



Inheritance after Apocalypse: the Dystopian Environment

by Serban Dan Blidariu

1. INTRODUCTION

A utopia is defined as a place both perfect and impossible. A dystopia refers to a world so imperfect that it annihilates all hope for the better. A utopian world is often connected with some sort of political system that provides, in abundance, for all. Yet a political system cannot provide all by itself. The resources must come from somewhere; most probably, nature. If, for a moment, we imagine all the abundance taken away, we will also distance ourselves completely from perfection. If we take all hope of ever getting them back from the picture, we are left with the image of a barren land and nothing else. If that is all we have left and there is nothing more to strive for and no way to change the situation, then all is futile. A world-wide dystopian realm will then be the true death of history, a cataclysmic event that nearly nullifies all others, making them look insignificant in comparison and removing all other major ones from possibility.

Throughout the course of this paper we will focus on Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* (2006). This is not his only apocalyptic novel, though. Harold Bloom once said that "*Blood Meridian* (1985) seems to me the authentic American apocalyptic novel (...)" (Bloom 2009: 1). However, *Blood Meridian* is placed in the past and it does not give the reader a feeling of what may come to pass because it already has. The devastated landscape has been a central part of more than one of McCarthy's novels yet not always in the same manner: "In *The Road*, this image is reasserted more powerfully than ever before." (Cant 2009: 186). We will attempt to prove the importance of nature when it comes to the civilized or even a humane way of life and how a devastated global landscape leads to a dystopia. The change of habits imagined in the novel show how land and culture, be it rural or urban, are in connection. One



cannot sustain itself without the other. This change brings about a new world order, one which was not passed on but somehow inherited. The novel by Cormac McCarthy is obviously a work of fiction and will be treated as such. However, *The Road* portrays a world that might be possible to some extent, improbable as it may seem, and speculates on that fact as we will speculate on notions like utopia, dystopia and behavior starting from their fictional representations. We believe we have to mention that the book has also been defined as a post-apocalyptic science fiction novel. In a broader sense, Suvin claims that "Strictly and precisely speaking, utopia is not a genre but the sociopolitical subgenre of science fiction." (Suvin 2010: 42-43). It is evident, we hope, that what applies to utopia applies to dystopia as well.

The modern word 'utopia' derives from Ancient Greek, where 'ou' meant 'no' or 'not' and 'topos' meant 'place'. The Greek 'ou' is similar to 'eu', the latter's translation being 'good'. Starting from these etymological roots we have utopia as "the simultaneous indication of a space and a state (...) that are nonexistent (ou) as well as good (eu)." (Suvin 2010:17). The word appeared for the first time in Thomas More's *Utopia*, published in 1516, and it is likely that More had the twofold meaning in mind especially because there are no English words for 'outopia' (non-existent place) or 'eutopia' (ideal place). In the case of dystopia the situation is different. There is no pun intended because 'dys' meant 'bad' in Ancient Greek and there is no other word that similar to it in order for the modern term to have a twofold meaning. A literal translation of 'dystopia' would simply mean 'bad place' (Vieira 2010: 3-27).

The imagination of society when it comes to its own state has always worked in two divergent directions at least, either in the direction of the dream or of the nightmare. Just as natural as the dreams of improvement are the fears of things getting worse. Initially, there was only utopian literature. It managed to withhold its preeminence as long as the desire to dream was stronger than society's fear or interest in the worst possible outcome.

2. FUTURE LANDSCAPE AS DYSTOPIA IN CORMAC MCCARTHY'S *THE ROAD*

A barren and unproductive land can be a cause for a dystopia even outside of an oppressive political system yet a plentiful land cannot lead to a utopia all by itself. Even so, for most utopias a bountiful environment is a necessary condition. We can very early understand that fact if we take a look at the original *Utopia*, the one from which the genre gets its name. Their worldly paradise was not in any way independent from nature. It existed alongside it and, one can say, it could not have existed outside of it or else the plentiful society would have been threatened.



They set great store by their gardens. In them they have vineyards, all manner of fruit, herbs, flowers, so pleasant, so well furnished, and so finely kept that I never saw thing more fruitful nor better trimmed in any place (More 1997: 64).

We can see how important the plentiful land is when imagining a perfect society. Perfection is a sum of factors and the environment is clearly one of them. Beyond that, religious symbolism is also very important in a utopia if we are to look at the construction of any traditional book written in that genre (Baker Smith 1987: 3).

