Letters and Languages Guide Volume: 5 Issue: 1 / 2026 /pp.76-96

Radical Individualism and the Justification of Violence through "Othering" in Cormac McCarthy's The Road

الفردية الراديكالية وتبرير العنف من خلال مفهوم "الآخر" في رواية "الطريق" لكورماك مكارثي

Abdelkrim BOULANOUAR

University of Oran 2, Mohamed Ben Ahmed (Algeria)

Boulanouardarcy@outlook.com

Received : 02/05/2026	Accepted: 24/05/2026	Published: 30/06/2026

Abstract

In his post-apocalyptic novel, *The Road*, Cormac McCarthy hyperbolizes this situation by placing his characters in a world where all human relations are based on survival. Without a governing system to enforce ethical boundaries, violence becomes the law of the land, and the fall of community leaves in its wake a disintegration of morality. Cannibalism, as the epitome of detached individualism, is adopted as a common method of sustenance and a clear indicator of a lost sense of humanity. The purpose of this article is to demonstrate how, in McCarthy's work, extreme individualism and the process of "othering" gradually dehumanize people and create a reality in which violence and cruelty are normalized under the system of the survival of the fittest.

Keywords:

Contemporary American literature; Morality; Violence; Othering; Nihilism;

الملخص : غالبًا ما تؤدي الفردية المتطرفة والانفصال العاطفي إلى تصور الآخر على أنه «كائن» منفصل، مجرد من إنسانيته، يمكن إخضاعه للاضطهاد والوحشية باسم المصلحة الشخصية. في روايته الكارثية «الطريق»، يضخم كورماك مكارثي هذه الحالة من خلال وضع شخصياته في عالم تعتمد فيه جميع العلاقات الإنسانية على البقاء على قيد الحياة. وبدون نظام حاكم لفرض الحدود الأخلاقية، يصبح العنف هو القانون السائد، ويخلف انهيار المجتمع في أعقابه تفككًا للقيم الأخلاقية. ويُتبنى أكل لحوم البشر، باعتباره تجسيدًا للفردية المنفصلة، كوسيلة شائعة للبقاء ومؤشرًا واضحًا على فقدان الإحساس بالإنسانية. الهدف من هذا المقال هو توضيح كيف أن الفردية المتطرفة وعملية تغريب الآخر في رواية مكارثي تؤديان تدريجياً إلى تجريد الناس من إنسانيتهم وخلق واقع يتم فيه تبرير العنف والقسوة في ظل نظام البقاء للأقوى .

كلمات مفتاحية: الأدب الأمريكي المعاصر؛ الأخلاق؛ العنف؛ التهميش؛ النزعة النهيلية

1. INTRODUCTION:

When dealing with the problem of morality, one of the recurrent questions is whether humanity is by nature prone to socially-recognized notions of "good" such as generosity and compassion, or whether it is limited by its animalistic instincts of seeking hierarchical domination through strength and the rejection of the "other" (through individualism and tribalism). Man is undoubtedly a social creature but, without a structure that dictates the appropriate code of conduct, it is less clear whether cooperation is his innate modus operandi, especially in times of need and with persons outside his kin or community. These questions are among the many philosophical dilemmas raised in Cormac McCarthy's 2006 novel *The*

Road in which he puts humanity's ability to maintain its civilizational values to the test. His postapocalyptic tale places a duo of survivors, a father and son, in a world completely devoid of order, where all semblant of civilization had failed and where a sense of utter nihilism seems to have consumed the barren landscape. The unnamed protagonists have a dual quest. First, they must survive the starvation, harsh winter and the hordes of cannibals "who would eat your children in front of your eyes…" (McCarthy, 2006, p148). Most importantly, they strive to restore a sense of meaning to justify their suffering by holding on to seemingly lost moral values such as kindness, compassion and a strict refusal to engage in cannibalism.

