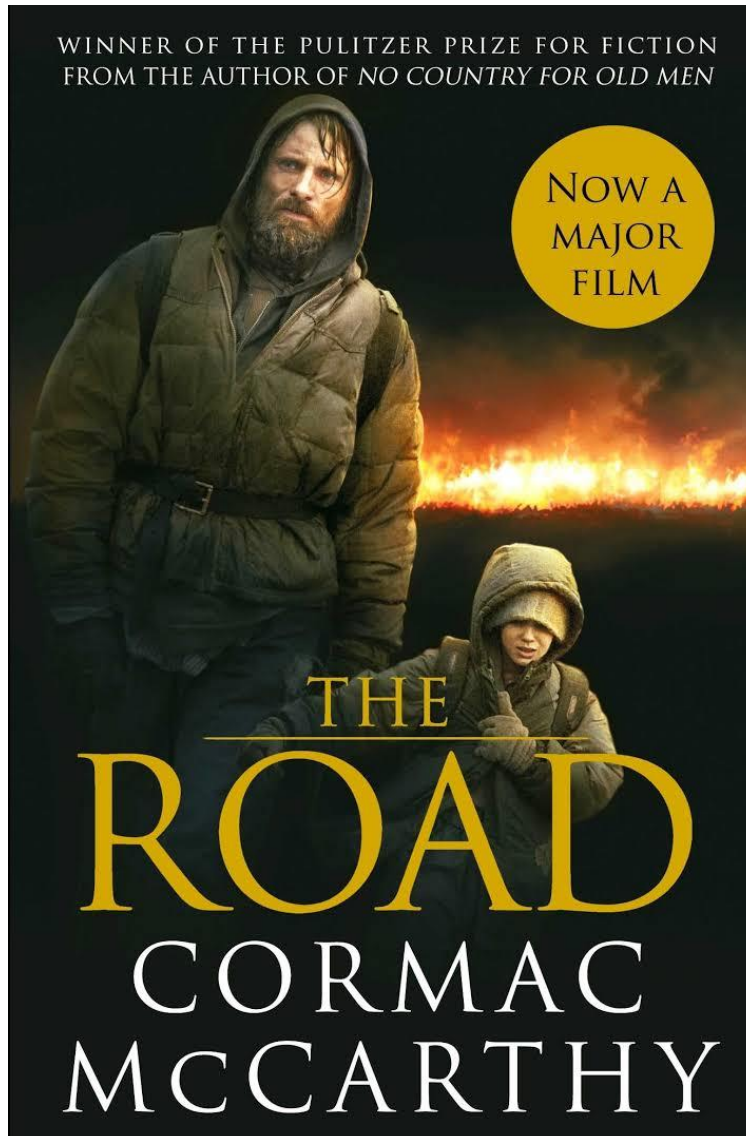


**The Theme of Isolation and Hope –
A Post-Apocalyptic View from McCarthy Cormac’s *The Road***

A. Shobana

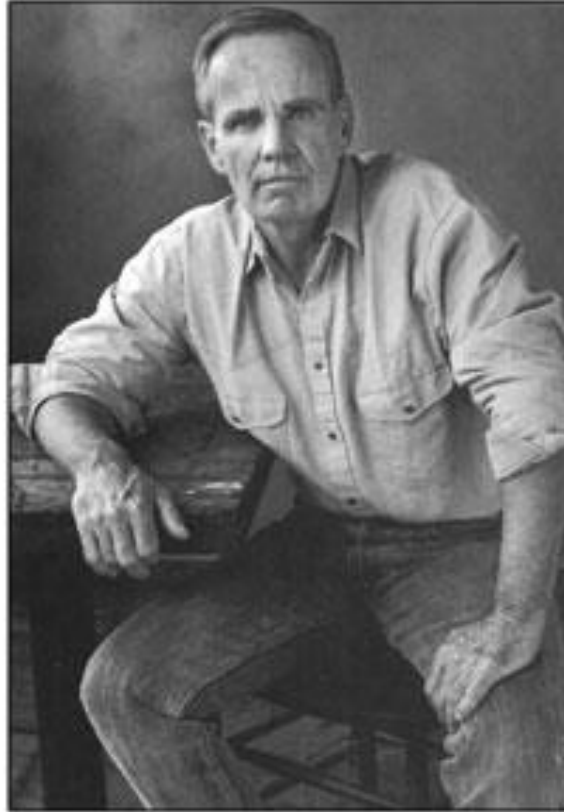


Courtesy: https://books.google.co.in/books/about/The_Road.html?id=WIKrD-GKehQC&source=kp_cover&redir_esc=y

