
Reconciling the Void: An Analysis of McCarthy's *The Road* (2006)

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Abstract

Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* (2006) presents a stark, post-apocalyptic world stripped of structure, meaning, and divine presence, yet within this narrative of devastation lies a profound exploration of survival, love, and metaphysical reckoning. This paper investigates how the novel confronts the concept of "the void"—a space of absence, death, and spiritual silence—while simultaneously offering the possibility of reconciliation through human connection and moral perseverance. By analyzing the unnamed father and son's journey, the essay examines how their bond functions as a moral axis in a world where traditional systems of belief and ethics have collapsed. Through close textual analysis and philosophical reflection, the paper argues that *The Road* both acknowledges and resists nihilism: the void is not denied, but met with acts of care, memory, and storytelling. The narrative's sparse language and recurring imagery of fire, darkness, and silence are read as stylistic manifestations of McCarthy's existential concerns. Special attention is given to the novel's ending, particularly the trout passage, which offers a potential vision of beauty and permanence amidst ruin. This moment is interpreted not as resolution, but as a final gesture toward the unknowable—a symbolic reconciliation with the void that defines the novel's moral and metaphysical terrain. Drawing on existential and post-theological frameworks, the paper positions *The Road* as a literary meditation on endurance, meaning, and the remnants of faith in a disintegrated world.

Keywords: Cormac McCarthy, *The Road*, existentialism, the void, post-apocalyptic fiction, father-son relationship, metaphysical absence, reconciliation.

Whether one examines the Big Bang theory or delves into religious philosophy, clashes and contradictions among various forces have played a pivotal role in shaping the world. Throughout history and even in the present day, contradictions persist which lead to uncertainty, void, and chaos. To address this void, reconciliation becomes imperative. Reconciliation entails re-establishing compatibility between seemingly incompatible entities. It seeks to bridge the gulf that can emerge within societies or between different cultures and civilizations. Throughout history, humanity has endeavoured to reconcile these voids and overcome the divisions that threaten harmony and cohesion. However, as humanity has evolved, so too have concepts of emptiness, uncertainty, and chaos. Humans now scrutinize every aspect of their lives, turning once simple questions about seasons, surroundings, life, and death into complex inquiries about existence. It's not inaccurate to say that the more the human mind has developed, the more formidable the void has become. Culture production mirrors this void and one can observe the writers addressing the void and uncertainties of life in their works. Writers of the past founded certain fulcrums on which they established reconciliation of the void but in the wake of Postmodernism, those fulcra were dismantled. Postmodernism, as defined by Francois Lyotard, is "incredulity towards metanarratives". This incredulity robbed the contemporary writers of reconciliation; therefore, they seem struggling to reconcile the void in this era. The postmodern scenario has inverted the picture and has led humans to nowhere. Some people are opting to ignore the implications of postmodernism, while others struggle with a sense of powerlessness," (2006, p. 12). "Storytellers, like all of us, struggle with this complex condition in varied and vast ways." (2006, p. 12).

The present study is delimited to explore the ways McCarthy has incorporated to reconcile the void in his novel *The Road* (2006). McCarthy's writing delves deeply into human nature and psychology as he addresses profound and inherently serious issues with a grave tone (Bloom, 2009). McCarthy's works depict a melodramatic perspective on human life and existence through exploration of the perverse, grotesque, and extreme. His writing is saturated with themes of human suffering, massacre, bloodshed, nihilism, absurdism, and stoicism. *The Road* (2006) highlights the story of a son and his father who underwent the apocalypse and experienced it very closely. The novel portrays their struggle to survive in the post-apocalyptic wasteland. The characters' attempt to live in the area which apparently looks war affected has been portrayed. The setting, and diction of the novel adds in the overall tone of the novel which gets clear with the depiction of nuclear winter with scenes of dead animals and people. The frequent use of 'cold', 'empty', and 'grey' to describe the surroundings (McCarthy, 2006) can be traced in the novel. The negotiation to live and make sense in the deserted world which can be termed as 'new world' is depicted, and the survival technique and strategies to live seem to be the force taking people to extreme, leading them to killing, stealing and committing other unpardonable acts.