There is a sharp contrast between the protagonists who naively cling to an ethical code they named "carrying the fire" and the rest of the survivors who reject community, devour their own progeny for sustenance and engage in slavery and violence with complete impunity. The clash between the two forces constitutes the core of the novel's philosophical debate in which "McCarthy requires his characters and his readers to reconstruct belief systems, human relations and understandings of the self in this bewildering post-natural and postcapitalist world" (Kollin, 2011, p158). One side of human relations, in particular, is highlighted in the novel: man's capacity of cruelty under individualistic survivalism. Indeed, aside from the main characters, everyone in the novel rejects the idea of meaningful community and regards others as either a threat or a means to an end (food, means of reproduction…). This dehumanization of the other facilitates acts of violence because it suppresses the natural feelings of empathy. Relations are based on utility and individuals cease to be people and become

objects of consumption and merely disposable waste when their primary function is depleted. Throughout the novel, we encounter slaves herded like cattle, prisoners locked in a basement and harvested for their flesh, and a human infant roasting on a spit. This pessimistic portrayal of humanity's worst traits seems to betray "...the fear that human beings may not in fact deserve to survive" (Cooper, 2011, p221). What is certain is that when individualism trumps over compassion, and when the other is seen with animosity and/or objectification, "evil" and immorality become the norm. The purpose of this article is to demonstrate how, in McCarthy's conception of the world, violence, epitomized by cannibalism, is justified and even normalized when individuals detach from community and view people as a distant and dehumanized "other" that can be used and discarded according to their own individualistic needs. While the concept of violence in *The Road* has been widely discussed, existing studies tend to focus on the father-son relationship, existential concerns, or post-apocalyptic and environmental interpretations of the novel. Little attention has been paid to the underlying causes of violence and the erosion of moral values. This research addresses that gap by drawing on philosophical perspectives to examine how extreme individualism, survival instincts, and processes of othering contribute to dehumanization and the normalization of cruelty.

2. The Apocalypse and the Death of Morality

The fall of civilization precipitates loss of meaning, and McCarthy's novel depicts a bleak world where all signs of order have vanished. Naturally, this leads to the devaluation of the concept of morality which becomes a useless vestige of a

bygone era. Everything in the novel is "Darkness, desolation, isolation, the brute reality of an indifferent world: these are the patterns of experience Cormac McCarthy forces upon those who choose to read him" (Frye, 2009, p179). This is an important detail to understand how human relations work in the novel. They are based on desperation. *The Road* takes place after a mysterious beam of light have reduced the land to ashes. Food reserves are depleted and the earth itself is unable to produce crops. Most animals are extinct and only human beings stubbornly cling to survival. It is tempting to read this novel as merely a postapocalyptic tale or even a travel narrative (since the story follows the protagonist's journey south). Yet, elements of total destruction are only a pretext to test humanity's ability to maintain its values. Neither the causes of the cataclysm nor its location is important. We know that the story takes place in "What used to be called the states" (McCarthy, 2006, p35) but there are no names of cities or roads. The story is purposefully de-geographized. Also, the cause of the apocalypse is not mentioned in the novel. There have been speculations ranging for a meteor hitting the planet to a nuclear explosion but these explanations force a political or even environmental reading on the novel. Carmen Laguarta Bueno writes: "Many of the critics [...] tend to put the emphasis on the causes of the disaster rather than on its implications for the survivors. However, what really seems to concern McCarthy is human behavior in a situation of crisis such as the one described in *The Road*" (Laguarta Bueno, 2019, p74). Consequently, our attention should steer away from the common tropes of the postapocalyptic narrative and focus on how the human behavior evolves in such situations. This reading will serve to

understand why violence became the new law of the land, and why human connection was reduced to an impractical forgotten ideal.

It is important to mention that in McCarthy's cosmos, there are no systems that dictate proper behavior. Governments as the primary sources of social order are absent. As Euan Gallivan notes, "in *The Road* there is no State, a fact which is crucial for an understanding of how the ethical system in question relates to the novel" (Gallivan, 2008, p102). Indeed, without a systematic view of morality, the line between what is generally considered "good" and "bad" is blurred. This also means that all acts of violence, no matter how vile or cruel are met with impunity. Despite all their flaws, states and governments generally impose a sense of unity and social cooperation for the sake of common interests. The individual relies on the group in the same way that the group requires valuable individuals. In *The Road*, however, individualism becomes extreme, radical, and the ideas of group, country or common identity are rendered useless.