Abstract

A mother is the most precious person in the life on everyone about which we cannot describe completely in the words. However, some of the valuable moments with our mother can be described. A mother is the most beautiful and caring person in our lives. She always cares every moment for our every need without any personal intention. The role of the mother in our lives is always different and precious than other involved in our life. Of course, we are truly loved and cared by our mothers every moment all through the day. She never wants back anything from her kids instead she loves us with open heart. Mother is unique in this world in the life of everyone's as a living goddess who always takes all the pains of her child and gives love and care. This paper reveals the true love and affection of a father towards his son in short. It's a post-apocalyptic journey of father and son. The novel describes the anxiety of the dying father for his son's future. He is cautious to protect his son from cannibals and murderers especially from negative aspects about future. As a responsible father, he instills faith and hope for the future in his son. The son is also successful in imbibing the lessons taught by his father and ready to face life with new hope by carrying the fire.

A father and his son walk alone through burned America. Nothing moves in the ravaged landscape save the ash on the wind. It is cold enough to crack stones, and when the snow falls it is grey. The sky is dark. Their destination is the coast, although they don't know what, if anything, awaits them there. They have nothing; just a pistol to defend themselves against the lawless bands that stalk the road, the clothes they are wearing, a cart of scavenged food and each other.



Dust jacket photo from
The Crossing, 1994.
Photo credit: Marion Ettlinger.
Used by permission.

Courtesy: <https://www.cormacmccarthy.com/biography/>

The Road

The Road is the profoundly moving story of a journey. It boldly imagines a future in which no hope remains, but in which the father and his son, "each the other's world entire," are sustained by love. Awesome in the totality of its vision, it is an unflinching meditation on the worst and the best that we are capable of ultimate destructiveness, desperate tenacity, and the tenderness that keeps two people alive in the face of total devastation. The novel starts with the sleeping boy and father who wear a face mask to protect them from some anonymous dangers. The name and place and period have never mentioned. The man who is protagonist dreams about the granitic beast chases them near black ancient lake than turned away from them. When the man's open his eyes he started to find some food for his kid.

Language in India www.languageinindia.com ISSN 1930-2940 18:3 March 2018

Dr. T. Deivasigamani, Editor: Vol. II Black Writings: A Subaltern Perspective

A. Shobana

291

The Theme of Isolation and Hope – A Post-Apocalyptic View from McCarthy Cormac's *The Road*

Surroundings - Questions

When the kid woke up, the land was barren, silent, and godless, so the kid starts to enquire about the surroundings, the protagonist uses binoculars to search for any signs of life, but he found none. The location was unsafe during the daytime because they were visible from the road. They stayed with their shopping cart and backpacks, which they used to carry necessary belongings, the boy and his father travel through the dead land, heading south. On their way they passed a gas station to collect some oil to light the lamp. When they settled in some safe place he asks his father to read stories. Before falling asleep, the boy asks his father whether they will die, to which his father replied, sometime, not now. He even says that he will be ready to die if his son wishes to die. He assures his son that this way they could stay together even after his death. After his son falls asleep, the father remains awake listening to the nothingness of the world.

Corpses Around

They passed through the city, the father holding their pistol close by. They saw corpse. The father remembers an idyllic day from his childhood with his uncle. They continued in the morning, and as they pass a barn, they discover three bodies hanging inside. The boy wishes to scavenge for items they might need, but his father does not allow him. The man also dreams about his dead wife continually about the death conformation of him, but he keeps on moving with kid. When they reached his old house, which is barren and spoiled, he remembered his past life, after three days they felt earthquake and moves from that house. They travelled across mountains, in the distance; they could see the forest fires raging in the mountains. The man, who is familiar with this part of the land, expects to reach the land. When the road is obstructed by fallen trees, they must unpack their cart, carry their belongings to the other side, and repack it. At night, the boy had a nightmare about a wind-up penguin that haunts the house they used to live in, moving without wounded up. After four days they discovered a river with a waterfall and enjoyed, despite the cold. In the woods, they found morsels a kind of mushroom, then settle down for the night, satisfied with their makeshift camp. The boy, having been born and become aware of the world after whatever the catastrophe was, does not know about the states and wonders what happened to them. The father cannot answer it.