The Road is not widely considered a dystopia, at least not in a classical sense, because it is more about the feelings of two people living in that world. It bears resemblance more to a psychological novel than one with a political subtext like George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949). It concerns the struggle of a father and a son who are trying to survive in a devastated, post-apocalyptic United States somewhere in the near future. The father has more knowledge of the outside world of the present and of the past, yet the son does not. Both the son and the reader gradually grow into the story and the son is as surprised of what he sees as the reader is of what he reads. This technique, Suvin says, is also used in science fiction novels to better introduce the reader in the *novum* (novelty) of the imaginary world (Suvin 2010: 84). Even though the novel does not conform to the classical dystopian model we still believe that it is a good example. It has nothing to do with politics or government as we see them because the society described is anarchical. However, the genre of dystopia has in the end more to do with presenting a world where hope is almost extinguished regardless of the political or natural cause of the situation. We also consider that the way in which it presents the barren landscape is more than appropriate for the theme we mentioned in the title because of the effects that came with the cataclysm (Hage 2010: 140). If we are trying to analyze a possible dystopian future imagined in a work of fiction, we cannot do that in the absence of a cause, even if that cause is not specifically mentioned. A very important difference between the world of classical dystopias and the world of *The Road* is the lack of a clear, specific back-story. The narration contains no reason for what has happened. It does not mention in any specific way what world-wide cataclysm led to the disaster. There are only hints from which nothing clear can be deduced regardless of how much intellectual effort is wasted in the attempt. This leaves us wandering about the causes and the reasons for the devastation. What we do know, however, is that the unnamed cause produced massive effects, dramatically changing the environment. The workings of the natural ways were twisted. Nothing was as it should have been in that world. In the beginning of the book the surroundings leave no space for hope. The natural cycle only brought forth more devastation. The following day would always, under those circumstances, be worst than its predecessor. "Nights dark beyond darkness and the days more grey each one than what had gone before" (McCarthy 2006: 1). The days were fading more and more into night. Light became weaker and weaker with each passing day and there was nothing anyone could do about it. The



cataclysm could have been man-made or not but to reverse the disaster was way beyond anyone's capabilities. The power of human influence had reached its limit in a situation when everyone desired the opposite. In the face of such extreme events hope is always diminished as a nightmarish landscape moves over from the land of dreams to the realm of reality.

2.1. *Dystopia, the Nightmare and The (American) Dream*

The rise of dystopia in the second half on the 20th century was, without doubt, influenced by the social and historical reality: two world wars in less than half a century and the rise to power of dictators like Hitler and Stalin. Under such harsh truths the dream of perfection seemed nothing more than a fantasy, an illusory desire for the better. Reality brought forth "a paralysis of Utopian thought and imagination" (Frye 1980: 114). Initially dystopias attacked what their writers thought to be false hopes. Edward Bellamy's ideas from *Looking Backward* (1888) were criticized by some, including Richard Michaelis, who wrote *Looking Forever Backward* (1890). In an age when technological progress, scientific advancement and mass industrialization were seen as the cure of all evils, Aldous Huxley, in writing *Brave New World* (1932), showed the possible downside of this direction. In *Animal Farm* (1945) George Orwell pointed the downsides of a misguided revolution while in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* he envisioned the ultimate nightmare of political centralization and government control over citizens.

Hopes for the better and fears for the worst have always been connected to dreams and nightmares. Utopian authors have chosen to focus on the first while dystopian authors have chosen to focus on the latter. Some hopes and fears have been institutionalized as well, becoming part of popular culture. In the United States there is the notion of The American Dream, which can easily be linked to utopian projection. Yet from this point of view The American Dream is like a double-edged sword. "Prosperity for anyone willing to work hard is a crucial component of the Dream, a house of one's own being the icon" (Hume 2002: 3). One of the most important novels in U.S. literature that dealt with the collapse of The American Dream was John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939), and *The Road*, according to Susan Kollin, is its "apocalyptic revision" (Kollin 2011: 158). Just like the father and the son in McCarthy's novel go toward the sea, the Joad family goes toward California. Their hopes of living comfortably in their home state have been shattered and salvation from economic collapse can only be achieved somewhere else. Just like the father and the son were trying to escape an environment filled with ash, the Joads are running away from the Oklahoma Dust Bowl (*ibid.*). In *The Road*, where nature has been devastated, a house of one's own can no longer be associated with achievement and stability, a proof of success and a source of wellbeing. When regardless of the amount



of work nothing can be produced anymore, the purpose of having a job becomes obsolete. The downfall of the economy is synonymous with the absence of The American Dream (Hume 2002: 3).

