

## Faith and Reason in the Mad Subjectivity: Cormac McCarthy's Post-apocalyptic Narrative *The Road*

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### ABSTRACT

Identified as the core of human subjectivity, madness and the shattered self are among the issues which Cormac McCarthy represents in his brilliant though terrifying narrative *The Road*. This study attempts to address the representation of subjectivity's faith and reason in the face of physical and mental struggles in his novel. Moreover, the relation that subjectivity has to the Big Other will be analyzed under Žižekian paradigms. In the pre-Kantian era, the human subject was to struggle against an extremity of madness so as to redeem itself a state of reason. But since Kant proposed that the core of subject/ivity can be madness itself, the struggles represented in McCarthy's novel have been examined as significant events that show this core of inconsistency and madness. To do so, the present study analyzes his text to show the inconsistency of the subject/ivity of his characters along with the role of reason/madness and their relations to faith in the narrative. Particularly, it would be fruitful to focus on the contribution of what Žižek calls the "Light of Reason" and its fluctuations/fragmentations. The point opposite to this Light would be the Dark of the world, a dire night in which that mad center of human subjectivity could emerge into the novel's events. For this purpose, the paper will elaborate more thoroughly on Derrida's and Žižek's viewpoints regarding Enlightenment and subjectivity. Of the main consideration in McCarthy's text is deciding about life and death and about the force that compels his protagonists to keep fighting for their survival.

**Keywords:** *The Road*; other; subject/ivity; reason; madness

### INTRODUCTION

The condition of the post-modern world is the condition of a "world in which everything can be simulated," a world in which "the copy is increasingly preferred to the original" (Marsden, 1999, p. 3). Hence, in this fake and hysteric condition, the question of the origin is challenged and pondered upon more than ever before. In Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* the reader faces a terrifying post-apocalyptic condition where all simulated commodities and ideologies have already lost their meaning and purpose. For example, in this novel, charms and fascinations of the postmodern era like shopping malls, brands of clothes, and so forth, are destroyed. Under the influence of such harsh stimuli, the subjectivity and the faith/reason attached to it would face fluctuations and transformations. In addition, if McCarthy's readers meditate deeply enough upon his story, they will appreciate his great power of writing. Regarding his fame, one could refer to Bloom's (2003) putting him among the top four American novelists with Philip Roth, Don DeLillo, and Thomas Pynchon. There are several scholarly works on *The Road* in the light of which this paper will attempt to present its argument.

Juge (2009) maintains her argument about McCarthy's text in tandem with Plato's allegory of the cave. However, she suggests that her reading of the text is not merely to perceive it as a novelization of Platonic cave but as a way of illuminating patriarch guidance and philosophy. She adds that "McCarthy understands, both as a father and a storyteller, the utmost importance of guidance and example, and I think that he is trying to put forward once again the idea that indeed the endless search for truth is the best stand-in for the actual attainment of wisdom" (Juge, 2009, p. 27). The quest for truth is identified as a requirement of wisdom. However, the issue is even more complicated than this. We can add the query that in McCarthy's text, how a fragmented subjectivity could even go on a quest for truth and wisdom. Assuming that such a quest for patriarch rationale is even possible, a concern of Juge's (2009) brilliant study is that wisdom/reason can be gained in the form of a pure absoluteness.

For Wielenberg (2010), McCarthy's text is a meditation on morality and God's existence as well as two other sources of benevolence: rationality and faith. Wielenberg maintains that "The fundamental ambiguity of God's existence remains unresolved in *The Road*. One of the lessons of the novel is that the answer to the question of whether God exists is not as important as it is often taken to be" (2010, p. 18). Thus, in the course of the darkness represented in the novel, faith in humanity is a way out to salvation. So, how to keep faith in man with a fragmented subjectivity is another line of argument that could contribute to Wielenberg's study. In Juge (2009) and Wielenberg (2010), we search for a trustworthy faith or wisdom that could guide human subjectivity through life in the horrible apocalypse of the novel.

