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The Illustrated Utopian Society in *the Road* and *the Postman* by David Brin and Cormac McCarthy

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ABSTRACT

For a long time, people were fascinated with imagination, how the world would be like, especially after occurring a catastrophe that leads to the earth-shattering event. The concept of doomsday has religious dimensions. Similarly, the apocalyptic concept poses a threat of catastrophes that might happen in the future. Generally, what people are curious about is whether human race can survive or not. The apocalyptic concept in fiction has a distinct remoteness including nuclear war, natural disasters, human overpopulation, and destruction of the environment, the wrath of God, alien invasion, or mysterious and unknown forces. Basically, the stories of apocalyptic genre contain a horrible event exposing the events in such a consternation way which is not for the advancement of the story, but it shows the depiction of people coping with the degradation of society. Some of the apocalyptic stories happen suddenly and cause a trauma. Both of the books that mentioned in this article share the same trait. In *the road*, an ambiguous apocalyptic event afflict is unknown to the reader. On the other hand, in *the postman*, there is a trait of trauma although, the apocalyptic event happens because of a devastating war still, no one can believe that great America has fallen down. The features of this genre are to expose what people do when all the social structures have previously known are gone. Thus, this paper focuses on the illustrated utopian society by both of the authors. There are several common themes between both of the books. But this study confirms to examine the utopian trait in the post-apocalyptic story and how the authors attempt to optimize the catastrophe in order to spread hope and optimism.

Key Words: Post-apocalyptic, apocalypse, optimism, *the road*, utopian, society, *the postman*.

1. Introduction

When the planet becomes a wild land of the destroyed building, and the civilization collapsed, a million of bodies are dispersed around, nature is silent and dark as well as the power grid is gone and everything appears dark. This is the image that comes to everyone's mind when we hear about an apocalypse story. Throughout human's history, people are fascinated with stories about the end of the world and the most controversial subject is how human race could survive. Thus, science fiction and all the stories about the apocalypse and post-apocalyptic provide people with a vivid imagination to

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the future. However, the majority of apocalypse novels or even those that discuss the issue of climate change are dystopian. In another word, this genre called climate fiction, but the climate fiction novels are also could be utopian and spread optimism to the readers. This is the field that this study attempts to highlight. It cannot be denied that recently human's activates constitute a serious danger to the future of this planet. Thus, the estimation of negative predictions is largely increasing. The genre of climate change poses creative challenges between nature and human. As well as it considers the effects of human being on this planet and other species. Further, the concept of the words dystopian and utopian should be defined in order to distinguish between them. Thomas More is the more profound of the utopian term, so the word utopian could refer to an imaginary island that he crafted in his book with the same name which built the foundation that modern utopias stand on. The most common idea is that a utopia is merely a world that is ideal, a sort of heaven on earth. Whereas dystopia is often thought to be its exact opposite, nothing but misery awaits mankind and the world has plunged its way into dark days. Moreover, the concept of the word is not limited to a place it could be a perspective or mindset. Both of the concepts are practically affected the human being. They exist in many different literary works especially the works that belong to the apocalyptic genre are dominated by dystopian atmosphere rather than the utopian atmosphere (Dündar 4-6). Commonly, the majority of apocalypse novels are posed the environmental problems and natural disasters, because this issue forms a serious danger to humanity's future. Concerning a natural problem as global warming, it might end up the world in future. Global warming might cause huge disasters as refugee crisis as a result of Caribbean nations flood. Scholars proclaim that the agriculture production will reduce as a result of global warming then the world will face a shortage of food. These are basic assumptions about global warming's effect on future. Yet the factors that increase global warming are not reduced or abolished. The assumptions of happening a catastrophe in future are inevitable (The Death of Environmentalism 14-15). Mankind harmed the nature by their activities. The idea of the apocalypse is familiar to people as well, David Brin in his novel *existence* defines this tendency of human to know about the end of the world or about the doomsday. He explains the desire of men kind of discovering all the stories that related to doomsday, also e claims that the notion that the past is always better than now and also it is preferable over the future. Hence he describes that there is a notion of Schadenfreude drives the popularity of apocalyptic stories, human find pleasure in imagining bad things happen as well as it is not happening to them:

Men and women have always been attracted to stories about ultimate doom, from the Books of Daniel and Revelation to Ragnarok, from Mayan cycles to Nostradamus, from Dr. Strange love to live With People Perhaps, there is an element of Schadenfreude, or deriving abstract: pleasure from the troubles of others even if those others will be your own descendants. Or else, some may feel stimulated to relish what they have, in the precious here -and -now, especially if our lives and comforts appear to be on temporary loan from a capricious universe. For billions of people, nostalgia fascinates with the notion that the past is always better and preferable over the future. (Brin 126)

