed, contributing to the overall darkness that dominates the physical world of the narrative is the absence of color and what can be identified as another image motif, the color gray. As the following examples show, the physical world is now invariably gray: “the days more gray each one than what had gone before”, “the gray light” (28), “the still gray serpentine of a river” (4), the long gray dusks, the long gray dawns” (6), “the gray country and the gray sky” (218),

“small gray ice” (18), “the graying landscape” (103), and as they finally arrive at their destination of the ocean all they find is “the flat gray coast” (290), and “the gray sea” (295). Even the snow turns gray as soon as it settles on the ground: “The new snow lay in skifts all through the woods, along the limbs and cupped in the leaves, all of it already gray with ash” (79). These are just a few examples, but the color “gray” can be found on almost every page to characterize nearly everything that is described.

One of the reasons why everything is gray is indeed because of the overwhelming presence of ash in the air and in the water; there is so much “dust and ash everywhere” (5) that the man and the boy have to wear masks to filter the air they breathe as much as possible. References to “the ashen overcast” (107) and “the eternal ash” (84) emphasize its overpowering presence. It dominates the whole environment, be it “...the ashen daylight” (3) or “the ashen scabland” (14). It is in the water and by the roadside: “The wet gray flakes twisting and falling out of nothing. Gray slush by the roadside. Black water running from under the sodden drifts of ash” (15). The water and the snow turn black as the ash keeps falling from the sky and swirling in the air, darkening everything: “The ash fell on the snow till it was all but black” (33).

In McCarthy’s *The Road*, the world as we know it has ended and all of nature is dead. Apart from time, the surroundings in which the father and his son travel are marked with neglect and illustrate a dead and decaying world: “Charred and limbless trunks of trees [...] blackened light poles, [...] a burned house, [...] abandoned road works, [...] billboards advertising motels. Everything as it once had been save faded and weathered” (6). The world offers no sign of recovery; there are no means of rebuilding: “The ashes of the late world carried on the bleak and temporal winds to and fro in the void. Carried forth and scattered and carried forth again. Everything uncoupled from its shoring” (10). McCarthy has drawn an overt and irrevocable

damages caused by human activities on environment. There is an implied warning in the novel that, if acted upon blindly, has potentially horrible and terrifying consequences. As in modern life economic considerations typically take precedence over environmental considerations, perhaps this exegesis would be best initiated with a look at the socioeconomic mechanisms at work in McCarthy's post-apocalyptic vision. It explores how human being rape and destroy the mother earth for momentary gain and materialistic prosperity.

The mummied dead everywhere. The flesh cloven along the bones, the ligaments dried to tug and taut as wires. Shriveled and drawn like latter day bog folk, their faces of boiled sheeting, the yellowed paling of their teeth. They were discalced to a man like pilgrims of some common order for all their shoes were long since stolen. (23)

The apocalyptic setting highlights the social malfunction and crisis in humanity. Emily Lane observes the apocalyptic setting in the novel that epitomizes the social defunct and crisis in the human nature. Highlighting the dark aspects of society and the human behavior, she asserts, "McCarthy represents society in crisis mode. Readers glimpse the darkest corners of human nature, such as selfishness and violence, as well as the darkest social practices, such as slavery and gangs, that bubble to the surface in *The Road's* post-apocalyptic scenario" (2). The apocalypse marks the degradation of human nature and the society by promoting slavery and cannibalism.

Projection of apocalyptic environment plays a pivotal role in man's life to showcase his mental strength. The father and his son are forced to struggle in the devastation. Despite the adversity he does not get distressed and lose hope. In contrast, the father takes adversity as an opportunity to assert his existence. With the encounter of catastrophe, he does not get bogged down. He feels his fatherhood is

under question, so he performs every activity just to protect his son. In the novel, the man personifies his fatherhood while the apocalyptic setting acts as a catalyst to surface out his actual character. Had not the apocalypse been in the story line, the father's heroism would have been subdued with the worldly responsibilities. Thus, apocalypse is in fact the soul of the novel.

The principal characters, the boy and his father undergo with different hardships and sufferings in the post apocalyptic world. They become both physically and psychologically feeble in the course of their journey. When they move on, they see the land is completely barren, no trees at all, everything is covered with ash. As they keep on moving, the problems become more intense. They do not get proper food, shelter, and no clothing in the time of cold. They search for fire but they cannot manage in the initial stage. "cold to crack the stones" (13), "dry and almost tasteless"(127) etc. clearly show that they are facing different physical challenges. At the same time, they also notice a group just like them as they are on the road that possesses a threat for father and son.