The present study argues while the world is angst due to the void, gulf, and chaos created by the incredulous nature of postmodernism, McCarthy's *The Road* (2006) reconciles the void bridges the gulf, and orders the chaos through religion, morality, and transcendentalism which not only provides possible solution to overcome the vague and complex condition of human society but also heals the wounds of humanity. To go about the

study, authors have certain questions in their minds like; What does lead to the creation of void in *The Road* (2006) by McCarthy? How does Transcendentalism reconcile the void in the novel? And in what ways do religion and morality overcome the void and heal the wounds of society in *The Road* (2006)? The authors have incorporated the theoretical underpinnings from Davies and Womack's work, *Postmodern Humanism in Contemporary Literature and Culture* 2006 to evaluate and answer the questions raised during research.

Throughout history, various ideologies and cultural transformations have attempted to foster harmony among humanity. However, postmodern theory has struggled to offer viable solutions to address the ambiguous and intricate state of human society through literature. In 2006, Davies and Womack disrupted this stagnation by publishing a treatise on *Postmodern Humanism in Literature*. They examined notable figures in postmodern literature who challenged conventional postmodern ideas and proposed methods to heal humanity's wounds. Davies and Womack synthesized their approaches in a manner that could serve as guiding principles for reconciliation. Prior to outlining the guiding principles, Davies and Womack dissected the obstacles hindering reconciliation. In their book "*Postmodern Humanism in Contemporary Literature and Culture*" (2006), they scrutinized prominent writers whom they believed pursued reconciliation. Drawing from their observations, they identified various devices and approaches capable of fostering new dialogues to create significance. They crafted a concise and conceptual framework encompassing all potential methods for reconciling the 'void'. They propose that reconciling the void doesn't entail a total triumph over it; instead, they suggest that their dialogue could yield some meaning (2006, p. 23). They identify two main tenets of reconciliation: Transcendentalism and Religion and Humanism.

Davis and Womack emphasize the significance of Emersonian transcendentalism as a potential avenue for reconciling the void. To comprehend Emersonian transcendentalism, it's essential to explore its etymology. Rooted in Latin, the term "transcendentalism" signifies "passing over" or "climbing beyond." Reflecting on the notion of transcending, it implies the existence of two realms: one to surpass and another to ascend beyond. From this perspective, all transcendental thoughts inherently involve dualistic concepts. According to encyclopedic definitions, transcendental or transcendent concepts aim to surpass the realm of finite and conditioned existence, leading to the infinite and unconditioned. Through transcendence, one attains insight into religion and metaphysics. In essence, to attain knowledge of the divine, one must transcend the limitations of finite existence. The boundaries of self-consciousness present barriers to this quest for discovery (1948, p. 405). Davis and Womack argue that postmodern theory overlooks the concept of transcendentalism, asserting that it enables individuals to rise above their physical constraints to comprehend the mysteries and complexities surrounding them. They contend that the transcendental approach liberates individuals from the confines of the 'self,' encouraging them to perceive things beyond their limited perspectives. This approach offers a potential resolution to the world's conflicts by eluding rigid theoretical frameworks and ideological constraints, embracing Emerson's notion of the 'ever-present now' (2006, p. 38). Transcendence typically occurs through self-reliance, meditation, epiphanies, or empathizing with the suffering of others. An analogy can elucidate how individuals transcend their surroundings: just as a wave in the ocean symbolizes human

consciousness while the ocean represents the subconscious, when individuals transcend their surroundings, they immerse themselves in the ocean, shedding their conscious identities and merging with the collective. By becoming part of the ocean, they become aware of the existence of other particles, acknowledge their presence, and integrate with them. This leads to increased tolerance, space-giving, and acceptance of diverse ideas, as individuals emerge from the confines of their personal ideologies.