2. *The Road*

2.1. Utopian trait in *The Road*:

Utopias perspective takes its place in literature from a long time. Turn back to history we observe that the utopian tradition started with Plato in his book *the republic* expanded to so many authors that discussed the same notion. Al- Farabi the Muslim philosopher also contributed in this field and he wrote *the perfect city* or the utopian city, which talks about the perfect city in his perspective and he set up many rules for the president of the city. In his opinion the utopian society could be achieved if the ruler of the city obeyed certain rules so it expanded to the citizens to, eventually the utopian society will be achieved. This idea posed in Plato's book as well, designing ideal political orders is the significant element of utopian society. Accurately the meaning of utopian in literature is a perfect society in another place where justice prevails, the people are perfectly content, and sadness, pain, and are abolished. This is observed in both of the books, in *the road* obviously, we notice that the protagonists of the novel are attempting to find a new life in a new society and place because their own society is completely corrupted. Hence concerning the name of the book it refers to the journey of finding a new place. It could be proclaimed that there is no linkage of the title and the context of the book but the symbol of utopian society. A symbol that there is the road leads to another place where everything is better. On the other hand the same concept is observed in *the postman* after the devastating war that destroyed everything the protagonist has faith that he can rebuilt the society and bring back the civilization. Again there is a sight for building up a utopian society. Generally, utopian novels have fictional characters, it tends to represent the characters it contains which is not based on the reality they are based on invented elements. Utopias characterized by the most detailed descriptions and a faith that the envisioned will in fact be without any problem or shortage. Moreover another feature is observed regarding to the characters in utopias story which is they are extremely critical in regards to their present society and, at least in words, contain the designs for a completely new state. They tend to change some basics in the society so that they are always presented in a distinct way from the other characters in the story (GEUS 188-189).

The road is a post-apocalyptic novel by the American author Cormac McCarthy, it exposes the struggle between good and bad. Hence it is a depiction of human's condition after falling a disaster that forms a serious danger to them. It exposes the attitude of mankind during the catastrophe, the novel takes the reader through a journey with the father and the son, as they travel south through the barren and charred landscape of the former United States. The story lights on the psychological aspect of the characters when cannibalism is seen, most of the characters are turned to cannibal in order to stay alive, and some of the others commit suicide. Whereas the father and the son maintained their goodness elements in spite of the suffering and harshness that they faced. Additionally, the barbarian and savagery side of humanity is exposed in the story, in spite of the advanced development and civilization, people couldn't maintain it, thus when they confront a catastrophe they turned to a barbarian. The goodness is observed in the character of father and son seemingly the son innate the sense of goodness from his father (Jordan 237).

3. Utopian society after the catastrophe:

In regard to the second novel *the postman* which is written by the American writer David Brin, it is also a post-apocalyptic novel that poses the nature of human after falling the catastrophe. There are several common themes between both of the novels. Both of them are discussing the issue of utopian society, the novel clearly focuses on the character of the protagonist who is wandering around America which becomes a wasteland because of a devastating war, there are a destruction and disease in the land and the civilization completely fallen down. Hence Brian criticizes the notion of certainty he shows that no one expected that there is a factor could knock America down all the way. Then there is a depiction of isolated villages struggling to survive. The protagonist pretended as a postman and he announces to the people the news that America is coming back in order to spread hope and optimism. It is a portrait of a lie that became a powerful kind of truth. In both of the books, the main characters fight to restore the civilization and find the utopian society in another place far from the wasteland. In regard to the atmosphere of the novels, in both of theme, it is dark and frustrated. But there is distinct in portraying nature: in *the road*, the landscape is mute, darkened, clouded, its color palette stripped of beauty and diversity and reduced to variations of gray. The visionary clarity of Emerson's nature is notably absent from the blasted environment. This is how McCarthy forms the world of the novel (Edwards 56-57). Simultaneously with the general concept of the novel that dealt with frustrated, destruction, and pessimism. Thus, alongside the concept of the novel nature also portrayed from its dark side. "Nights dark beyond darkness and the days grayer each one than what had gone before. Like the onset of some cold glaucoma dimming away the world" (McCarthy 3). In contrast, in spite of the destruction that dominated the city, David Brin attempts to refer to nature as a symbol of hope. Thus, there is a distinction between the depictions of nature in both of the books. Although the atmosphere is dark and grey in both of them Brin expose the nature as a powerful component which is able to provide the human being with a new beginning and new life, nature is a source that mankind pursue their life depending on it :

Snow and soot covered the ancient tree's broken branches and seared bark. It wasn't dead, not quite yet. Here and there tiny shoots of green struggled to emerge, but they weren't doing well. The end was near. A shadow loomed, and a creature settled into the drifts, and old, wounded thing of the skies, as near death as the tree. Pinions drooping, it laboriously began building a nest a place of dying. Stick by stick, it pecked among the ruined wood on the ground, piling the bits higher until it was clear that it was not a nest at all. It was a pyre. The bloody, dying thing settled in atop the kindling and crooned soft music unlike anything ever heard before. A glow began to build, surrounding the beast soon in a rich purple ambience. Blue flames burst forth. And the tree seemed to respond. Aged, ruined branches curled forward toward the heat, like an old man warming his hands. Snow shivered and fell, the green patches grew and began to fill the air with the fragrance of renewal it was not the creature on the pyre that was reborn, and even in sleep, that surprised Gordon. The great bird was consumed, leaving only bones. But the tree blossomed, and from its flowering branches, things uncurled and drifted off into the air. He stared in wonderment when he saw that they were balloons, airplanes, and rocket ships. Dreams. They floated away in all directions, and the air was filled with hope. (Brin, *The Postman* 2)