In the absence of a state, religion can often serve as a way to create a divine order that sets boundaries and monitors human behavior. It enables human being to transcend their natural needs, and act and interact according to an agreed-upon and meaningful belief system. "Good" actions are met with a promise of divine reward whereas cruelty and "evil" are discouraged by the threat of eternal punishment. The idea of heaven and hell constitutes the basis of human psychology because actions are governed by the natural need of seeking pleasure and avoiding pain. Also, suffering, in the case of starvation for instance, can be justified by the belief that it is a test of patience or a call to help others. Yet, in *The*

Road, religion and spirituality seem to have completely vanished from the world. The very description of the land is "Barren, silent, godless" (McCarthy, 2006, p05). Apart from the protagonists and the veteran's family who rescues the boy at the end of the novel, everyone they cross on their journey seems to have renounced the existence of God and failed to find a justification for their suffering or a code to govern their actions. Stephen Joyce observes: "Although Christian themes run throughout the text, there is no affirmation that there is a God to whom one can appeal" (Joyce, 2016, p09). At this point, it is established that there is no power that can prevent survivors from basing their actions solely on self-interest, and the dire circumstances they face justify every kind of transgression. McCarthy's depiction of the world seems to suggest a "... pervasive, ashen testimony of the absolute, continuing failure of ethics, of religion, of government, of diplomacy, of humanity, of everything" (Snyder, 2008, p69).

The only force that still had the potential of preventing survivors from completely losing their humanity is the family. It is true that the father and son maintained the sanctity of their relationship but, as seen earlier, they are the exception against which the rest of the narrative can be contrasted. They are aliens to their reality, relics of a forgotten era of compassion and self-sacrifice. What they witness, however, is the exact opposite of their values. The boy's mother, for instance, is seduced by the call of death and chooses to abandon her son instead of enduring suffering. Her suicide can easily be justified. For her, she was weak and soon to be the prey of the strong. She acknowledges the state of her world and the sort of behavior to be expected of others. When she proposes death as a liberator,

she explains her position to her husband saying: "Sooner or later they will catch us and they will kill us. They will rape me. They'll rape him. They are going to rape us and kill us and eat us and you won't face it. You'd rather wait for it to happen. But I can't. I can't" (McCarthy, 2006, p45). The mother ends up freeing herself from witnessing such horror with an obsidian shard. In this case, family could not offer a refuge from the evil that pervades the world. Despite the man's desire to protect his son, one can argue that "the woman's assessment of what the future might hold may in fact be more accurate than the man's" (Kollin, 2011, p170). Indeed, even the man himself dies at the end, leaving his son to fend for himself. Still, despite its failure, the protagonists' family did not willingly break the sanctity of their relation. Other families, however, desecrated all moral boundaries. Nowhere in the novel does the sense of the disintegration of community become more palpable than in the scene of the charred infant that the father-son see roasting on a spit, apparently ready to be devoured. With this scene, dehumanization reaches its pinnacle since even beasts shelter their young. Here, "[the] loss of mental and emotional commitment to others results in dissociative behavior ranging from the mother's rejection of her son to people devouring their own infants" (Cooper, 2011, p223). Dissociation or detachment from others appears to be the main cause of the dismantlement of community and it transforms even a child into an object of consumption. Without a government to punish such actions, a religion to sanctify human life or a family to preserve the safety of its members, the world quickly falls into violence. Gangs of cannibals roam the land and individuals find themselves reduced to the state of animal; either cattle to be herded, preys to be chased or

ruthless predators deprived of all sense of morality. This all starts, I argue, with the overidentification with individualistic survival and the concept of "othering".

3. Cannibalism, Violence and the Dehumanization of "the other"

The idea of "othering" that McCarthy hyperbolizes exists in most societies and it is usually part of the debate over racism and discrimination. To view certain individuals as "others" is to detach from them and to claim a certain moral or even biological superiority that legitimizes any hostile action towards them. Jean-François Staszak defines the other as a "member of a dominated out-group, whose identity is considered lacking and who may be a subject to discrimination by the in-group" (Staszak, 2008, p01). In *The Road*, where individual survival is the first priority and where no rules or systems impose social cohesion, the concept of othering takes on an extreme form, symbolized by slavery and cannibalism. In that system, the law of nature forces a hierarchy maintained by violence.