They could hear the diesel engine out on the road, running on God knows what. When he raised up to look he could just see the top of the truck moving along the road. Men standing in the stakebed, some of them holding rifles. The truck passed on and the black diesel smoke coiled through the woods. The motor sounded ropy. Missing and puttering. Then it quit. (64)

It shows that one of the challenges for them therefore comes from another human. As the nature has totally been destroyed, no option was left for them to survive except practicing cannibalism. Similarly, the psychological danger that they face is despair and alienation. Though together, they feel that they are lonely. It is because of the

destruction of the natural components. Human beings totally rely on nature in life. But when the nature gets destroyed, human beings too lose comforts, enjoyments, and become lonely.

The environmental apocalypse has been imagined in the novel with the purpose of giving warning that such type of catastrophe is not too far in the near future if irrational behaviours of human towards nature remain the same. It can be said with the reference of major characters, the father and son. They undergo different complex situation in the apocalypse world. The sole purpose of projecting the apocalypse and hardships of the major characters is merely to inform about the possible devastation in the world. In the conversation with Ely, the father says that “people were always getting ready for tomorrow. I didn’t believe in that. Tomorrow wasn’t getting ready for them. It didn’t even know they were there”(179).It means to say that people should be ready for the future to face any sorts of challenges. The type of problem and the time of its occurrence is unknown, but it is inevitable. They continue their conversation:

How do you know if you were the last man on earth? He said.

I don’t guess you would know it. You’d just be it.

Nobody would know it.

It wouldn’t make any difference. When you die it’s the same as if everybody else did too.

I guess God would know it. Is that it?

There is no God.(180)

Ely, one of the characters whom they meet on the way asserts that he was the last man on the world. He believes that due to destruction in the environment, no human would survive.

As the father and son keep on moving on their journey, they reach to the ruined houses. They have not entered the house before. In the basement of the house, the son sees the corpses and wants to go there. In this context it is mentioned:

He walked out in the gray light and stood and saw for a brief moment the absolute truth of the world. The cold relentless circling of the intestate earth. Darkness implacable. The blind dogs of the son in their running. The crushing black vacuum of the universe. And somewhere two hunted animals trembling like ground-foxes in their cover (138)

It reveals the indifference of the earth to the difficulty of man. 'Absolute truth of the world' ultimately means the death of everything in nature including the end of the world. The earth has left no future, no ways of survival of living beings due to any form of calamity. They might survive for a moment but the life will be in a great suffering like the father and son in the novel.

The reason behind showing such an apocalypse is also to make the people mentally prepare to face the possible consequences of environmental degradation. As they move on the south, they make a conversation about the same: "Can you do it? When the time comes? When the time comes there will be no time. Now is the time. Curse God and die" (120). It vividly shows the fact that the time is too near to face the environmental catastrophe in the world. When the time comes and the people realize that they have destroyed the environment; there will be no time to preserve and to bring back in the original state. The only option left in that situation is to curse God for his deeds and to live for some moment.

There was no reborn flora and fauna in McCarthy's *The Road*. However, the presence of the flora and fauna is the rest of the previous world. Flora in McCarthy's *The Road* is dominated by the trees. However, most of the trees have changed into

gray, dark and black. It is so pathetic when the father and his son faced the standing black trees and they realized that it changes. Horribly, it seems like ghost of trees. The changing of the trees is not underlined on the changes of its colour but also its presence. It means that the trees are not only changing into dark and black with its standing but also there are many trees which die and fall to the ground.

Again, nature is represented as dead and so emphasis is put on the remains of flora and fauna. References to death, especially dead vegetation, and to desolation are abundant: “The dead grass trashed softly. Out there a gray desolation. The endless seacrawl” (236), “the dead gray sand” (234), “the bleak sea” (230), “the dead weeds” (253), and “In the shallows beyond the breakwater an ancient corpse rising and falling among the driftwood” (252). The changes of fauna can be seen when the father and his son was camped in the forest and listening for any sound, it draws that the bird has changed its behaviour by holding migratory to circle the earth. The birds can no longer live in harmony with the environment by occupying the forest. It is caused the changing of trees which turn into dead. Thus, it forces the birds to change themselves. Other fauna changing draws when the father who found an odor of cows. However, the cows are extinct since years ago. He asks to himself whether the cows are really real or not. He finally realizes that it is extinct. It shows that the cows are changed from the presence to absence. The extinction of cows can be illustrated by the following lines:

There was yet a lingering odor of cows in the barn and he stood there
 thinking about cows and he realized they were extinct. Was that true?
 There could be a cow somewhere being fed and cared for. Could there?
 Fed what? Saved for what? Beyond the open door the dead grass

rasped dryly in the wind. He walked out and stood looking across the fields toward the pine wood where the boy lay sleeping. (127)

It shows that the animals are being extinct in the apocalyptic world. Since the land is barren and the grasses are dead, no animals could survive in such an environment.