What really shatters The American Dream from a dystopian perspective is the lack of hope for the future. If there is one thing all dystopian novels tend to share, it is this. Some characters in dystopias may choose to rebel, but their struggle is portrayed as a battle between David and Goliath where there is no possibility of a divine intervention. The static nature of the dystopian landscape is predominant from the first pages of *The Road*. It portrays a world where there is no change, no cycle and, beyond that, there is hardly any difference worth mentioning when one looks upon the world. "Dust and ash everywhere" (McCarthy 2006: 5). When it comes to every man's power of perception, there is uniformity as far as the eye can see. The overwhelming presence of ash and the devastation can be seen as a parallel to T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* and one of the most famous lines of the poem: "I will show you fear in a handful of dust." (Cant 2009: 186).

Uniformity was everywhere, and hope was missing. "The most obvious shared element is a glaring absence. In most of these books we find no sense of a desirable future" (Hume 2000: 267). When Kathryn Hume wrote those words in her book *American Dream, American Nightmare*, she was not referring only to dystopian literature but to books concerning the downfall of The American Dream. However, The American Dream is not essential to human civilization. Yet if its absence seems such a shock, at least on the territory of the United States where the action of the novel takes place, then the one felt by the father in *The Road* was by all means many steps higher.

2.2. The Feeling of an End and The Absence of Three Elements as Cause and Consequence

In the second half of the 20th century socialist ideas were losing ground in the western world because of what was happening in the Soviet Union and attention was again directed toward industrialization. The main purpose, this time, was economic growth (Kumar 1987: 389). Because of the increased attention on scientific progress both utopian and dystopian writers became more interested in the far future than the near future. The technology from George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* seems outdated today in the 21st century and it did not seem that extraordinary when he wrote the novel in 1949 either. It seemed close at hand. By switching the attention to the far future, both utopias and dystopias were intersected with the science fiction genre. Instead of attacking utopian projection dystopian literature now focused on future developments of what were then contemporary problems (Fitting 2010: 135-153). As the development of industry allowed man to have a far more important impact on the natural world, some organizations began to warn the public about possible future



environmental challenges. It did not take long for a new version of utopia to appear, the 'ecotopia', a vision of a modern society living a model life based on ecological principles. This genre of utopia could move back and forth in time and could choose between a non-industrial, pre-industrial or post-industrial society. Sometimes it even chose a moderately industrial society where technology was accepted and appreciated without governing the lives of the community. One of the first was *Ecotopia: The Notebooks and Reports of William Weston* (1975) by Ernest Callenbach. His imagined society did not discard technology altogether but was very selective when choosing what to keep. Written in 1974, the events are set 25 years into the future, after Washington, North Carolina and Oregon have left the United States and formed the new nation of Ecotopia. By making a different and environmental-friendly civilization possible with former U.S. citizens at its base, the novel can be interpreted also as an attack on materialism and consumerism. Before the ecotopia some dystopias were supposed to warn people about the danger of over-technologization or centralized control. Dystopian discourse had to change in order to survive and some chose to tell the readers to expect the unexpected (Stableford 2010: 223-258). In the last years of the 20th century the focus shifts again and the feeling of "the end" becomes more and more pronounced. Even notions like 'the end of history' are discussed. The need to see "the end of the line" becomes more powerful. However, there is nothing new about this. Humanity's "deep need for intelligible ends" has always existed (Kermode 2000: 8).

Society neither is nor will ever be perfect. Yet the wish will never go away. Also, the fact that a desire for improvement exists makes it clear that there are things which bother a society and the literature that better identifies them has an improved chance of success. The higher the recognition of a utopian novel in any given time, the more exact is the writer's identification of the anguish of the age (Manuel 1965: 293-295). The image of perfection was transplanted into the future, but it was taken from the past. During the Renaissance, when Thomas More wrote *Utopia*, for example, the Golden Age was identified with classical antiquity, with the times of Ancient Greece and Rome, due to the revival of interest for those ages and their literature (Pohl 2010: 51-78). In the case of dystopias, success is based on understanding the fears.