At the Bridge

They make their way to a bridge that crosses the river; they followed the footprints which ended with dead bodies of half burned man who has been struck by lightning. The boy wishes to help the man, but his father refuses, thus upsetting the boy. One day, the father awakens alert, pistol in hand. He sees people approaching from distance so he hides their belongings and ran away with the boy and find the man from the truck standing only twenty feet away, The father pulls the pistol on the man and warned him not to call any other but he tries to kill his son so, The father shoots the man in the head, then grabs his son, puts him on his shoulders, and runs away. They continue on their journey, freezing cold, made the man coughing.

Camp Site

=====

Language in India www.languageinindia.com ISSN 1930-2940 18:3 March 2018

Dr. T. Deivasigamani, Editor: Vol. II Black Writings: A Subaltern Perspective

A. Shobana

292

The Theme of Isolation and Hope – A Post-Apocalyptic View from McCarthy Cormac's *The Road*

The man and boy came across the old campsite to warm them, but his father found the cart was plundered, he noticed that the truck crews are cannibals, because they left behind some boiled bones. The boy was frightened to seeing them. The father tells him there is “bay guys” but also some “good guys” he also diverts his mind by playing flute. He heard the barking of dog but promised his son that he will not kill the dog. They also met another kid leaving along with that burned man the kid wants to help him but as before his father does not allow him to help them. One morning, when the father awakes and sees a large group of people marching up behind him. The man and the boy tried to hide themselves and stationed close to the ground. They felt that they would not be visible from the road. From their hideout they could see people marching forward carrying deadly weapons, the wagons drawn by slave.

Cannibalism?

The boy seeks affirmation from the father that they would never resort to cannibalism, even if they were starving to death. His father reaffirms that they are the good guys and that they are carrying the fire. The boy wishes to help that little boy by joining him with their travelling, but the man is extremely cautious to save his son from dangers. In a tool shed, the father found the packets of seed, bunker full of untouched food, along with other useful items like utensils. They enjoyed a can of pears and peaches for dinner. The boy goes to sleep inside the bunker, while the man finds more useful items. They planned to move from that place in a couple of days meanwhile the man prepares some wooden bullets.

Burnt City

As they continued, they saw the remnants of a burnt city on the horizon. They stop on a hill, and the boy asked his father about their long-term goal, neither of them knows what their long-term goals. The protagonist saw a decoyed old man and followed it, they over taken the old man. His name was Ely who was ninety-nine years old but tactic. The kid had some deep compassion on him and convened his father to give food and protection. Ely has an extensive philosophical conversation with the man about the state of the world. He was surprised to saw little boy in the destructed world. The next morning, they gave some food and started their journey. The man’s cough worsens as they continue to travel. The boy discovers an abandoned train, which they explore. At one stop, the man examines his maps and determines that they are approximately two to three weeks away from reaching the sea. The father becomes ill with a bad fever, which frightens the boy greatly. They remain in one place for several days as the father waits out his sickness to be cured but not.

The man remembers a winter long ago, when he was slightly older than his son’s present age. One night, his son has a nightmare but refuses to describe it to his father. They continue to travel towards the sea, but the father is extremely weak. They come across a gruesome road where the people were killed on the road in a fire. The father tries to prevent his son from looking, but the boy was surprisingly serene. They decided to leave less trash behind so that anyone behind

them will not know they have a food supply. They make camp, and while the boy slept, the father sees a group of people, three men and a pregnant woman, who passed them by.

The next morning, the protagonists continue onwards. The next day before the wakes up the felt a kind of smoke with terrible smell the man surmises that the people were frightened of the man since they have a pistol. The people left quickly, their food still cooking, so the man and the boy examine the abandoned campsite. A shocking sight awaits them, which the boy notices that a headless black infant in that pot. The next couple of days they forgot the food.