Clearly, there is the distinction between describing the nature in both of the books. In the first one is described as a dark and grey, even it increases day by day. This portrait of nature could be a reflection of the real condition of the story, also it's a reflection of character's psychology and perspective toward the condition. On the other hand in the second novel there is an optimist portrait of the nature, trees and flowers are blossomed as a symbol of new life after warfare and destruction. In spite of all the frustrated factors in both of the novels still there are many symbols of hope and charity. In *the road* the father and the son represented as a symbol of goodness, during all the harshness and struggling that they confronted they kept the trait of goodness inside them. As a surface assessment of the novel, it portrays that the character of the son is influenced by his father. It is a merit of imitation or inheritance, then the character of the boy stand out when his father says "You're not the one who has to worry about everything." And he answers "Yes, I am . . . I am the one" (McCarthy 259). It is an indication to the true nature of the child, he asserts his moral authority. Both of the novels are based on faith and optimism, the father in *the road* is struggling and defeated all the obstacles with a faith of brilliant future. Although he gets sick and weak but he lives solely to protect his son and he responds to any threat to his son's survival, large or small, with aggression (Cremean 86). The father defined himself and his son as a "good guy" they are carrying a fire as a symbol of hope and live, and to assert that they are good guy:

Look at me, the man said.

He turned and looked. He looked like he'd been crying.

[The Man:] Just tell me.

[The Boy:] We wouldn't ever eat anybody, would we?

[The Man:] No. Of course not.

[The Boy:] Even if we were starving?

[The Man:] We're starving now.

[The Boy:] You said we weren't.

[The Man:] I said we weren't dying. I didn't say we weren't starving.

[The Boy:] But we wouldn't.

[The Man:] No. We wouldn't.

[The Boy:] No matter what.

[The Man:] No. No matter what.

[The Boy:] Because we're the good guys.

[The Man:] Yes.

[The Boy:] And we're carrying the fire.

[The Man:] And we're carrying the fire. Yes.

[The Boy:] Okay. (McCarthy 108)

There is a nonexistence of people in the novel they are divided into many groups, some of the characters couldn't endure the catastrophe they commit suicide or death. For instance, the mother of the boy was one of the characters who commit suicide. Some of them turned to cannibalism in order to stay alive. In counter, the father and the son decided to pursue their journey as a good guy. In this portrait, there is a clear message that when there is no more connection between the human being the civilization will be failed. There are many little things that hold the civilization together, most people take it for granted thus, when there is a disconnection people are facing a disaster (Tallent 16). Likewise in *the postman*, there is a clear portrait of failed civilization because of the lack of communication between people. As if the postman is the messenger that attempts to reconnect them once again. Hence the real career of the character is not postman but when he found the uniform of postman he decided to pretend as a postman and pronounce the good news to people all over America. There is a specific notion combines three characters in the novel which is faith and hope. Hence they are a symbol of goodness, in another word they are perfect individuals to set up a utopian society.

4. Conclusion

Apocalypse and post-apocalyptic is a wild literary genre, which deals with fictional stories in order to expose predications about the end of the world and doomsday. Thus, the post-apocalyptic stories pose the question about human's race survival after occurring a catastrophe. Generally, this kind of genre lights on the psychological aspect of mankind after the disaster, as well as the attitude of people in a wasteland that surrounded by crumbled buildings, collapsed civilization, and despaired atmosphere. In regards to nature, it tends to be presented as dark and grey in order to reflect the disaster or to indicate that: with collapsing the nature everything will be collapsed too. Obviously, nature is a basic source of human's life. Thus, the destruction of nature causes inevitable disaster to mankind. Generally, most of the post-apocalyptic stories are dominated by a dystopian notion, nevertheless unlike the other stories, *the road* and *the postman* are based on a notion of hope and optimism, a notion that makes the existence of a utopian society possible. These books are unusual comparing to the other post-apocalyptic stories is the optimist atmosphere that dominated the stories, In spite of all struggles and harshness that they confronted, still, there is a hope inside them. The notion of utopian society has been discussed in many literary works, likewise, these two novels clearly expose the same notion. As the concept of utopian is finding a better life in a new place, the protagonists of the novels are struggling to survive from their corrupted society in order to establish better one in a better place. The notion of utopias observed in *the road* by characters of the father and son. They attempt to survive from their society with a faith of better future. In spite of the harshness that they faced they pursue their life without any change in their personality. After the death of the father, the son pursue his journey, on the other hand, the name of the novel proclaims that in spite of all the obstacles there is the road to establishing a utopian society. Hence in the other novel, *the postman* the goodness and faith of the character are observed, after the civilization failed and everything collapsed. An only person attempts to restore the civilization and spread hope among people. Although the protagonist starts with a lie but later on it becomes a powerful truth. Eventually, he succeeded in spreading hope. All these depictions are the symbol of human's power and capacity. The notion of building a utopian society could start with the postman or even with the child. As far as there is faith and hope the collapsed civilization or the collapsed environment could be restored as well.

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