Davies and Womack think that religion has an impetus to offer reconciliation to jangling issues of the postmodern era. They believe that restoring the belief in God and Christ can give hope even in this scenario. They, by giving the example of the movie 'Magnolia', assert that in the fight of good and evil, only the good can have Divine help. For them, acknowledging the presence of God, seeking his light, supporting the good in the fight between good and evil can make this man a new Adam. They criticize the postmodern narrative which has made simple notions of love and redemption impossible and complex. They believe that the writer of Magnolia first sends his characters into the darkness or void of postmodernism, then, convinces them to alter their situation through music, and their "joyous leap into coincidences" (p. 156). The characters lose themselves in the music of the church; they find music- a symbol of order and harmony- unlike their chaotic world. That's why Davies and Womack endorse the importance of religion to overcome the void of postmodernism.

A void is a situation where everything is in chaos and uncertainty, where there is no respect, tolerance, or reverence between two antagonistic views, where anarchy reigns and man's existence is at stake (Davies and Womack, 2006). The lexical meaning of void is gap, gulf, or vacuum. The word 'void' has been used by Womack and Davies in its literal meaning. For them, 'void' is chaos where one does not find meaning, hope, and aim in life (2006). They have taken void as a chaotic situation in postmodern. They have explored the works of many writers who have depicted voids in their works like Harrison, Irving, and Ansler. According to their approach, a void is a human condition of suffering, complexities, and miseries.

Reconciliation involves reintroducing compatibility between two seemingly incompatible entities, bridging the gap between opposing dialogues where both extremes begin to consider each other's viewpoints (Demastes, 1998). In human societies, this process is vital, as contradictions and variations frequently result in fragmentation within relationships, ideas, philosophies, and concepts. Demastes (1998) argues that our existence involves a "necessary interplay between order and disorder," contrasting the views of Aristotle, Descartes, and Galileo, who condemn chaos as inherently malevolent and destructive. He proposes that dwelling solely in either extreme is nearly impossible. Moreover, he prompts anthropology, science, and literature to endeavor to reconcile opposing extremes. Rejecting the dichotomy of either/or and linear thinking, Demastes underscores the coexistence of contradictory realms. Failure to acknowledge the nature of one's existence and circumstances often leads to disaster, as exemplified in Arthur Miller's *Death Of A Salesman* (1976), where Willie Lowman grapples with balancing his roles as both a devoted father and a successful businessman (Demastes, 1998).

Since ancient times, literature has grappled with the overarching theme of humanity and it has encompassed its myriad facets such as war, good and evil, love and hate, pessimism and optimism, all under the auspices of a divine power (Lock, 2008). Humans

have perennially sought answers about their surroundings, seasons, life, and death, turning to storytelling as a means of grappling with their uncertainties and disorderly existence (Lock, 2008). These stories often featured gods, goddesses, monsters, and spirits wielding extreme power over human lives (Lock, 2008). As Greek civilization progressed, questions about the relationship between humans and gods, as well as the influence of fate on human existence, led to uncertainties and complexities (Silberman, 1986). Literature emerged as a tool to reconcile these existential dilemmas, with tragedians like Euripides, Aeschylus, and Sophocles delving deeply into these issues to elucidate the connection between humanity and divinity. During the Renaissance, writers championed the freedom of humanity from the constraints imposed by clerics, eventually sidelining religion altogether. However, there was a subsequent acknowledgment of the role of religion in human life, and writers illustrated the consequences of excessive humanism and liberation, where humanity ran unrestrained.

In the realm of modern literature, there is a palpable sense of lamentation among humanists, critics, and writers regarding the stark depiction of the demise of humanism, the void of meaning, and the prevailing uncertainty portrayed in works such as modern novels, expressionistic plays, and Absurd theatre (Esslin, 1969). Gallagher (1986) articulates the prevailing sentiment that the modern age is characterized by a pervasive atmosphere of despair and distress, resulting in a profound sense of emptiness and existential void. Barbara's critique of Yeats' *The Second Coming* underscores the perceived shortcomings of what she terms as "naturalistic modernism" of the twentieth century, where the absence of God and morality leaves behind a landscape of bleakness and pitilessness (Review, 99).