They find a water source, and the boy runs ahead to drink from the water. The father notes that he has not seen his son run in a very long time. They see a house in the distance. The man insists they walk to the house to search for food. On the way, the man finds a few arrowheads and gives them to the boy to keep. Inside the house, they find very old cans of food. They make a fire in the fireplace, make dinner, and spend the night inside the house. The boy begs his father not to go to the second story of the house, but the man goes nonetheless. They find clothes in the bedroom. The two of them stay in the house for four days, and the man makes new clothes for his son. They also find a wheelbarrow, which they use upon leaving to transport their new set of blankets and canned foods. They finally reach the sea, but the ocean is not blue, which disappoints the boy. As they sit together on the beach, the boy wonders what lies beyond the ocean?

The man teaches to swims after the boy sleeps, the man stands on the beach and reminisces about his life when his wife was still alive. When he returns to their camp, the boy is awake and frightened. In the morning, they explore the beach. They come across an abandoned ship. While the boy keeps lookout on the beach with the pistol, the man swims out to the boat to explore it.

The ship is named Pajaro de Esperanza, or Bird of Hope, and hails from Tenerife, a Spanish island. The boat has not been ransacked, and while the sea apparently has destroyed most of its contents, it turns out that much remains. The man is able to retrieve some clothes for himself and the boy. He also recovers a toolbox, a bottle of gas and so on. The kid missed the pistol, but the next day, they spend the morning unloading goods from the ship. The father's cough continues to worsen. The man finds a flare pistol from the ship and a first aid kit. The son learns that the man has kept the flare pistol to shoot people, not to signal, because there is no one to signal. The boy wants to shoot it that night as a celebration.

A Message in the Sand

The boy suggests writing a message in the sand for the good guys, but the man mentions that the bad guys might see it. Thus, discourages the boy. The man says they could still write a letter. The boy becomes ill and vomits. The father gives him expired antibiotics from the ship's first aid kit. The boy remains sick for some time, and the father's health gets no better. The man agonizes over his son's illness. He sleeps restlessly. Eventually when he awakens, the boy is better, and his fever has broken. A couple of days later, the man and the boy continue to finesse their beach campsite. One day, the man sees prints in the sand as they return to their camp. They hurry back to their belongings, which have been completely damaged. The father decides to hunt down

the robbers, so they track the prints. The man with his pistol and warns the thief to step away from their cart. The boy begs his father not to kill the thief. So the father instead forces the thief to take off all of his clothes and put them in the cart. The man leaves the thief naked on the side of the road.

Attacks with Arrows

At the edge of one town, they were suddenly attacked with arrows by a man hiding in a building. The father is hit in the leg, but he manages to shoot the flare pistol at the building and set it on fire. The man tells the boy to remain with the cart in hiding, while he enters the house with the reloaded flare pistol. The man treats his wounded leg with the first aid kit. The kid conforms that his father didn't harm the arrow man. As they walk, the man coughs up increasing amounts of blood. Among the items left on the road they find a canvas bag and a suitcase, which they take with them. The man must stop to rest on an old couch by the road.

Near the River

After two more days of travel, the protagonists arrive at a broad river with a collapsed bridge. They raise a tarp for shelter and fall asleep in the next morning the man's cough worsening continuously. The man is bedridden. He refuses to eat his share of a can of a fruit, but the boy insists on saving his father's half for the next day. The boy tries to make a tent, but his father does not want to be covered. The man wishes to be able to see, to watch his son sit by the fire. While the boy investigates their surroundings, the man remains at the camp. When the boy returns, his father begs him to continue the journey with the pistol.

The boy refuses to leave without his father. The man assures the boy that he knows how to carry the fire, that the fire is real inside of the boy. The boy reminds his father that he promised never to leave him. The man promises his son that he can still always talk to his father, even if they are not physically together. The child travels down the road but then returns to his father, who sleeps. The boy talks to him and tries to listen for a response, then tries again. The father wakes up, still coughing. During the night, the boy holds his father. When the boy wakes up, his father is dead. The boy weeps, goes to the road, and then returns to his father's side to hold his hand, crying his name. The boy remains by his father for three days. Finally, he returns to the road. He notices that someone is approaching. The boy stands by the road with the pistol in his hand. He has piled blankets over the man's body.