The protagonists of the novel are lone travelers, a fact that prevents them from encountering other "good" people but saves them from the more likely outcome of falling victims to the roaming gangs that control the land. From afar, they often keep an eye on these gangs and the convoys of slaves that follow them. Using his binoculars, the man notices the cannibals and ″Behind them came wagons drawn by slaves in harness and piled with goods of war and after that the women, perhaps a dozen in number, some of them pregnant, and lastly a supplementary consort of catamites ill-clothed against the cold and fitted in dog collars and yoked each to each" (McCarthy, 2006, p73). The list blurs the line between people and "spoils of war" making the two elements indistinguishable

from each other. Also, the pregnant women suggest the end of the family structure since births are the result of the forceful fulfillment of carnal desire that only increases the quantity of the herd. As for the men, they are either used as workers, pulling the carts like oxen, or as reserves of food. The latter use for humans is also seen when the protagonists come across an old plantation house. In the basement, the protagonists' hopes to find supplies are deflated by the horror of seeing barely-living people harvested for their flesh. The missing leg of one of them suggests that their limbs are cut off one at a time to keep the "freshness" of the meat. Appalled by the horrific scene, the man flees without attempting to help them lest he is caught by their captors. In both the basement and the convoy, it is clear that humanity had no intention of regaining its inter-relational values. As a matter of fact, from the moment people cease to be considered human and turn into food supplies, all hopes of meaningful community are lost. As Jordan Dominy notes, "cannibalism is problematic for most readers precisely because it closes off the possibility of rebuilding any resemblance of modern society by having a relationship with other people that does not involve viewing the person as a resource" (Dominy, 2015, p153).

It is important to note that in the novel, the act of consuming human flesh is never fully depicted. The protagonists come across signs of cannibalism but never witness the act itself, detaching the reader from the deed and leaving the mind to visualize its own terror" (Dominy, 2015, p147). This is generally a common trope in this sort of fiction, except certain works like Thomas Harris's Hannibal Lecter series. More significantly, it might symbolize the father and son's moral fortitude

and their refusal to lose their humanity. Still, in most cases, the horror of seeing the remains of devoured people is enough to create a permanent feeling of dread in the survivors. For instance, after a cannibal grabs the boy, his father shoots him in the head and flees the scene. After some time, the man returns and discovers that the cannibal had met the same fate as his victims and became nothing more than "bones and the skin piled together with rocks over them. A pool of guts" (McCarthy, 2006, p57). When human relationships are based on utility, the strong predator that maintains the power of his "tribe" quickly turns into a prey when his power wanes. His value is based on what he can provide; if he fails to bring strength, he becomes a source of food. This scene also brings another dimension to the concept of "othering" in a postapocalyptic setting, namely the fate of the individual after his death. Worse than being considered food, the remains of the member of the community who loses his worth are treated as trash to be discarded by the side of the road.

In most postapocalyptic or dystopian fiction, the status of human beings loses its sanctity and the body is seen as nothing more than organic waste. This can be seen for instance in Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* where the protagonist imagines her husband dead in the forest, his face planted on the earth. She says: "the body is so easily damaged, so easily disposed of, water and chemicals is all it is, hardly more than a jellyfish, dying on sand" (Atwood, 1985, p106). In McCarthy's vision, this description is adopted by most characters who, obsessed by their own survival, never the take the time to honour or bury their dead. Corpses that fill the wasteland, newly starved or "dried to leather", are a

common spectacle for the inhabitants of *The Road*. The father often tries to shield his son from these horrors but he eventually abandons his futile attempts. In the case of cannibalism, parts that are not consumed are thrown away or left under a pile of rocks. This proves that "The destiny of the consumed thing is to become waste, a word that appears several times in *The Road*, always as descriptions of the ashen dead landscape" (Dominy, 2015, p152). A consumed "thing" is an appropriate word here as it describes the way survivors viewed each other. As a matter of fact, things or objects are often more valuable than other human beings; a clear residue of the extreme consumerism that plagues most cultures today. Indeed, despite being set after the destruction of civilization, signs of consumer culture pervade the narrative, showing sings that "...the novel is a critique of capitalist consumer culture" (Jung, 2023, p96). What is certain is that humanity maintained its consumerist tendencies even after the annihilation of the capitalist system. People still sought to amass goods and resources (even under the form of other human beings), fought over them and threw the excess and the leftovers without consideration. Useless objects litter the landscape and useful ones are looked after better than families. The protagonists' shopping cart for instance, is filled with whatever essential objects they could find; tarp, binoculars, food supplies. For the man's pragmatic mind, connections with those objects replace the need for human interaction because while the first prolongs survival, the second only threatens it. Randall Wilhelm explains: "Objects become, then, intimately connected with the protagonists' very existence, some even to the point where they become psychologically embodied, and when they are lost or left