Strindberg's analysis in "The Crisis of Beliefs in Modern Literature" (1964) offers a profound reflection on the human condition in the modern era. Drawing a parallel between Dante's Hell and the ethos of modernism, Strindberg suggests that medieval man, shielded by unwavering belief, could avert despair by turning away from the metaphorical gaze of Medusa, the symbol of despair. In contrast, modern man, lacking such steadfast beliefs, confronts despair head-on, leading to a profound existential crisis. This crisis manifests in various forms, encompassing despair of self, of others, of civilization's purpose, and even despair concerning the very existence and benevolence of God (Strindberg, p. 475). Modern writers, having gazed into the eyes of Medusa, find themselves despairing due to their lack of beliefs. T.S. Eliot mourns the woeful state of modern humanity, and depicts them as 'hollow' and 'stuffed' individuals with heads filled with straw, languishing in Limbo (Williamson, 1979, p. 18). Similarly, Eliot, like Strindberg, attributes the root cause of modern despair to a lack of belief. Early modern writer G.B. Shaw responds to this despair and emptiness by advocating for the concept of a Supreme Being or super-humanism, akin to Nietzsche's idea of the Superman. Shaw frequently portrays his super being in his plays, asserting that the evolution of a moral vision is the only solution to the crisis of belief which ultimately elevates humanity to rational heights. He envisions his superman devoid of illogicality, dogmatism, and irrationality (Strindberg, p. 481).

In the annals of English literature, a pivotal juncture arose when the traditional tenets of humanism, rationality, and universal values espoused by writers, philosophers, and politicians failed to satiate human beings. Particularly from the 1960s onwards, a cadre of philosophers emerged, challenging prevailing beliefs, values, norms, and the purported ideals of humanism with unwavering skepticism. They contended that the lofty slogans of humanism rang hollow, and the prospect of genuine improvement seemed increasingly

remote. Instead, they posited that the world was characterized by chaos, fragmentation, and fluidity, thereby challenging grand narratives and meta-narratives (Introduction, Cambridge Companion, 2004). Socio-political shifts, including advancements in technology, the rise of the internet fostering cultural blending. Deconstruction, a concept by Derrida, undermines established centers of religious, political, and racial discourses, propels the human psyche into a postmodern milieu characterized by disintegration, amalgamation, and identity instability. Pertaining to this, Vaclav Havel who was President of the Czech Republic, observed in 1994, "This (above) state of mind or the human world is (terms as) postmodernism" (2002).

In the realm of postmodern fiction, Aldridge, in *The American Novel and the Way We Live Now* (1983), observes a trend towards extreme distortion, rendering it nearly impossible to trace characters and events back to any real-world origins or norms of rationality. The usual standards of believability and mental stability no longer apply, as characters inhabit an unstructured realm where their actions are unpredictably random and inescapable, symbolizing an inexplicable and immeasurable madness (Sim, 2001, p. 123). Writers like Marquez in *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (1970) and Calvino in *Invisible Cities* (1978) similarly challenge traditional storytelling conventions by composing their narratives in fragments, thereby blurring the boundaries between art and life due to the fragmentation of existence. William Borrough's *Naked Lunch* (1992) explicitly depicts the human condition, with the circularity of the plot symbolizing the labyrinth of life that leads nowhere. The protagonist's futile struggle with drug addiction mirrors the unresolved clashes and conflicts of multiple parties, delving into aspects of human psychology often left untouched and considered undiscoverable (Borrough, 1992, p. 39). Kundera, another postmodern writer, explores the hollow slogans of individual liberation in his society and the false promises of communism, which lead to the disintegration of human relationships by projecting these themes in his works (Bloom, 2002, p. 33). McCarthy, an American writer, is known for his exploration of violence, nihilism, and absurdism in works such as the *Border Trilogy* and *Blood Meridian*, which vividly depict human cruelty, brutality, selfishness, and dishonesty (Bloom, 2009, p. 14).

If one pays heed to history, almost all writers tried to reconcile the void but when it comes to the postmodern era, writers struggle to reconcile. This aspect opens the gates for the researchers to look into whether none of the writers in the postmodern era tried to reconcile or were there some writers who tried and worked to get the boat out of troubled waters. If there exist some writers who tried to reconcile, what approaches did they incorporate and how far were they able to reconcile the void in the postmodern era? Therefore, the present study aims to find the void and approaches *The Road* (2006) by McCarthy to analyze if the novel tries to reconcile the void created due to Postmodernism.