Towards the end of the novel, the father and his son reach the seashore, and what they find is simply more desolation. The boy is disappointed because he has expected it to be blue like it is on the worn out map his father has been carrying around but it is gray like everything else. For the father who, unlike his son, had already seen the ocean and experienced the seashore, it is completely different from what it used to be. In fact, the description of the sea and the beach reflects the overall devastation and bleakness that prevail throughout the narrative, and encompasses all of the features identified previously. The beach and the ocean are gray and lifeless: “No gulls or shorebirds” (235). On the beach are scattered derelict objects of the past, “Charred and senseless artifacts strewn down the shoreline or rolling in the surf” (235), and the bones of animals: “the salt bleached ribcages of what may have been cattle” (230). The following passage also underlines the absence of life: “Long curve of beach beyond. Gray as lava sand. The wind coming off the water smelled faintly of iodine. That was all. There was no sea smell to it. On the rocks the remnants of some dark seamoss” (236). For the father, who can recall what the sea smelled like, “There [is] no sea smell to it”, and it smells only of salt because there are no more fish, crabs, or any life at all. The father wonders if “there could be death ships out there yet, drifting with their lolling rags of sails. Or life in the deep. Great squid propelling themselves over the floor of the sea in the cold darkness” (234).

Maybe somewhere in the deep sea some life forms could still be alive, but closer to the surface the probability is extremely low as the food chain is broken and

the diverse ecosystems destroyed. Undoubtedly, all life forms closer to the shore and on land, aside from the few remaining humans, have perished.

They trekked out along the crescent of beach, keeping to the firmer sand below the tidewrack. They stood, their clothes flapping softly. Glass floats covered with a grey crust. The bones of seabirds. At the tide line a woven mat of weeds and the ribs of fishes in their millions stretching along the shore as far as eye could see like an isoclines of death. One vast salt sepulcher. Senseless. Senseless. (237)

Besides the memories and dreams of the father, the lost natural world can finally be glimpsed again in the vignette that ends the novel. Standing outside the narrative once the father is dead, this final passage emphasizes the idea that nature belongs to the past and is lost forever.

McCarthy ends the novel with the father lamenting the exhaustion of natural life, "Once there were brook trout in the streams in the mountains. You could see them standing in the amber current where the white edges of their fins wimpled softly in the flow. They smelled of moss in your hand" (206). As De Bruyn claims "the word 'once' suggests the irreversibility of this probably man-made apocalypse, while the passage itself functions as a reminder of the connection between nature and man" (788). The focus of the story suddenly shifts its place from the man and the child to the no longer existing mystery of the universe. This change in focus also bestows some eco-global and eco-central quality on the text as it implies wherever we are in the world, our actions have global consequences for the nature, considering the fact that nature is map of interconnections between inanimate and organism. And once this delicate balance is disturbed there might not be a way to fix it. McCarthy's subtle yet powerful handling of these aspects of nature, human survival and the

concept of hope makes *The Road* an effective piece of literary imagination, one that will not leave the consciousness of the reader hopefully for a long time. Indeed, the final passage conveys not only the absence of life, flora, and fauna, but also the broken relationship between humans and the natural world. In this regard, Kenneth Brandt states, “McCarthy’s concluding passage spotlights a web of environmental interrelationships and presents a contrapuntal arrangement of images that implicitly conveys the totality of humanity’s dependence on ecological stability” (66). It closes the novel and is placed outside the narrative; it gives more weight to the ecological concern that was implicit all along: that humans need nature, that it is precious and can be lost. As Brandt states further, this “final passage [...] undeniably directs the reader’s attention to the fragility of the natural world” (66). Moreover, he notes that “this section is detached from the main narrative, which serves to reinforce the idea that such a scene is inaccessible to the novel’s characters” (64). The boy’s father is dead, and since nature as it once was has been accessible only through his memories, the only place where it can be evoked at the end of the novel is indeed outside the main narrative.