DuMont (2012) is concerned with the aesthetic dimensions of McCarthy's novel which describes a very harsh fate for Man and civilization. He says his novel "refuses to draw a distinction between art and life, not to devalue aesthetic expression, but in order to suggest a means by which it can be appreciated after the apparent death of the Author" (2012, p. 58). But he more often deals with the ambiguity and ambivalence of life. While he suggests that life and art are inseparable, he also considers the connections of life to art as ambiguous, inconsistent, and ambivalent to demonstrate the incoherent human subjectivity. In other words, "by blending the act of aesthetic expression with the changeability of life itself, he [McCarthy] resists the autonomy and stability" (Dumont, 2012, p. 71) of the modernist aesthetics. It is also noteworthy to remember that "contrary to the modernist stress on totalitarian and persecutory metanarratives", postmodernism emphasizes "legitimation of the plural" (Karim, 2013, p. 116). Thus, considering subjectivity and reason, a close examination of *The Road* shows the inconsistencies, pluralities, and instabilities of the postmodern aesthetics. This latter study, unlike the previous two, implies how the representation of consistent and reasonable human subjectivity is rather impossible to achieve. This could be a good justification for the claim that in McCarthy's text the subjectivity is represented as shattered, inconsistent, and mad.

Fledderjohann (2013) asks in the harsh and chaotic environment of *The Road* and "[i]n the hopelessness of an unspecified catastrophe that has turned the known world into a bleak and hostile wilderness, how can existence be sustained?" (p. 44) The present writers believe that McCarthy's novel provides an exciting answer to this rather frightening question, because his characters "return to their rituals of setting up and taking down, getting out and putting away, taking off and putting on, and so they sustain both their continuation and their reasons for doing so" (Fledderjohann, 2013, p. 55).

To analyze the theological and rational human subject/ivity as well as its inconstancies and fluctuations seems to be contributing to the previous studies. In other words, while the aforementioned scholars have discussed reason, faith, and the meaning of life in McCarthy's text, the present study will take to address the question how these concepts

reflect the inconsistency and madness of the subjectivity of his characters. Throughout McCarthy's novel, the reader observes how the issues of faith and reason are represented. So, in the present study the necessity of revisiting these aspects of subjectivity in *The Road* is examined. In the writings of Derrida and Žižek the problematicity of human subjectivity and reason is analyzed. In the light of their analyses, this study will make an argument which describes the inconsistency and problematicity of the subject/ivity of McCarthy's characters. Last but not least, it will be maintained that, like a serpent biting its own tail, the ending of this novel can be perceived as a new beginning. As his story begins to be narrated again, the journey of subject/ivity can be re-started.

### **MADNESS, INCONSISTENCY, AND INCOHERENCE OF THE SUBJECT**

Before Derrida, it might be proper to define subject/ivity in a way that would accord to the principles of finalizability, self-sustainment, and coherence. However, since Derrida the concepts like finalizability, closure, clearness, purity of reason, etc. have been challenged severely. Thus, talks about the concept of subject/ivity have gone under many changes. Along with Žižek (2012), the Kantian consideration of subject/ivity as a soft and shiny core with a surface of harmony has been repeatedly revisited, re-evaluated. Instead of including a soft and shiny core, it is "a night" that dwells in subject/ivity. Like in Kant and German Idealism, in Žižek (2012) it is also indicated that the core of the human subjectivity is "absolutely immanent ... which is why the metaphor of that core is ... the night of the world," and which stands in contrast to the notion of Enlightenment that is symbolized via a "Light of reason" which wants to dispel "the surrounding darkness" (p. 166). Moreover, "Kantian emphasis on the power of mind and reason operates in the service of a moral framework" (Behrooz & Pirnajmuddin, 2016, p. 184). However, this night at the core of the modern subject contradicts and dethrones the reasonable and wise subject of the Enlightenment. Žižek (2012) adds that before Kant subject/ivity was a property of reasonable beings, the beings that would avoid lust, animalistic passions, and madness so as to maintain a disposition that they were worthy of.

At this juncture in the history of intellectuality, it is fruitful if we briefly discuss subject/ivity as represented in McCarthy's novel. As Wolfreys (2004) observes, subjectivity is complicated and multidimensional. And when we confront the issue of the individual and psychological subject/ivity, it becomes even more complicated. Psychological subject, the subject before the law; that is, the subject that is responsible before the law or that practices the law as an enforcer, has a lot in common since it all escapes certain finitude regarding its escaping a certain closed-on-in definition. This escape from finalizability, finitude, and closed-on-in definition seems to be a commonality among different subjectivities introduced by disciplines like philosophy and psychology. The "problem [of representing subjectivity] is therefore how the form and nature of self-consciousness are to be described" (Bowie, 2003, p. 16). Furthermore, if, as Bowie claims, Descartes perceives subjectivity "as a thinking being" (2003, p. 17), Kant considers self-consciousness and the knowledge of the world driven from it, and transfers them to the realm of non-theological determination. Bowie says "Kant shifts Descartes's emphasis on the existence of self-consciousness, [...], on to the relationship of the thinker to every thought that the thinker could have" (Bowie, 2003, p. 17), and thus tries to extract a philosophical inference that is in need of no external authority or big other.