One might wonder, though, what has all of this got to do with absence. In *The Road* this is not mentioned very often, yet in a few distinct passages we see that the absence of God is connected to the barren land. "With the first light he rose and left the boy sleeping and walked on to the road and squatted and studied the country to the south. Barren, silent, godless." (McCarthy 2006: 2). It may not be obvious for all that 'godless' is the cause for 'barren' and 'silent', but we believe that the presence of these three words in a simple sentence alludes to a connection if not in the 'real world' as imagined in the novel, at least in the mind of the adult character at that time. If we think how cultures have imagined things to be for millennia, there has always been a dream or an ardent wish for a return to the Golden Age. Even if it did not bear the



name at the time, it was the prototype Utopia. We can see that there are three general types of 'world' if we take into consideration absence, presence and contact from a religious perspective. Absence and presence are two extremes with nothing in between. Something either is, or is not. From the point of view of presence, there are two variants, which may or may not be divided. In the case of absence there can be no contact because you cannot make contact with something that does not exist. Therefore, the first case remains as it is and cannot be divided. In the case of presence we have two possible outcomes: one in which contact is made directly and one in which it is not. Taking all this into consideration, we can view the problem in three ways. A world in which God is present, but contact is not made so directly; a world in which God is present and contact is as direct as it can be; or God is totally absent. The first one, from a religious (or Christian, because some references in the novel will be to Christianity and not to an unnamed religion) perspective, is our world. The second one is the mythical Garden of Eden. And the third, in the terms of this book, is the "barren, silent, godless" land. If that connection between God and nature is only in the head of the adult character for a short moment, he still does not want to let it go. The attempt to reconnect, at least on a psychological level, is there. The father only had his son in that barren world. He wished that his child was his link to Heaven, and in the absence of that link, God does not interact with the world. He said: "If he is not the Word of God God never spoke." (McCarthy 2006: 3). When it comes to the Christian religion, perfection can be found only in God and, in the absence of a direct connection, nothing else can come close. Because of that, the description of the land as being godless is so important.

Another absence, but only apparent, is that of the Sun. The absence is apparent not because the Sun might have disappeared but because it can barely be seen through the clouds of ash.

Just beyond the high gap in the mountains they stood and looked out over the great gulf to the south where the country as far as they could see was burned away, the balanced shapes of rock standing out of the shoals of ash and billows of ash rising up and blowing down country through the waste. The track of the dull sun moving beyond the mirk (McCarthy 2006: 13).

We can see that in the text the word 'ash' appears twice in order to signify the extreme excess of that element in the air. The fact that the Sun is no longer visible can also symbolically refer to the lack of hope. The Sun cannot clearly be seen and this signifies that hope is nowhere in sight as a distinct element. The disappearance of any clear hope is accompanied by the symbolic defilement of purity. When it comes to nature purity is associated with snow because of the color. When that color switches from white to black, purity turns into its opposite. "It's snowing, the boy said. He looked at the sky. A single gray flake sifting down. He caught it in his hand and watched it expire like the last host of Christendom." (McCarthy 2006: 15). The absence



of purity and hope is again correlated at a religious level. The words “the last host of Christendom” makes that pretty obvious.

In the absence of these three things: religion and spirituality; purity; nature’s regenerative force, everything starts to look and to be darker and darker. “The wet gray flakes twisting and falling out of nothing. Gray slush by the roadside. Black water running from under the sodden drifts.” (McCarthy 2006: 15). Even the running water has turned to black and ash and leafless trees are everywhere. The absence of the before-mentioned elements can thus be viewed as cause for what is going on. The land is barren because it is godless, nature is devastated and incapable of healing itself because its regenerative force is absent, and purity, most of all, also seems to have disappeared. However, they are only the known causes of the situation. Yet they were not the spark that started the fire. What really did, though, we cannot name, for the initial reason why things are as they are, is under a different absence: the author has not named what has caused the cataclysm. In the given situation, other, more obvious absences, have taken the forefront. We assume that the characters, or at least the father if not the son, know what really happened and what event devastated the land. This is why the father is most concerned with the absences we have mentioned earlier. Even though none of this would have happened without the cataclysm, it is the absence of the three things we enumerated previously that stands out in the picture.