In *The Road*, nature is represented as destroyed, dead and belonging to the past. The descriptions of the landscape are rich in post-apocalyptic imagery that is dominated by death and devastation as well as by motifs such as darkness, the color gray, and ash. The natural world, more specifically flora, fauna, and the environment, are described in three different ways: in terms of absences—the sky is “birdless”, the ground is “trackless”, there are no fish in the lakes, no life, no movement, the country is desolate and silent—, as dead remnants—dead trees, dead vegetation, animal skeletons—, and as memories—nature as it once was, healthy and alive, is portrayed through the dreams and memories of the man, and in the vignette that ends the novel.

The analysis of the text shows how human characters are so heavily dependent on nature for their survival. The imbalance in the nature is directly responsible for human crisis. Lawrence Buell's idea that human is connected to the physical world, affecting it and affected by it is clearly seen in the novel. In the name of development and modernity, human have destroyed the nature. Since the technology and science has dominated the world, the environment has been ignored by humans. In other words, human civilization was anti-environmental. As a result, human actions became responsible for the environmental damage, hence, inviting their own doom.

Devastation of earth surely has a relevancy with the humans and non human aspect relationship. However, humans tend to be indifferent toward nature even become destructive. Consequently, the father and his son have to undergo the hard life in the devastated earth. It is pictured that devastation has stroked the whole environmental aspects; atmosphere, hydrosphere, lithosphere and biosphere. Devastation of atmosphere is pictured by the presence of ash, dust and carbon which occupy and fill the atmosphere. As a consequence, the air is contaminated by carbon, the sky is covered by grayscale image of ash and dust and everything is covered by blowing ash and dust. Devastation of lithosphere can be drawn from the pictures of land changing into barren and erode, the trees that stick on the land have dead and falling down, and everything which flows on the land becomes gray and black. Similarly, depiction of hydrosphere is also bizarre. It is pictured that the sea has changed into gray. The sea is the estuary of the whole water which flows on the land, even from the sky. The flowing water has changed into black and the rainwater is falling down as gray sheet of rain. Thus, the sea certainly has changed into gray. Moreover, it is contaminated by the ash, dust and carbon. Consequently, there is no

sea creature survive. And, biospheres' components of the world have been completely damaged with the projection of dead bodies, dead animals and birds etc.

There are serious consequences on the character's life who dwell in an environmentally devastated world. Physically, they are always affected by the bad air; contaminated by ash, dust and carbon that fill the atmosphere till make them hard to breathe. They have experienced a respiratory problem that suffers the father an acute cough. The devastated earth also forces them to keep always starving. The father and the son often delay their desire of food for few days. For them, the most important thing is still having water. However, when the water runs out, they have to drink contaminated water which is in the gutter. Surely it affects the condition of their body or their health. The days of them are only spent to seek some foods and the save place. Mentally, the devastated earth has changed the mindset of the father. He becomes a worried man; worry of food and shoes. He also keep trying of anything; trying to find anything that can be consumed. The father also become a careful man, he always watch out; watch out of the devastation that threaten their safety and watch out of the bad guys who hunt them like a zombie in horror film. He also never gives up and full of spirit to struggle their life. The devastated earth has haunted the son so that he always feels scared of anything.

McCarthy, in the novel *The Road* has used five modes of perception as argued by Lawrence Buell in *Environmental Imagination*. Buell believes that to make the human beings aware regarding the apocalyptic situation, interrelatedness, biotic equalitarianism, magnification, conflation and sense of imminent environmental perils are used as the politics. By giving such modes of perception in the novel *The Road*, the writer wants to convey the message that human beings should internalize the importance of nature. If the unchecked activities of human beings continue in nature,

the imminent environmental peril is apparent. In this sense, it is the politics of McCarthy to project apocalyptic vision to avoid the possible environmental hazards.

In a nutshell, the reason behind the projection of apocalyptic world in the novel *The Road* is to warn the human beings that the doom is not too far if the environment is degraded in the present pace. The major characters the father and the son have been experiencing all the hardship in life, in the novel, is primarily because of the onerous environmental situation of their surroundings. These characters are hoping to continue their life without a hope but those, at the same time, symbolically indicate if it continues, the living of organism will be more dreadful in the future. Human beings are haphazardly destroying the nature without looking for its future consequences. This indifference of human upon the environment, in contemporary period, has led the environmental components get deteriorated, and then its repercussions are the obvious that humans cannot sustain any longer in the earth like the characters shown in the novel, as nature is inseparable part of human life and many of which syndromes have already been started to be experienced. Hence, to avert the possible negative forthcoming in the earth, the text is prominently relevant to deal as it surfaces the possible grievances on the earth in near future on undermining and under rating the burgeoning environmental issues.

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