McCarthy's novels often incorporate picaresque elements, with characters traversing landscapes fraught with chaos and uncertainty. The settings of his novels typically portray a postmodern void, with characters often depicted as men on the road searching for shelter, a destination, or attempting to escape some form of apocalypse. In *The Road* (2006), for instance, a father and his son navigate a desolate, ash-covered world devoid of food, shelter, technology, or civilization, where they are pursued by cannibals. Wood describes the novel's setting as an anarchic landscape where the sun has been blotted from the sky (Wood, 2009, p. 14). Critics have debated the significance of God and religion in McCarthy's work,

particularly in *The Road* (2006). Some argue that the novel portrays a godless world, with McCarthy exploring themes of despair and nihilism. Clute posits that the primary enigma of the novel lies in the absence of God, stating that It is a narrative that one cannot conceive of as being salvaged by a Christ. He adds, "It is a story about the end of the world in which the world ends" (Clute, 2006, p. 497). However, others contend that McCarthy's inclusion of religious themes, including references to Christ, suggests a journey towards reconciliation and survival. Despite the ambivalence and contradictions, the role of God and religion in the novel remains a point of contention among critics, with some viewing it as a story of nothingness and despair, while others interpret it as a quest for moral choice and redemption.

In *The Road* (2006), the absence of God and religion, as highlighted by setting, dialogues and characters, present a world that is "barren, silent, and godless. As snow falls, the narrator describes the protagonist catching a snowflake and watching it expire in his hand "like the last host of Christendom" (McCarthy, 2006). This imagery suggests a universe devoid of divine presence. McCarthy has deliberately created such a void to underscore the need for reconciliation. By portraying a world that appears irredeemable and devoid of God, he sets the stage for the exploration of themes related to redemption and survival in the face of overwhelming despair. Thus, the absence of a Godly universe becomes a crucial element in McCarthy's narrative which emphasizes the characters' journey towards reconciliation amidst chaos and uncertainty.

However, McCarthy utilizes the depiction of the father and the son as the "good guys" to underscore his stance on the concept of God. These characters embody the dwindling virtue amidst a backdrop of turmoil and malevolence. Ely, an aged figure encountered by the father and son, could symbolically represent a divine messenger. Described with traits reminiscent of Buddha and speaking in a prophetic manner, Ely's presence hints at the potential existence of a higher power within the narrative. Despite the harsh wilderness they inhabit, Ely retains some semblance of human values. Since goodness is both a moral and religious value, the presentation of goodness amidst the chaos and void of the world, and its survival, albeit with difficulty, suggests a path towards reconciliation. The existence of characters who embody goodness in such a bleak landscape hints at the possibility of finding redemption and meaning even in the face of overwhelming despair..

McCarthy's depiction of character of father and son holds significant implications throughout the novel. He presents a constant struggle between good and evil, symbolizing the dwindling goodness in the chaotic world and contrasting it with the malevolent forces represented by "the cannibals." Even the description of the environment in which the father and son must survive carries negative connotations. In the opening scene, a dark and bleak landscape is depicted, with nights growing darker and days becoming increasingly gray (McCarthy, 2006, p. 3). The survival of goodness, rooted in religious and moral values, serves as McCarthy's attempt to reconcile the void. Both the father and the son demonstrate compassionate hearts, with the son expressing a desire to share food and clothing to help others survive (McCarthy, 2006, pp. 260-278). Another example of goodness is seen in the father's sacrificial act to save his son's life. Despite his injuries, the father encourages his son to leave him behind, expressing faith that goodness will ultimately prevail: "Goodness will find the little boy. It always has. It will again" (McCarthy, 2006, p. 281).