Since the Age of Reason, thinkers have been attempting to discover the determiners of subjects as rational beings (Bowie, 2003). For example, in the age of Kant it would be the job of the faculty of reason to give a frame to subjectivity, to define it, and to determine its functions. Hall (2004, p. 23) states that reason was the "defining characteristic" of that age.

According to Adorno and Horkheimer (2002), Enlightenment, even as a concept, was firstly to demolish superstition and emancipate the man from the shackles of dogmatism and mindless prejudices.

According to Hall (2004), this unshakably reliable reason would bring about a certain faith which could be termed philosophical idealism while it is not unlike religion. Even in Kant, this kind of faith - an ideological faith in the faculty of reason as an institution that has the ability in its a priori to individuate and determine right and wrong definitions, etc. - created a prejudice of which reason was supposed to get rid. "Kant, as a product of his age, was unequivocally sexist and to his mind women were by definition irrational beings" (Hall, 2004, p. 28). This shows the danger of relying too much on the reason of man's subjectivity and accepting its total authority and trustworthiness, because it is a blind faith in reason, which is not much different from the blind religious partiality. In McCarthy's novel the critique of such blind faiths in Human's reason and the big Other's theology becomes tangible enough through analyzing the inconsistency and unreliability of subjectivity. Throughout this study, 'big Other' is used in tandem with the Žižekian ideas on this concept. In other words, big Other refers to that divine other of theology/Christianity or even the logocentric authority of language/reason.

In the modern era, is there still any consistent definition for reason? After the decline of the authority of the church and theology, and the emergence of Enlightenment in the dawn of Modernity, if reason fails to account for subjectivity, what is the solution? How does McCarthy's novel demonstrate some trends related to this faculty? And finally, would it be more fortuitous to examine the relations between subject/ivity and other human faculties instead of defining the nature of subjecthood and determining its boundaries? However, if the link between reason and theology seems a bit pale, one can analyze language as the locus of the modern subjectivity. For Derrida, "philosophy so understood is a product of Indo-European languages – to the extent we know what that phrase means – and the product of Western Civilisation. [...] not an eternal project in the mind of God [...], but a project with a certain materiality, a certain history." (Roderick, 1993). This seems a good starting point to analyze subject/ivity as a product of language. However, according to Sherman (2007), Derrida provokes that the "linguistically structured self-consciousness is always-already at a distance from Being, thus precluding the possibility of 'self-presencing' (p. 93). A shortcoming of Kant and Enlightenment (although in a later period the madness core of subjectivity would prove helpful to remedy it) was that they ratify a whole and present faith in reason. However, our consequent knowledge of subjectivity is distant from presencing in a consistent, coherent, whole state and subject/ivity, reason, and faith cannot be presented and defined in any absolute form. Such an absolutely authentic subject/ivity that could account for all 'what is?' questions, is only a phantom. The 'what is?' question itself is an old thought (Wolfreys, 2004) that spans over a large extent of considerations. Moreover, Derrida observes (1991) that it is both impossible and problematic for the formation and identity of subject to be present to it as a whole. Searching for the origin of subject or a specific status of subjecthood that would define subjectivity is the ultimate search for the beginning of all beginnings. This is because if there is an origin for the subject, there has to be an origin for language and meaning also. Therefore, proving the existence of such origin is impossible. The argument of the present research is that as the origin of the event that brings the world of McCarthy's *The Road* to its disastrous apocalyptic narrative, this kind of search seems to be ambiguous. Moreover, the subject/ivity's status is more in tandem with inconsistency and madness than with order and coherence. Nonetheless, there is a crucial relation between subject/ivity and Other. If capturing and defining subjecthood is an impossibility, examining the relation between subject and Other is very fruitful.