2.3. How a Devastated Landscape Rather Mutates Than Changes Human Behavior

Throughout the novel the behavioral mutation has already taken place because the devastation of the landscape is a thing of the past and there is nothing left to do for the father and son than to be on the move. “Environmental catastrophe is yesterday’s news in Cormac McCarthy’s Pulitzer-prizewinning book, *The Road*, a narrative that is part ecodystopian fiction and part American road novel.” (Kollin 2011: 157).

A large part of those that survived the unnamed cataclysm took the place left open by the extinction of the beasts in order to roam the land and filled that spot better than the animals ever could. The new habitat speaks of nothing but destruction, hatred and violence, seemingly directed towards everyone and everything.

People sitting on the sidewalk in the dawn half immolate and smoking in their clothes. Like failed sectarian suicides. Others would come to help them. Within a year there were fires on the ridges and deranged chanting. The screams of the murdered. By day the dead impaled in spikes along the road. What had they done? He thought that in the history of the world it might even be that there was more punishment than crime but he took small comfort from it (McCarthy 2006: 32-33).



This level of violence is not exclusive to *The Road*, being also present in novels like *Blood Meridian* and *Child of God* where, just like here, it was central to the novel's style.

As those books do, it takes violence and beauty as given, as natural; and like those books it also refuses to comfort its reader by positing a difference, much less admitting a contradiction, between the violence and the beauty it depicts. (Phillips 2011: 174).

A dystopian landscape gives birth to nothing more than dystopian behavior. The connection cannot be avoided. Even if civilization or high culture are not seen as direct and immediate consequences of the environment, if what is available everywhere around us quickly changes then civilization cannot remain as it was before. Culture influences us, and we behave as we were thought, in theory, yet the behavior of today will never be maintained at a large scale if everything around has changed. If the influences are different it is illogical for the result to stay the same. Eventually, the devastated landscape turned everything around the main characters into a "terra damnata" (Gwinner 2011: 137).

Given the fact that the unnamed cataclysm only happened years before, the landscape is filled with the dead and what became of them. The victims' numbers were beyond counting and the intention to clean up everything was nowhere to be seen.

By dusk of the day following they were at the city. The mummied dead everywhere. The flesh cloven along the bones, the ligaments dried to tug and taut as wires. Shriveled and drawn like latterday logfolk, their faces of boiled sheeting, the yellow palings of their teeth. They were discalced to a man like pilgrims of some common order for all their shoes were long since stolen (McCarthy 2006: 23-24).

It took some years before it was like that. At first the land was filled with refugees and because of the ash that was everywhere they ended up wearing masks and goggles. No longer a world worth to be seen, people like them became part of the landscape. The shift from civilization to anarchy seems to have been gradual in the novel, yet even if it was not immediate, it was still unstoppable. The capacity to put things back in order was lacking. It did not matter if the desire to do it was there because the resources to achieve it were lacking. The effect on the environment was felt by every member of society.

In those first five years the roads were peopled with refugees shrouded up in their clothing. Wearing masks as goggles, sitting in their rags by the side of the road like ruined aviators. Their barrows heaped with shoddy towing wagons or carts.



Their eyes bright in their skulls. Creedless shells of men tottering down the causeways like migrants in a feverland. The frailty of everything revealed at last. Old and troubling issues revealed into nothingness and night. The last instance of a thing takes the class with it. (McCarthy 2006: 28).

Everyone took refuge wherever they could and wherever they thought it was safe, if there was anything like safety left. This desire for security was also mirrored in the journey begun by the father and the son. "All the day following they traveled through the drifting haze of woodsmoke. In the draws the smoke coming of the ground like mist and the thin black trees burning on the slopes like stands of heathen candles." (McCarthy 2006: 49-50). Just by mentioning candles, be they heathen, we have another religious reference. Here the devastation is symbolically associated with anything other than Christianity. Regardless of the association though, the reference was clear enough when it mentioned that everything was burning and, through that fact alone, things were made even worse. The environment is ablaze, slowly turning into ash that will greatly pollute the air and block the rays of the Sun. There is no room for civilization where nature cannot sustain itself and even life seems to have outlived its usefulness. Everything around seems pointless. However, the father and son will struggle on and, just by doing that, will witness many things. The most shocking, at least for the father who had memories of a previous time, was the downfall of man and the disappearance of humanity in those around him. In the absence of civilization many who were accustomed to it leave it aside and act as if they never knew it. The moral dilemmas were not exclusive to those around them but to the main characters as well. However, the most important moral act tends to become survival, especially for the father who thinks that assuring his son's survival is his ultimate duty. Thus he no longer thinks about consequences in the far future but only in the present and the near future (Gwinner 2011: 138).