A man with a shotgun approaches the boy and asks him about his father. The boy tells him that his father has died, and the man tells the boy to join him. The boy asks whether the man is one of the good guys. The man says yes and tells the boy to put away his pistol. The man asks the boy to show him his father's body, but the boy is unresponsive. The man reveals that he is with a larger group of people who have known about the man and the boy. They apparently discussed whether or not to check on the boy. The man adds that the boy must take a chance with them or else die with his father.

The boy asks him whether he also carries the fire, but the man does not understand. When asked a second time, however, he responds that he is indeed carrying the fire. The man reveals that he has two children (a boy and a girl) and a wife. He promises the boy that they are not cannibals. The boy decides to join the man and his family. The kid believed that his father could speak with him after his death. Because already he told death can't separate them. He has not only given love and affection to the child but had actually taught him to endure adversity and look forward to a bright and hopeful future.

I cannot think of any need in childhood as strong as the need for a father's protection by Sigmund Freud. The father of psychoanalysis that had analysed many theories which is related with emotional bonds like physical, psychological problem, accepts the value of father care on son early life revealed in the above quotation.

Apocalypticism of *The Road*

The apocalypticism of *The Road* seems to be a response to an immediate fear of disastrous doom in the United States after the terrorist attacks on September 11 2001 Dianne C. Luce claims that the novel "had its genesis in a very specific moment": McCarthy imagined the apocalyptic setting while staying in a hotel in El Paso with his young son, John Francis McCarthy," *The Road* has at its core the desire to drive the reader's imagination into contact with an extreme vision of an apocalypse-ravaged future America, there to discover what-if anything-remain. The desire to reconstruct the world by deconstructing it seems to reflect the fundamental fear underlying the novel, namely, the fear that human beings may not in fact deserve to survival.

The Twin tower attacks resulted in the deaths of 2,996 people, including the 19 hijackers and 2,977 victims. More than 90% of the workers and visitors who died in the towers had been at or above the points of impact. In the North Tower, 1,355 people at or above the point of impact were trapped and died of smoke inhalation, fell or jumped from the tower to escape the smoke and flames, or were killed in the building's eventual collapse. The destruction of all three staircases in the tower when Flight 11 hit made it impossible for anyone above the impact zone to escape. 107 people below the point of impact died as well.

Urban Search and Rescue Task Force German Shepherd dog works to uncover survivors at the site of the collapsed World Trade Center after the September 11, 2001 attacks. At least 200 people fell or jumped to their deaths from the burning towers landing on the streets and rooftops of adjacent buildings hundreds of feet below. Some occupants of each tower above the point of impact made their way toward the roof in hope of helicopter rescue, but the roof access doors were locked. No plan existed for helicopter rescues, and the combination of roof equipment and thick smoke and intense heat prevented helicopters from approaching. A total of 411 emergency workers died as they tried to rescue people and fight fires. More than 90 countries lost citizens in the attacks on the World Trade Center. Two people were added to the official death toll after dying from health conditions linked to exposure to dust from the collapse of the World Trade Center.

The people in US who were around the New York City much affected and question about the enigmatic future. They started to predict the days after the great collapse. McCarthy is one among the pragmatist in this situation which made him to think about post-apocalyptic life. Thus drove the author to set the novel. The novel describes the post-apocalyptic era, *The Road* tries to explore the very fabric of human conscience. It has been written by a well-tested author, known for his subtle depiction of human emotion and character and who is widely acclaimed as one of the best of his time. Cormac McCarthy, like his previous works, has tried to peep into the mind of his protagonist who is alienated from the world because of misfortunes and tragedies in his life, but chooses to carry on the burden of existence. With the depiction of apocalypse and chalking almost the saddest of his works so far, McCarthy has tried to bring about the very opinion he keeps of the world around him.

American Redemption

McCarthy uses the template of American redemption through the interactions between the father and son. Throughout the novel, the father attempts to construct a meaningful world for the son. He draws on two aspects of the redemptive framework, identity and mission. The elements of identity and mission are conveyed through the statements, repeated throughout: "Are we the good guys?" "We're carrying the fire."