behind, engender in the mind anxiety and something akin to the human sense of loss" (Wilhelm, 2008, p131-132). This sense of loss is best illustrated in one of the last interactions the man had with a stranger. When the cart is stolen, the man falls into a murderous rage and when he catches the thief, he leaves him naked, unarmed and hungry by the side of the road. Although he tries to convince himself that he did not harm the thief (mostly to maintain the appearance of "goodness" before his son), the boy reminds him of the consequences of his actions. "But we did kill him" (McCarthy, 2006, p214), the boy says. Here again, it is clear that the object's value exceeded that of the person. Even a moral character condemned another human being to death (due to cold and starvation) in order to "avenge" the loss of his belongings. The thief was not considered as human; he was a mere threat to survival that had to be eliminated.

As a consequence of the dehumanization that permeated the world of *The Road*, survivors slowly lost all sense of identity and saw themselves more like animals, hunting and/or being hunted. At the beginning of the novel, the father and son come across a half-burned survivor sitting by the road and waiting for his death. The boy, eager to help, asks him father about who he was and the reply was "I don't know. Who is anybody?" (McCarthy, 2006, p39). This answer is very significant because it marks the end of individual identity. Survivors are either cannibals, slaves, preys or trash. This is one of the reasons why all characters are nameless in the novel (except Ely but he lies about his name making his identity as elusive as all other characters). Donovan Gwinner writes: "To a great degree, then, father and son appear so burdened by survivalism that the energy and thought

they can invest in notions of identity are minimal, even insofar as they might claim to be "survivors"" (Gwinner, 2011, p142). What replaces identity is the identification with roles, and since they were either hunter or hunted, they viewed themselves as animals sharing a hostile territory. The fact that the story is told in first person and following the man's point of view means that likening survivors to scattered animals is made by the survivors themselves. For instance, the man describes himself saying: "Eyes collared in cups of grime and deeply sunk. Like an animal inside a skull looking out the eyeholes" (McCarthy, 2006, p51). Besides showing his apparent starvation, this description betrays his vulnerability, comparing himself to a small animal, hiding behind his humanoid façade. The violence of their world and the law of "the survival of the fittest" had forced the weak characters to maintain only the appearance of humanity. The protagonists are considered vulnerable because refusing to engage in open violence and cannibalism are clear signs of weakness in the novel (and to a smaller degree, in the author's reality). Similarly, the gangs of cannibals shed their human shell for a more menacing, monstrous appearance. Indeed, "just as the father likens himself and his son to two hunted animals, so others are likened to the animals that hunt, bestial in their savagery, as is necessitated by their environment" (Gallivan, 2008, p99). Both the hunter and hunted lose their humanity in this dynamic. For instance, when they encounter a cannibal who had strayed from his gang, the narrator describes him as follows: The reptilian calculations in those cold and shifting eyes. The gray and rotting teeth. Claggy with human flesh" (McCarthy, 2006, p60). The focus on the cold eyes and the teeth that are accustomed to

human taste puts the stranger into a predatorial position, looming over the innocent creatures that only sting back to repel the attacker. For both the "good guys" and the "bad guys" (as the boy and his father refer to the two types of survivors), the other ceases to be human.

Although the man's actions may seem justified, they often result in the same brutality and cruelty he tried to avoid, making him indistinguishable from the people he tried to avoid. The man refuses to help the trapped victims in the basement, shoots a cannibal in the head, burn an assailant with a flare and condemns a thief to a certain death. These acts of violence prove that "In the man's quest to protect the boy he becomes almost indistinguishable from "the bad guys" he continually warns his son against. The road gangs justify their actions in the name of survival; the man justifies his actions in the name of his son's survival. The difference becomes increasingly small as the novel progresses" (Joyce, 2016, p10). The man's awareness of this similarity, though only subconscious, is symbolized by his reaction to his mirror reflection. As they entered a solitary house, "They came upon themselves in a mirror and he almost raised the pistol. It's us, Papa, the boy whispered. It's us" (McCarthy, 2006, p105). The boy, with his uncorrupted perception and his clearcut distinction between good and bad, immediately recognized their reflection. The man, on the other hand, was ready to engage in violence, which had become a second nature. Again, empathy was impossible and forgiveness was too costly. The boy's life was the only one that mattered because it was seen as human "life", precious and worth preserving. Since he refused to engage in cannibalism, his dehumanization of others did not transform them into