In McCarthy's text, the subject/ivity's self-presencing is portrayed as problematic and impossible. McCarthy's text challenges any ideological comfort zone that tries to define subject/ivity. Therefore, just like the origin of the apocalypse in the narrative, an external authority and definitive anchor for subject/ivity is impossible to attain and is probably non-existent. In the materialized reality, it is as if the disaster is a metaphor of the world we live in: there can be achieved/determined no finalized, self-sustained, legitimate origin or point of reference for the human subjecthood that would explain our status in the world. Neither a theocratic faith nor Enlightenment reason can fully guide Subject/ivity through McCarthy's story.

### **THE BIG 'OTHER' AND THE IMMINENT END**

"Ely" is the only character in McCarthy's novel who has an actual name. If this name is a shortened form of "Elijah" the name of the Jewish prophet in the Bible, it can represent a trend of theological determination of subject and its replacement by a Kantian consideration. A significance of Ely's name and character is that, like in the Bible, he appears as an ancient "metaphysics of presence" at an extreme transfiguration/alteration in the history of man. The Biblical Elijah appears as a transfiguration of Jesus Christ. Likewise, in McCarthy's text Ely appears when the Boy and the Father go under extreme circumstances that redefine their faith and consciousness. To be altered, that is, to become an other or go through the radical conditions of otherness (Wolfreys, 2004), the subjectivity may suffer in reaching a state of madness that is more eminent than its definition and determination. It is likely that a theologically rational subjectivity, like Ely before the Unknown Catastrophe, has been replaced by a more chaotic state of subjecthood. Thus, this chaotic subjectivity of Ely appears most alien and foreign to the Boy and the Man.

Now, Ely's presence and his possible referring to the Biblical significance mark the novel and provokes the reader to consider the matter of 'the big Other' in the text. If he represents a faith in an ancient theology (a religion of a Big Other) that has failed its upholder, it is enlightening to consider a few trends. Firstly, as Saccamano (2007) asserts, Derrida requires us to revisit the claims of apocalyptic discourse and its upholders' claim over the end of man, literature, the West, and the idea of progress itself. Secondly, Derrida provokes a double reading of the notion of reason in Enlightenment. Accordingly, on the one hand, the reason is similar to the divine presence of the big Other in being a priori to the subject and preceding knowledge. On the other hand, reason is a faculty or power to revisit the supposedly inherent ideas and even its own implications as well. This is to say, this reason can doubt and revisit every context. Thus, it can bring about an unconditionality that introduces a responsibility which is exterior to the knowledge yet it is not considered irrational; a democracy to-come (Saccamano, 2007). Reason can depart from its own universality to re-invent some exceptions of its own; to revisit its own context. While the Boy's character and his linguistically constructed subjectivity can extend hospitality and kindness to those who are in need, other subjects in the narrative fail to practice such a great liberality. The Man and even Ely cannot completely represent a faith in reason/rationality or religiosity. Ely, the ragged embodiment of the old faith (probably that of Abrahamic religions), and the Man, who is the angry practitioner of Enlightenment reasoning, dismiss the Kantian-Žižekian consequence of studying subjectivity, which includes madness and irrationality as incontrovertibly integral to the human subject/ivity. The Boy's subjectivity seems to be open to this mad core that is why he is able to take decisions against the rational and theocratic reductive forces. These forces assume that reason and rationality are inherent to their own discourses. They somehow assume that they have an a priori stance in defining subject/ivity.

The reason why the Boy is able to be liberated from these reductive forces could be found in his special relation with the other/big Other. McCarthy's reader should not attempt to construct an imminent End for Man with no returning point. A reading considering the matter of the relation to the 'other' would reveal a resisting force against the announcement of Man's End. Ely's religious faith has already accepted the end, and it is probably for this reason that he is distorted and disheveled. On the other hand, the Man's faith in reason dictates that the End for all is inevitable and only survival matters even at the cost of abandoning other fellow wo/men. Before one gets to Boy's situation in this regard, one might ask: is death described as the immanent end? In McCarthy's text, Death is depicted as both a lover and as a notion of Being which is about to meet its own death (McCarthy, 2006). Ergo, the text also criticizes its own overwhelming end-of-all-things description. This resistance culminates in the end of the novel which is a re-beginning also.