Clute's assertion that *The Road* is "a story about the end of the world in which the world ends" ("The End of the Road," *Science Fiction Weekly*, p. 497) overlooks the nuanced portrayal of hope and redemption in McCarthy's narrative. The presence of a mother-like woman who affectionately embraces the boy contradicts the notion of a complete apocalypse. As Ellis notes, the ending provides a rare instance in McCarthy's novels where a full family unit is depicted: "provides us for the first time in a McCarthy novel with a full family" (Ellis, 2006, p. 37). The survival of the boy, characterized by his compassionate heart and embodiment of religious and moral values, serves as a pathway to reconciliation. Allegorically, the boy can be interpreted as a Christ-like figure. The father perceives the boy's anointed hair akin to that of the Messiah, and the boy himself prophetically claims to carry the fire, symbolizing light, knowledge, and divine inspiration: "Yes I am..... I am the one" (McCarthy, 2006, p. 281). The use of biblical language and imagery further reinforces this interpretation, echoing Christ's proclamations in the New Testament (John 14:6, 10:7, 10:11, 8:12; Revelation 1:8).

McCarthy employs the term "Salitter," meaning Divine Essence, a concept associated with Jacob Boehme, a Lutheran mystic, to underscore the presence of God in the narrative: "Divine Essence" (McCarthy, 2006). Clute himself acknowledges the transcendent nature of the Christ figure, suggesting a need for the divine to persist in the earthly realm: "the Christ figure must somehow be seen – be felt – to transcend the drying of the divine out of the earth" (Clute, 2006). However, he contends that the boy's character does not fully compensate for the absence of God. Yet, the image of the boy glowing like a tabernacle in the wasteland as the father gazes at him in his final moments suggests a profound spiritual significance: "glowing in that waste like a tabernacle" (McCarthy, 2006, p. 273). The term "tabernacle," traditionally associated with places of worship in various religions, implies a sacred presence and underscores the boy's role as a beacon of hope and redemption amidst the desolation. This evocation of religious imagery suggests that, despite the absence of explicit divine intervention, a sense of spiritual transcendence persists in the narrative, offering solace and meaning in a world ravaged by darkness and despair.

In contemplating whether the father's state is one of delirium or divinity, the absence of textual evidence pointing to delirium prompts consideration of divine elements within McCarthy's narrative. Through the use of terminology associated with divinity like "Salitter" and "Tabernacle," McCarthy subtly suggests a presence of the divine (McCarthy, 2006). The father's parting words, imbued with hope and hinting at the potential of divine intervention, further underscore this notion: "Goodness will find the little boy. It always has. It will again" (McCarthy, 2006, p. 281). Following the father's passing, the boy finds refuge with Parka-man and his companion, who imparts teachings about God to him: "The breath of God was his breath" (McCarthy, 2006, p. 286). McCarthy not only ensures the boy's survival but also introduces him to a nurturing maternal figure, which symbolises a restoration and compensation for the loss of his mother earlier in the novel. The mother's role in elucidating the inexplicable to the boy metaphorically echoes divinity, drawing parallels to Mary, a significant figure within the Trinity.

Despite the novel's bleakness, it concludes with the union of the mother and the son, symbolizing a reunion of man and Mother Earth. The boy, having reached a point where he can identify God, finds relief in the embrace of the mother figure: "She said that the breath of God was his breath yet though it passes from man to man through all of time" (McCarthy,

2006, p. 286). McCarthy suggests that divine inspiration or the life force will continue to flow through humanity, making goodness possible even in the chaotic world. While goodness may not exist in abundance during this bleak period, Davies and Womack believe that the acknowledgment of God or divinity can serve as a ray of hope, inspiring a desire to live and strive for reconciliation. Though it may not lead to perfect reconciliation, it provides something to live for. Thus, McCarthy's portrayal implies a belief in God, at least for the purpose of healing wounds and maintaining hope for the future.

In *The Road* (2006), McCarthy portrays the protagonists as "Good Guys" who do not have cannibalistic tendencies like his other protagonists. In this novel, his protagonists search for others who share their ethical values. Despite the bleak and inhumane world they inhabit, they embody humanity, ethics, and a semblance of goodness amidst pervasive darkness. The narrative presents a constant struggle between good and evil, with the protagonists steadfastly upholding human values such as love, sacrifice, and selflessness. Through the character of the father, McCarthy underscores the persistence of ethical narratives in the postmodern era, offering a glimmer of hope amidst widespread catastrophe. The father's unwavering commitment to protecting and nurturing his son reflects a sense of divine duty and moral obligation: "My job is to take care of you... I was appointed to do that by God. I will kill anyone who touches you" (McCarthy, 2006, p. 65).