food sources, but it still devaluated them to the state of dangerous monsters to be avoided, pests to be crushed, or waste barely worth noticing. According to Lydia Cooper, the root of the hostility and the death of community were caused by one thing: fear. She writes: "A more nuanced reading of the novel, however, suggests that it is fear that is to blame for this violence, and fear that makes of others an 'Other'" (Cooper, 2021, p148). It is clear that fear of death (through starvation or murder) was prominent throughout the novel. It is also obvious that the first instinct in seeing another survivor is suspicion because any new appearance can be a threat to one's individual survival. Even the most harmless animal can bite or sting when it feels threatened and it is a plausible hypothesis to blame the violence of McCarthy's world on fear. This is particularly true because the novel was written after the 9/11 fears and paranoia that gave a pretext to a lot of hatred, discrimination and wars led by the United States. In the case of politics, the US fear of losing its supremacy led to the creation of "enemies" labelled terrorists in order to strip them from their humanity and justify all actions against them. Similarly, In McCarthy's vision of the world, radical individualism and the fear of death ushered an era where everyone is a hostile "other", creating an emotional detachment that leads to guilt-free violence and savagery.

4. The end of violence through the restoration of community

Despite its dark tone, *The Road* is not an entirely nihilistic work. It prophesizes the end of humanity when civilizational values crumble under the weight of individualistic survival, but it also leaves the possibility of redemption. The boy, who represents McCarthy's vision of morality, maintains his seemingly

naïve ability to view others as people, deserving of compassion and love. Throughout the novel, while his father advocates for the safety of isolation, the boy longs for community. He shares his food with survivors despite the scarcity of resources and even asks Ely to share their supper and coffee. He imposes a strict ethical code on his father and pressures him to help others and to refuse to consume even the dog they heard barking in the distance. This idealistic code of conduct is clearly out of place in McCarthy's world but it is exactly what makes the boy the moral center in the novel. Indeed, "because such humane generosity in an inhumane world where self-preservation seems paramount may constitute McCarthy's essential notion of goodness and grace" (Snyder, 2008, p70). In this, McCarthy appears to have a Schopenhauerian notion of ethics which stipulates that no one is truly moral if they do not operate beyond the constraint of a state or governing system. In simpler terms, a "good" person must do good out of personal choice, not out of adherence to laws or obedience to a government. As Euan Gallivan explains, "For Schopenhauer, only the individual who accepts the moral boundary between right and wrong where no State or other authority guarantees it can truly be identified as just" (Gallivan, 2008, p102-103). The boy's instinctual benevolence acts beyond and even against his environment, making him a perfect Schopenhauerian hero, and explaining why his father elevated him to a divine status, often comparing him to a messiah. He also identifies with others instead of objectifying them, choosing compassion over cruelty which Arthur Schopenhauer considers the solution to moral erosion. In *The Basis of Morality*, the philosopher writes: "Cruelty, which means the maximum deficiency in Compassion, is the mark

of the deepest moral depravity. Therefore, the real moral incentive must be Compassion" (Schopenhauer, 1903, p. XVIII). Empathy and the end of "othering" are then possible solutions for the violence that pervades McCarthy's world.

As demonstrated earlier, fear is also a strong catalyst for violence and cruelty. Fear of starvation, of others and of the incessant call of death often create destruction and self-destruction (in case of the mother's suicide). In terms of relations, it is the main cause for separation since the father's lonely path and his inability to find other communities are caused by his dread to lose his son. Here again, the boy proposes an end to violence by going against the natural instinct of flight. He risks his survival for a chance to reestablish a sense of community. Lydia Cooper clarifies: "The boy postulates that an attitude of constant fear might cause them to miss out on finding other 'good guys' on the road [...] As the novel's moral center, he exemplifies the capacity of compassion to triumph over fear" (Cooper, 2021, p148). Despite the bleak tone of the novel and its bitter-sweet ending, there is clear call for compassion that transcends the violence of its world.