When nature does not offer food and you want to continue living, you have to take it from somewhere. When all supplies have been depleted, one turns to his surroundings. When almost all that is left alive in the world are humans, one has two choices: starvation or cannibalism. For some, the predatory instinct which was so common in the natural world kicks in. In the barren land of a dystopia man has become his own natural predator, in lack of all else. Proof of his hunting achievements can be seen all around. The father character witnesses what is going on around him. "Coming back he found the bones and the skin piled together with rocks over them. A pool of guts. He pushed at the bones with the toe of his shoe. They looked to have been boiled. No pieces of clothing." (McCarthy 2006: 73-74). Only one thing was left to distinguish man from animal. He still cooked his meals. Sometimes.

There are worse things than ash everywhere. At least there is no image of murder in them. But when instead of the actions of fire one witnesses the actions and crimes of man and those images start to seem so normal that they become part of the natural habitat, things have gone too far. Again, the father sees the results of cannibalism.



Only this time he is no longer surprised for there is not one thing that he witnesses here which seems to be new.

He'd seen it all before. Shapes of dried blood in the subtle grass and gray coiled of viscera where the slain have been field-dressed and hauled away. The wall beyond held a frieze of human heads, all faced alike, dried and caved with their taut grins and sunken eyes. They wore gold rings in their leather ears and in the wind their sparse and ratty hair twisted about on their skulls. The teeth in their sockets like dental molds, the cruel tattoos etched in some homebrewed wood faded in the beggard sunlight. (McCarthy 2006: 94-95).

The sight of the accomplished crimes of man can be horrifying, but the sight of the partially accomplished crimes of man that will be completed later can be even more so. The effects of cannibalism on a dead prey are bad, yet the effects of cannibalism on living prey waiting to be consumed are much worse. The father character sneaks somewhere to look around and in a building he finds other people. However, they were in no position to either attack him or greet him. "Huddled against the back wall were naked people, male and female, all trying to hide, shielding their faces with their hands On a mattress lay a man with his legs gone to the hip and the stumps of them blackened and burnt. The smell was hideous." (McCarthy 2006: 116). They were captured and huddled together in a room to serve as provisions for later on. They were kept like slices of meat in a butcher's shop.

In a natural cycle, herbivores eat grass and carnivores eat other living things, mainly herbivores. But only in a natural cycle. In this dystopian cycle no one eats grass because there is no grass to eat and man eats man. And because man has been used to make provisions, he now has a stack of humans in the basement, waiting, sort of, to be consumed.

The difference between what we consider to be normal human behavior and what became the norm (to avoid saying that it became normal) is more than obvious. The most apparent and sudden change, though, was not political, social or economic. It was first and foremost environmental. When that changed for the worst everything started to crumble. With such dramatic changes taking place, for the unnamed father and his son the apocalypse was everywhere around them. It stopped being imminent and became immanent (Phillips 2011: 185).

3. CONCLUSION

Idealism and utopia used to go together when calling for change. Feelings of hope were there, yet in time hope turned to fear and that lead to the birth of the dystopia. The worst things possible seemed closer to reality than the best as soon as the two meanings of utopia, 'ideal place' and 'no place' were seen as divergent. A place can be



perfect only in the realm of ideas. In reality, it would continue to be a 'no place'. Social reality had a stronger influence on the utopian genre than the other way around. Yet what both utopia and dystopia tried to envision was a long-term change that would lead to the end of the road, either for the best or for the worst. This finality, though, would seem more threatening in a dystopia.

In a situation like that which was presented in *The Road* there is not much to be done, really. However, it is a work of fiction, not a prophecy. Even so, it can be taken as a warning. And it has. It has reached a stage where some are looking at it as "one of the most important environmental novels of the last 50 years". Due to this fact some of his previous novels are also "being reconsidered as environmental texts". *The Road* is now seen as one of the essential ecocritical novels (Spurgeon 2011: 19-20). This has led to many interpretations of the text.