Their journey mirrors spiritual quests, akin to Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* (2003), as they navigate moral challenges and violence while striving to maintain their humanity. Their quest can be interpreted as an attempt to restore pre-void religious ethics in a world devoid of moral clarity, where the act of naming things becomes crucial in distinguishing between good and evil. The encounter with Ely highlights the significance of names in attributing accountability and identity. Ely's refusal to disclose his true name reflects a fear of misrepresentation and loss of individuality, emphasizing the importance of maintaining one's identity in a dehumanizing environment: "I couldn't trust you with it... I mean, you could talk about me maybe. But nobody could say that it was me. I could be anybody" (McCarthy, 2006, pp. 144–45).

Davies and Womack propose another avenue for reconciliation through transcendentalism. While acknowledging that Emersonian transcendentalism may not be readily apparent in its purest form in the postmodern context, they identify elements such as self-reliance and the pursuit of dignity that resonate in postmodern literature, particularly evident in McCarthy's *The Road* (2006). The novel explores themes of survival, juxtaposing morally acceptable and unacceptable means of staying alive in a world ravaged by apocalypse. The characters' humanity and moral integrity come under scrutiny, notably when the boy questions whether their desperate actions still uphold goodness. This moment of introspection marks a significant juncture in their journey of enlightenment, where self-assessment becomes paramount, prompting even the father to reevaluate his actions. Tensions escalate when the boy, clinging to his innocence, witnesses the blurred distinction between "good" and "bad" in their harsh reality, especially as his father resorts to aggressive measures like robbery to ensure their survival. The father's justification—"I wasn't going to kill him"—is met with the boy's poignant observation: "but we did kill him" (McCarthy, 2006, p. 278). The son's discomfort serves as a beacon of humanity amidst the chaos, challenging his father's single-minded focus on survival and protection. This conflict represents a deeper phase in their existential journey, where empathy for others begins to permeate the father's

self-interest. It signifies a transcendental shift, wherein the individual transcends personal concerns to empathize with others, recognizing their shared humanity.

In "Hospitality in Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*", Snyder discusses the stark contrast between the boy's compassionate nature and the harshness of the world around them. The boy's generous and kindly demeanor in the face of a savage world, where survival often means viewing others as a source of food, symbolizes a hope for a rejuvenated society. In a particularly tough situation with a thief, the boy advocates for mercy, embodying the type of civil behavior that lays the foundation for a nascent civilization. The "fire" he carries is symbolic of the lingering presence of humanity and the prospect of a brighter future. The boy's potential to spread a renewed sense of humanity and altruism is a flicker of light in their grim reality. Unlike the encounters with hostility that punctuate their journey, the boy ultimately experiences an act of generosity, a solitary moment of true human connection that stands out in the narrative. However, he experiences multiple problems because of this. Snyder is of the view that when one presents oneself as generous and 'friendly' in an unfriendly world, it gives rise to many problems. Demonstrating hospitality can sometimes be misconstrued as naivety which potentially can lead a survivor into perilous situations. For instance, pushing a trolley brimming with supplies in a post-apocalyptic wasteland can inadvertently advertise one's vulnerability to other, less benevolent survivors. In this scenario, the boy's inherent kindness could easily be exploited by those with malicious intent. This dynamic also highlights the interdependence between the man and the boy. While the boy relies on the man for guidance, resilience, and survival instincts, the man equally depends on the boy for his moral compass, optimism, and civility. Without each other, they may struggle to navigate the dangers of their harsh environment. In considering the boy's fate alone, it raises the question of whether he would fare well or fall victim to cunning individuals posing as needy survivors. The ethical dilemma between extending kindness or prioritizing self-preservation is a recurring theme. Ultimately, the challenges of maintaining goodwill and generosity in such dire circumstances underscore the harsh reality of Snyder's observation: the remaining populace is hostile and dangerous, especially for a child. These trials reflect the struggles inherent in a journey of transcendence, where one must continually grapple with faith and spiritual conviction amidst adversity.