5. CONCLUSION:

The Road is a novel that goes far beyond the horrors of postapocalyptic fiction and raises deep philosophical questions that scrutinize the very notion of humanity. By placing its characters in a world without hope, it tests man's ability to hold on to his civilizational values and his ability to construct meaningful relationships. McCarthy's pessimistic view portraits individuals as too blinded by their own individualistic needs to look past themselves. Others are alienated and

seen as only means to an end, or as threats to be avoided. This act of "othering" desensitizes survivors to the suffering of their fellow men and leads to a surge of violence. This latter escalates from being a fight for survival to seeing others as resources, culminating in cannibalism which becomes almost the norm in a fallen civilization.

Fear remains a strong motivator of human action. It constitutes the basis of human motivation along with the seeking of pleasure. Man acts to reach a potential heaven or to escape a potential hell. In most cases, the fear of hell is a stronger force which often changes the nature of the person it possesses. In *The Road*, hell is almost an invisible character that follows all survivors, epitomized by the many forms of death they encounter along their journey. The characters of *The Road* contemplate it too often since the majority of their journey is spent discussing death, avoiding it or witnessing it. The constant dread dehumanizes survivors even further, transforming them into animals engaged in a deadly game of hide and seek. The radical individualism paired with the fear of anything that can threaten the instinct of survival mark the end of community. The new, nihilistic state of mind of most survivors justify all acts of cruelty towards the weak.

Naturally, morality survives in the novel, represented by the boy who expresses a desire to reestablish the rituals of kin and friendship he was deprived of since birth. He displays a naïve yet brave rebellion against the loss of ethical values that plagues his world. Despite being out of place, he proves that McCarthy's late novels are injected with a subtle belief in higher ideals which can only be retrieved through an almost Nietzschean proclamation of personal values

that goes against the status quo of the dominant culture.

6. Bibliography List:

- Atwood, M. (1985). *The Handmaid's Tale (Digital Copy).* Titivillus.
- Cooper, L. R. (2011). Cormac McCarthy's The Road as Apocalyptic Grail Narrative. *Studies in the Novel Vol. 43 No. 2*.
- Cooper, L. R. (2021). *Cormac McCarthy: A complexity theory of literature. .* UK: Manchester University Press.
- Dominy, J. J. (2015). annibalism, Consumerism, and Profanation: Cormac McCarthy's The Road and the End of Capitalism. *The Cormac McCarthy Journal Vol. 13*.
- Frye, S. (2009). *Understanding Contemporary American Literature: Understanding Cormac McCarthy.* (M. J. Bruccoli, Ed.) USA: The University of South Carolina Press.
- Gallivan, E. (2008). Compassionate McCarthy? The Road and Schopenhauerian Ethics. *The Cormac McCarthy Journal Vol. 6*.
- Gwinner, D. (2011). "Everything uncoupled from its shoring": Quandaries of Epistemology and Ethics in The Road. In S. L. Spurgeon (Ed.), *Continuum Studies in Contemporary North American Fiction. Cormac McCarthy: All The Pretty Horses, No Country for Old Men, The Road.* Leicester, UK: Continuum International Publishing Group.
- Joyce, S. (2016). The Double Death of Humanity in Cormac McCarthy's The Road. *Transatlantica: Revue d'études américaines Vol. 2*.
- Jung, N. (2023). Individualism in Cormac McCarthy's The Road: The Highway to Unsustainability. *Cultura: International Journal of Philosophy of Culture and Axiology Vol. 20 No.1*.
- Kollin, S. (2011). "Barren, silent, godless": Ecodisaster and the Post-abundant Landscape in The Road. In S. L. Spurgeon (Ed.), *Continuum Studies in Contemporary North American Fiction. Cormac McCarthy: All The Pretty Horses, No Country for Old Men, The Road.* Leicester,, UK: Continuum International Publishing Group.
- Laguarta Bueno, C. (2019). Trauma and Existentialism in Cormac McCarthy's The Road (2006). *Nordic Journal of English Studies Vol. 18 No. 1*.
- McCarthy, C. (2006). *The Road.* New York: Alfred A. Knopf.

- Snyder, P. A. (2008). Hospitality in Cormac McCarthy's The Road. *The Cormac McCarthy Journal Vol. 6*.
- Schopenhauer, Arthur (1903). *The Basis of Morality* Translated by Arthur Brodrick Bullock. London: Swan Sonnenschein and Co.
- Staszak, J.-F. (2008). Other/Otherness. *International Encyclopedia of Human Geography*.
- Wilhelm, R. S. (2008). "Golden chalice, good to house a God": Still Life in The Road. *The Cormac McCarthy Journal Vol. 6*.