As a conclusion, we have seen how the lack of natural resources can disturb the habitat of an imagined world. When that disturbance reached certain proportions, it mutated the ways of man. When that habitat was no longer disturbed but practically non-existent, without a trace of what it used to be altogether, man changed with a magnitude to match. When nature turned for the worse, so did man.

WORKS CITED

Baker Smith D. and C. C. Barfoot (eds.), 1987, *Between Dream and Nature: Essays on Utopia and Dystopia*, Radopi, Amsterdam.

Bloom H., 2009. "Introduction" in H. Bloom (ed.), *Cormac McCarthy*, Infobase Publishing, New York, pp. 1-8.

Bloom H. (ed.), 2009, *Cormac McCarthy*, Infobase Publishing, New York.

Cant J., 2009, "The Road", in H. Bloom (ed.), *Cormac McCarthy*, Infobase Publishing, New York, pp. 183-200.

Fitting P., 2010, "Utopia, Dystopia and Science Fiction" in G. Cleys (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Utopian Literature*, Cambridge University Press, New York, pp. 135-153.

Frye N., 1980, *The Stubborn Structure: Essays on Criticism and Society*, Methuen Library Reprints, London.

Gwinner D., 2011, "'Everything Uncoupled from its Shoring': Quandaries of Epistemology and Ethics in *The Road*" in S. L. Spurgeon (ed.), *Cormac McCarthy: All the Pretty Horses, No Country for Old Men, The Road*, Continuum, New York, pp. 137-156.

Hage E., 2010, *Cormac McCarthy: A Literary Companion*, McFarland, Jefferson.

Hume K., 2002, *American Dream, American Nightmare. Fiction Since 1960*, University of Illinois Press, Chicago.

Kermode F., 2000, *The Sense of an Ending*, Oxford University Press, New York.



Kollin S., 2011, "Barren, silent, godless': Ecodisaster and the Post-abundant Landscape in *The Road*" in S. L. Spurgeon (ed.), *Cormac McCarthy: All the Pretty Horses, No Country for Old Men, The Road*, Continuum, New York, pp. 157-171.

Kumar K., 1987, *Utopia and Anti-Utopia in Modern Times*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford.

Manuel F. E., 1965, "Toward a Psychological History of Utopia", *Daedalus* 94, pp. 293-322.

More T., *Utopia*, 1997, translated by Ralph Robinson with an introduction by Mishtooni Bose, Wordsworth Editions Limited, Hertfordshire.

McCarthy C., 2006, *The Road*, Picador, London.

Phillips D., 2011, "He ought not to have done it': McCarthy and Apocalypse" in S. L. Spurgeon (ed.), *Cormac McCarthy: All the Pretty Horses, No Country for Old Men, The Road*, Continuum, New York, pp. 172-188.

Pohl N., 2010, "Utopianism after More: The Renaissance and Enlightenment", in G. Cleys (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Utopian Literature*, Cambridge University Press, New York, pp. 51-78.

Spurgeon, S. L. 2011, "Introduction" in S. L. Spurgeon (ed.), *Cormac McCarthy: All the Pretty Horses, No Country for Old Men, The Road*, Continuum, New York, pp. 1-22.

Spurgeon S. L. (ed.), 2011, *Cormac McCarthy: All the Pretty Horses, No Country for Old Men, The Road*, Continuum, New York.

Stableford B., 2010, "Ecology and Dystopia", in G. Cleys (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Utopian Literature*, Cambridge University Press, New York, pp. 259-280.

Suvin D., 2010, *Defined by a Hollow: Essays on Utopia, Science Fiction and Political Epistemology*, International Academic Publishers, Bern.

Vieira F., 2010, "The Concept of Utopia", in G. Cleys (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Utopian Literature*, Cambridge University Press, New York, pp. 3-27.

Serban Dan Blidariu is a Ph. D. student at the West University of Timisoara, Romania currently working on a Ph. D. in American Literature entitled *Slavery Between Text and History: The Social Reality and Its Reflection in American Literature*. From 2011 he has been teaching English classes to students of chemistry, biology, ecology and biochemistry. His latest conference attendances include the *Heritage* conference in Perpignan, France, in May 2012 and the *Desire, Literature, Culture* Postgraduate Symposium in Valetta, Malta in March 2012.

blidariu.serban@gmail.com