The ending of the novel *The Road* (2006) is very crucial as the boy makes the decision to go along the family who watches him mourning by the dead body of his father. This decision can be taken as the new beginning. This point highlights the dichotomy of good-bad survival. Prior to this, father and son discover a house with a cellar filled with people while exploring the post-apocalyptic wasteland. They were shocked to know that the people in the cellar are the food. This highlights the shortage of the food which has made people to resort to "bad survival". The decision to 'bad survival' means to focus completely on staying alive without considering morality. It simply means to survive in a self-centred way only for oneself. It is the apocalypse that can be assumed to be the driving force behind compelling the people to adopt bad survival strategy that it is better to slaughter and eat other by resorting to cannibalism than to die. There are certain scenes in the novel where the instances of such claims can be traced. For instance, the scene where the father and the son go towards the smoke and reach to a little clearing. There was nothing and the occupants have taken everything with them. The son there sees a charred human infant with no head who was blackening on the spit. He stoops over and picks it up. "I'm sorry, he whispered.

I'm sorry" (McCarthy, 2006, p. 211). Although both the father and the son are "hungry all the time" (p. 32), yet they disgusted such acts and get shocked to witness such crimes against nature. This scene serves as an epiphany, a transcendental moment, as the father confronts the harsh realities of their existence and undergoes a profound transformation. It reinforces his earlier affirmation to his son's question, "Are we still the good guys?" to which he responded, "Yes, we're still the good guys. And we always will be" (McCarthy, 2006, p. 81). Despite their extreme hunger, they refuse to compromise their moral integrity, maintaining their identity as "good guys." Mullins (2012) raises poignant questions about the essence of humanity when survival instincts overshadow moral and ethical considerations. He challenges whether any rules exist when an individual's survival is at stake. Despite encountering cannibalism twice in the novel, both the father and son adamantly reject it, opting instead for empathy and compassion. In light of Mullins' inquiry, they exemplify the epitome of "good guys." In essence, the journey of the father and son represents a transcendental quest for reconciling the void. Despite facing adversity and temptation, they remain steadfast in their empathy and unwavering faith. Their willingness to sacrifice personal interests for the greater cause of humanity epitomizes the transcendental journey towards reconciliation.

In the realm of contemporary literature, Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* (2006) stands as a powerful testament to the human spirit's capacity for resilience and redemption amidst the direst of circumstances. This research article has delved deeply into the thematic underpinnings of the novel, drawing upon the insightful framework provided by Davies and Womack's exploration of postmodern humanism. In a world characterized by skepticism towards overarching narratives and a pervasive sense of existential void, *The Road* (2006) emerges as a beacon of hope, offering a nuanced portrayal of reconciliation and transcendence. Through the lens of religion, morality, and transcendentalism, McCarthy's narrative navigates the complexities of human existence, illuminating the path towards healing and renewal. At its core, the novel grapples with the clash between despair and hope, chaos and order, darkness and light. Through the journey of the protagonist and his son, readers are confronted with the harsh realities of a post-apocalyptic world while simultaneously witnessing moments of profound tenderness and connection. It is within these moments of connection—forged through acts of kindness, compassion, and unwavering faith—that the void created by postmodern skepticism begins to dissolve. Moreover, this research article underscores the transformative power of literature in shaping our understanding of the human condition. By engaging with *The Road* (2006) through a theoretical lens informed by postmodern humanism, we gain deeper insights into the potential of literature to bridge divides, challenge assumptions, and ultimately, offer a semblance of meaning and purpose in a seemingly indifferent world. In conclusion, *The Road* (2006) serves as a poignant reminder of the enduring resilience of the human spirit, even in the face of unimaginable adversity. Through its exploration of reconciliation and transcendence, the novel not only offers a narrative of survival but also a profound meditation on the essence of humanity itself.

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