In the first, the son frequently asks his father for assurance of their identity as "good guys." This is often coupled with the opposite: the identification of others that they encounter as the "bad guys." The father has designated the world in this way in order for the boy to assess their actions and encounters accordingly. Their identification as "good" explains, and even justifies, actions that may otherwise be questionable. The pathos lies in the fact that this moral structure no longer makes sense in this post-apocalyptic world. The boy first asks: "Are we still the good guys?" following an incident in which the father kills a man. At several pivotal points, the boy returns to this question with, we might interpret, growing awareness that good and bad can no longer be distinguished.

The second, "We're carrying the fire," is a statement of mission. Through this statement, the father has given their journey purpose. The implication is that someone is waiting to receive the fire that they bear. Traveling over the dull and ashen ground, the father counters the monotony of the landscape by ascribing a higher meaning to their travels.

Michael Chabon writes: "As they travel the father feeds his son a story, the nearest that he can come to a creed or a reason to keep on going: that he and his son are 'carrying the fire'" (24-25). It makes their existence necessary in a world in which necessity takes on its rawest form. There is a terrifying scene in which they encounter a group of survivors huddled in a cellar. From the half-burned body of one man, it is clear that they are staying alive by eating human flesh. The father and son do not talk about this encounter immediately, but after a short time, the son asks his father about it. "We won't ever eat anybody, will we?" The father assures him that they will not:

No matter what?
No. No matter what.

Because we're the good guys.
Yes.
And we're carrying the fire.
And we're carrying the fire. Yes.
Okay. (108-09)

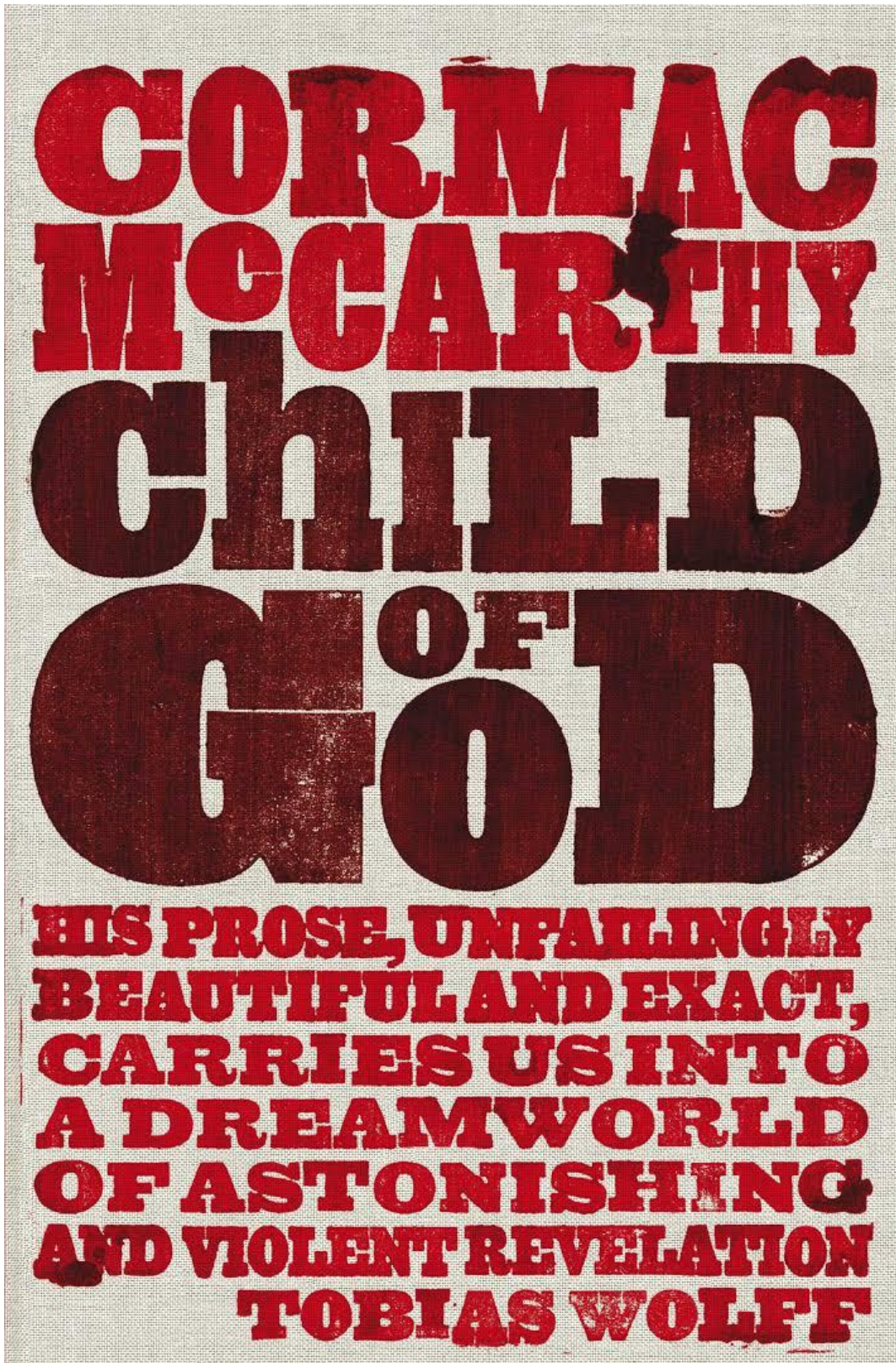
A critic Rune Graulund notes, the novel ends with a deus ex machina when the boy meets a family of friendly survivors, "validating the father's words concerning goodness in physical as well as conceptual form."