Žižek (2012) elaborates on the relationship between subjectivity and the Big Other of language. He notes that an imbecile should use a stick for walking around because of a basic inadequacy or imbalance in his intelligence, (Žižek, 2012, p. 2). Žižek contends that the stick is a metaphor of language itself (2012, p. 2) on which we lean on to make up for our psychological inadequacy or imbalance. And he continues "we all, [...], have to lean, [...], the symbolic order, [...], what Lacan calls the 'big Other:' [...] the idiot is simply alone, outside the big Other, the moron is within it (dwelling in language in a stupid way), while the imbecile is in between the two - aware of the need for the big Other, but not relying on it, distrusting it (p. 2).

The language of McCarthy's text is tricky, its style unreliable. A lack of proper grammatical marks is evident in his text, and McCarthy's free style of writing helps boost a sense of confusion and ambiguity of the origins both of his story and the apocalyptic disaster. Despite these merits of his prose style, the main concern of his reader is how it reflects the presence of the 'other' and shattered selves. The author poses a challenge to the consistent and coherent presence of the big Other who only wants to bring an end to everything, and he provokes the reader to challenge its terminal claims. His narrative begins with the depiction of an environment that language cannot fully describe, and only ontological questioning based on reason can comprehend: "Nights dark beyond darkness and the days more gray each one than what had gone before. Like the onset of some cold glaucoma dimming away the world" (McCarthy, 2006, p. 3). Then there is the first observation of the boy by his father: "He knew only that the child was his warrant. He said: If he is not the word of God God never spoke" (McCarthy, 2006, p. 4). We can observe how the subjects are fit into the realm of language and the divine presence that is the owner or creator of that language. Moreover, McCarthy's deviation from proper grammar simulates the inconsistency of subjectivity, the impossibility of meaning, and the unstable relationship between the subject and the Big Other.

As Žižek (2012) observes, this being within the words of a divine presence that claims authority over subjectivity (being in the realm of language) is problematic because that big Other of language or divine authority fails to define and represent the subject in coherent and cohesive terms. Moreover, such authority of the divine big Other is challenged by the language and events of the novel. Conclusively, being bound to "watching the nameless dark" (McCarthy, 2006, p. 8) seems to rely on a strong sense of trusting the metaphysics of presence and to entrust all to a big Other that always fails to provide a clear path for the subject, but which always professes that subjectivity can be defined and guided by its power and authority.

In the character of Father, two forces seem to be clashing: a theological force that belongs to the divine big Other and a force of enlightenment or reason. Whenever he rejects helping people or fails to show leniency towards them, Father relies on his reason to survive

the harsh circumstances of their surroundings. Reason dictated that he must observe his limits when it comes to helping the other people. Thereby, he ignores the Christian teachings that would advise him to love his fellow men. In other words, Father ignores theological force when it comes to survival. All of this clash between the forces of reason and faith is represented and echoed through the unreliable language of the novel and the horrible events it depicts.

However, the son moves between relying and distrusting the theological and rational forces of language while Ely ignores the whole rational aspect of language as he represents an ancient theological reasoning which has failed to explain and account for some possibilities that has brought the world of the novel to such a horrific fate. Failure and frustration of both Ely and the Man has something in common: they both put the same faith in theological logic and Enlightenment reasoning respectively. A big Other represents itself cunningly; one believes in it out of the theological faith and the other out of the illuminating reasoning faculty of the human subjectivity. Sharpe ratifies that “unconsciously, to believe through an other, others, and/or the material institutions (big Other) of a hegemonic political system: ‘belief has a reflexive structure proper to the intersubjective space: ‘I believe in the (national) Thing’ equals ‘I believe that others (members of my community) believe in the Thing’” (2006, p. 111). However, the Boy escapes to be part of this belief, and he plays a role that is in harmony with Derrida’s view on reason; that is the reason is capable of breaking itself and creating new possibilities of invention no matter sometimes those possibilities could appear to be impossible to attain or determine. The Boy is too tired to read a book his father would offer him (McCarthy, 2006, 8). A symbolic refusal of succumbing to the ideology of the big Other that would freeze Boy’s re-inventing reason and close his subjectivity to the ability to revisit the context of a horror to extend his hospitality to the lost Ely.

