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## HOPE TOWARDS APOCALYPSE: A CRITICAL STUDY OF CORMAC MCCARTHY'S DYSTOPIAN FICTION THE ROAD

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### Abstract

Post-apocalyptic fictions play a vast role in literature especially that of environment. The function of apocalyptic fiction is unraveling of untold wisdom. This paper attempts to testify how the novel, *The Road* being post-apocalyptic fiction shows portrayals of contrasting settings and societies separated from each other by space or barriers and time. Each represents a realm of experience and poses different approach towards apocalypse namely hope and humanness both being the necessary attitudes in a dying landscape. It depicts how the novel progresses in an apocalyptic landscape and experiences the possibilities of life, depicted as a journey from place to place and as these settings and societies come into various other kinds of contact with each other, the possibilities of life being worked out in the story are seen.

**Keywords:** Post-apocalyptic fiction, Postmodernism, Environmental degradation, Catastrophe, Dystopian future, Hope, Humanness

### Introduction

Apocalypse is the most poetic and imaginative form of eschatological writing. In *The Road* the contrary union of present and future, realism and fantasy is rendered in the terrible victory of the object world. The human made environment has finally vanquished nature, but the products called into the world by the rule of exchange value, have been brought to a desperate extraction of use value; absolutely within the realm of necessity only a few decades before that the description of apocalypse became historical. Henry Treece in his 1946 book *How I See Apocalypse* enumerated the qualities of Apocalyptic Movement writings:

... the writer who senses the chaos, the turbulence, the laughter and the tears, the order and the peace of the world in its entirety is an Apocalyptic writer this utterance will be prophetic for he is observing things which less sensitive men may have not yet come to notice; and as his words are prophetic, they will tend to be incantatory and so musical. At times, even, that music may take control, and lead the writer from recording his vision almost to create another voice. So, momentarily, he will kiss the edge of God's robe. (22)

*The Road* focuses on examining the role of social and cultural factors in generating and, potentially, countering eco-social ills. The reason for the same is that the novel protests against dissenting dogmas including complacent political systems, detrimental environmental policies, and reckless technological and scientific experimentation; the

form allows authors to infer from current events and imagine an abysmal future. Moreover, the quest for life's meaning has always been a central aspect of human life and culture.

Apart from a religious outlook, the novel taken for study carry a mythical outlook toward apocalypse. Apocalypse in the novel *The Road* can be looked in terms of Postmodernism. Post modernism, in attempt to "be witness to the unrepresentable" (Lyotard), seeks to transcend the categorization and historicizing that has beset the representative authority of modernism. In this it parallels, and invariably becomes a precursor to apocalypse. The transformation required for the realization of apocalypse all but necessitates the relatively radical methodology that is inherent in Postmodernism, because the utter negation and complete reworking of all that constitutes reality is exactly what is needed for apocalypse to be achieved.

The paper focuses on the novelists' attitude towards apocalypse. It is noteworthy that Hope and Humanness have been the constant reiterations dwelt by the novelist considered for study. Hence a critical study on Hope and Humanness in the selected novel has been carried out.

### Discussion

Post-apocalyptic fiction is not merely a warning against global catastrophe but also an attempt to create an image of a land destroyed by nuclear bombs and attacks and a dystopian future that dwells on ruins. It doesn't simply herald environmental cataclysm; it forecasts a land

flooded by water, with despondent survivors adhering to a life-raft of a society, lost in a world and hallucinates of a promised land. It portrays a human world that is immersed in illusions.

Sanes in the introduction of Post- Apocalyptic fiction: Holocaust as a Metaphor says,

Into these worlds, which are our own and not our own, post-apocalyptic fiction places one or a handful of main characters whose job is to experience the pageant of the future, confront its demons, and often undergo an ethical transformation and bring about a new world. These characters escape from and destroy oppressive dictators or machines that control human life; they go on journeys to find better ways of life; and they found new societies in which civilization will get a second chance. Their role is often to fight so that humanity will have a second chance, and to manifest ethical qualities that demonstrate it deserves a second chance.

In addition to the above traits, the novel *The Road* exhibits a few features. Society is fragmented and unable to protect its members; Supplies are scarce and basic survival is not given. The modern civilization has left behind a series of ruins full of danger and powerful artifacts.

A realist section of the narrative, in which the problems of subsistence are played out, there are two modes at work: precise description and parody. This echoes the capacity of dystopian fiction - particularly the post-apocalyptic genre of the critical dystopia to mix dread and relief, to feed anxiety about the future by enacting its worst scenarios but, at the same time, to relieve the anxiety of an inchoate but much- anticipated end by giving it fictive or unreal form. At once, the realism of a future world evoked precisely is also the critique of the present through the fantasy enactment of its diabolical traits.