Issue of Hope

Many of the scholarly articles written on *The Road* have attempted to address the issue of hope. Shelley L. Rambo has claimed that, "McCarthy catches the reader in a schizophrenic, and distinctly American, post-apocalyptic crisis of meaning: between the craving for a happy ending and the recognition of its impossibility " (101). Rune Graulund shows that the novel can sustain several hopeful readings such that we can "invest our hopes either in nature, in humanity or in God" (76). However, he claims that we cannot simply choose one of these readings, because to do so would be to "ignore quite a few signs to the contrary" (76). Ashley Kunsu makes the case that the redemption found in the novel is ultimately a linguistic redemption.

Sense of Isolation and Hope of a New Life

Here the paper highlights two different views on life during the sense of isolation as a dying father who counting his days due to illness but increasing the hope of new life in his son's heart. He believes that he has a God-given duty to care for his son and that his son is a living sign of God's presence. His divine calling creates an ethical dilemma for the father, since in the world they inhabit, it appears that the kindest act a father can do for his child is to kill him or her before the child suffers too greatly. The last paragraph in *The Road* is full of hope for the boy and the earth's future.



Language in India www.languageinindia.com ISSN 1930-2940 18:3 March 2018

Dr. T. Deivasigamani, Editor: Vol. II *Black Writings: A Subaltern Perspective*

A. Shobana

299

The Theme of Isolation and Hope – A Post-Apocalyptic View from McCarthy Cormac's *The Road*

Courtesy: https://books.google.co.in/books/about/Child_of_God.html?id=zeauYKLTIEC&source=kp_cover&redir_esc=y

Bibliography

Arnold, Edwin T. and Dianna C. Luce “Introduction” perspective on Cormac McCarthy. Eds. UP of Mississippi, 1999.

Gunfighter, Nation: The Myth of the frontier in twentieth century America. New York: MacMillan, 1992.

Mccarthy, Cormac. *The Road*. New York. Vintage books 2007

Noble, Alan. The absurdity of hope in Cormac McCarthy’s *The Road*. south Atlantic Review 76.3(2011) academic on file web. 18 Oct 2014.
<http://www.cormacmccarthy.com/18june 2009>.

A. Shobana
Assistant Professor of English
Tagore College of Arts and Science
Chrompet
Chennai
Tamilnadu
India
ashobana87@gmail.com

Language in India www.languageinindia.com ISSN 1930-2940 **18:3 March 2018**

Dr. T. Deivasigamani, Editor: Vol. II Black Writings: A Subaltern Perspective

A. Shobana

300

The Theme of Isolation and Hope – A Post-Apocalyptic View from McCarthy Cormac’s *The Road*