As far as the novel's present is concerned, the past is a disjointed and anomalous collection of experiences removed from inclusion in any future attempts or successes in progression.

McCarthy utilizes apocalyptic imagery and themes in the fiction to interrogate political systems and warn of future disaster if preventative action is not taken now. They reveal that crises will arise if ordinary people delay making the necessary changes until 'tomorrow' because they refuse to believe that threats are serious or will affect them. The apocalyptic genre in *The Road* offers a useful example of how writers can use apocalypse as a genre of protest to critique scientific, social and environmental

policies. By representing these mythical dystopian settings and societies of the future, post-apocalyptic fiction pulls us out of earthly lives and gives a sense of the inescapability of time. Permeating this view superficially and letting the reader embrace it in a single narrative of unfolding images painted with picturesque words and images, it temporarily aids one in experiencing the immensity of time and with inadequate place in the larger pattern of things

This landscape recalls the "stony rubbish" of Eliot's "The Waste Land" and invokes the beast from Yeats' "The Second Coming." The father's dreams include "a creature that raised its dripping mouth from the rim stone pool and stared into the light with eyes dead white and sightless" before turning to "lurch away" (*Road* 3-4). These literary evocations not only aid to posit McCarthy's story within a mythical and spiritual cultural history – either of losing one's way in the middle of life, of things falling apart, or of a life as a wasteland, of having lost a Paradise. The power of allusion is used to intensify, to give convoluted resonance to his story; these allusions also help constitute one of the great losses occasioned by the apocalypse that has occurred before the novel begins. In the novel, post-holocaust worlds have lost most technology and are recreating a world, a history again in a new way.

These allusions constitute an echo not only of literary but also of human history, within a temporal environment still possessed of a future. Within which, at the risk of oversimplifying, 'the wasteland' was a metaphor. *The Road* depicts the fulfillment of those metaphors; a world in which metaphor has become fact, in which Eliot's spiritual 'wasteland' is reified in the refining fires of apocalypse to 'wasted country' - to 'cauterized terrain'. At any rate, this is the conceit of the novel. To be sure, these are themselves images within McCarthy's futuristic allegory.

The exchanges between the man and his son in *The Road* deliver the idea that the father struggles to hold his life just with the hope that there should be a safe hands awaiting the boy. Till then they remain the each other's world entire

In *The Road*, the man carries just two weapons with him; One being hope, the other a pistol with a few bullets. Cannibalism is both a literal and figurative threat in the novel. The pistol is the last weapon the man decides to employ. He kills a stranger who approaches the two with a motif. The man decides to keep the last bullet for his son for he cannot leave his son in the beastly and insecure world in his absence. The journey of the man along with his son in *The Road* may remind the concept of Flannery O'Connor that a good man is hard to find. With an

uncertain hope the man in McCarthy's novel continues his journey along *The Road* of the barbarians. Schaub observes,

Indeed, one may wonder if McCarthy's motive might not be exactly the testing of whether goodness can persist in the face of violence, when an act of charity may lead to one's own disembowelment, or whether goodness can persist in the absence of a world endowed with meaning, and in which the future appears so foreshortened as almost to collapse with the present moment.

### Conclusion

It is innocence of mind that cultivates human qualities. For instance, the boy unlike his father cares for the destitute boy whom he saw once. He wants to take the boy along with them, shelter him and share him with what they have. As for the man he is no more naive in mind and hence thinks that the destitute boy cannot be taken with them as he can bring nothing but danger. It is humanitarianism that keeps the boy amidst a new family which could give him all familial ties as a son to a brand new father, mother and sister at the end of the novel. McCarthy's boy defies the enlarged vision of William Golding that man is evil by nature. He tries to save and shelter but not severe and survive at stake.

The lesson *The Road* is the same as said above. Though hope is the predominant catch in *The Road*, the novel is not devoid of humanness on the whole. If the

world in *The Road* has been totally devoid of the humane touch, there would have been no way for the man to have hope.

Merging hope and humanness proves to be a fantastic reaction towards catastrophe. Even if nothingness prevails, even if life threatens one's existence, life at its best continues if and only if hope and humanness could merge. Man is a social animal and in this modern world, though has become a techno savvy; man has not attained the status of being independent. It is the term 'interdependence' that makes man blessed amidst numerous social relations. If hope could be the belief of the individual, humanitarianism is the attitude of the individual towards the rest.

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