The Boy, “the last host of christendom” (McCarthy, 2006, p. 13), is the skeptical dweller within the big Other of language. This is to say he never trusts language of faith or reason fully. He doubts and questions his father’s secular reasoning and also resists being destroyed by the theological disappointment that has defeated Ely. Language of theology and Enlightenment reasoning both advocate an unconditional trust in their big Other. However, the Boy decides to keep faith in the undecidability and remain untrusting towards what language offers in its purest form. As Derrida (2002) observes, undecidability allows one to maintain a polyphonic genealogy as opposed to the mono-genealogy of the inflexible yet fragile ideologies that have already taken all the decisions a priori to the undecidable condition of the subjects. In a stupid way of believing that the total absence or full presence of the big Other is possible, mono-genealogy hinders the way for the undecidable subject. Hence, this undecidability allows subject/ivity to undertake extreme measures of alterity. Subject/ivity is not a fixated identifiable presence. Through relationality, subject/ivity is possible, and the relations yet again are not bound to sameness but to alterity. The alterity and relationality of the subject and other will get reduced by philosophical thinking. As Critchley (1999) observes, “the very activity of thinking, which lies at the basis of epistemological, ontological, and veridical comprehension, is the reduction of plurality to unity and alterity to sameness” (p. 29). Moreover, Brandt (1997) observes that Derrida’s considering alterity identifies this concept as an internal property of any closed structure, linguistic or other kinds. Therefore, temporal deferral of presence and spatial distinction would place the presence of a big Other in relation to subjectivity and not dominate it.

Dwelling witlessly in (surrendering totally) and ignoring naively (rejecting totally) the big Other are both the same reductionist ontological thinking that would obstruct the flow of alterity. In McCarthy’s novel the subject/ivity should be able to criticize and doubt the language. This new subjectivity culminates itself in the Boy when he, due to his alienation (in

the temporal dimension) from the commodity of the modern era, fails to recognize an iconic momentum from an epoch in which copying and artificiality is the vogue of the day. Yet after drinking the Coca Cola, the Boy is inclined to have a chance for another drink:

He took the can and sipped it and handed it back. You drink it, he said. Let's just sit here.

It's because I won't ever get to drink another one, isn't it?

Ever's a long time.

Okay, the boy said. (McCarthy, 2006, p. 20)

It is no shame or regret in being allured to the sweet dark drink, a remnant of ages past. However, this shows how a skeptical subject could also be tempted by the big Other of the industrial era and enjoy one of the hypnotizing product of both industry and language.

But for the father the case is much different. He is still enchanted with and trapped in the nostalgias of the past age. He constantly rebuilds the memories of that gone age with all of its familiarities, comforts, and charms. However, the Boy is not even tempted by those memories; he is repelled by his father's proposal to visit the remnants of that good old age:

Are we going in?

Why not?

I'm scared.

Don't you want to see where I used to live?

No. (McCarthy, 2006, p. 21)

One might think that the Boy has not experienced that lost age, and so he does not yearn for those bygone times. The point is that the Boy represents a radical alterity from the previous generation, an alterity which is the concrete face of the other as Levinas observes (Wolfreys, 2004). Levinas' 'other' could be interpreted as Žižek's big Other since it stands on the other pole in relation to subjectivity; an 'other' which is abstract and overwhelming in authority. The Boy stands in a vantage point from which all the lost achievements and probably even the ideologies of the past could be doubted and criticized. The Boy has seen the radically altered face of the big Other and knows that it is powerless in defining his subjectivity. Yet the big Other claims false strength. He always succeeds in showing leniency towards other people with no regard for the logic of survival which his father adheres to. The Boy ignores the logical discourse that dictates one is not to risk imminent death by sacrificing oneself for those in need. The father's stalemate, the fact that he could not see anything other than the survival of his kid and himself, impedes the way for the appearance of any true enlightening reason. A reasoning that can help the survival of the entire human subjectivity not merely two subjects. The imminent end in *The Road* has threatened the re-inventing reasoning faculty of the human subjectivity. "God's own fire-drake" (McCarthy, 2006, p. 26); this is the best description of the Boy's sparkling and radical alterity/deviation from the commonality possibly imposed by the big Other's machination of an imminent End.

### THE EVENT AND THE SUBJECTIVITY

There has been a discussion over the status of the subject and its relation to this apocalypse of the post-modern era. At this point, it seems fit to discuss the event of *The Road* as its mad and undecidable flow against the trends of rigid reasoning and ideas has been discussed. Žižek (2012) observes that a lack of ontology, that defines the general structure of beings, culminates in a lack of knowledge in comprehending the structures of universal truths. Yet this ontology at some points has to give into being un-graspable to create a sense of eventness. The aim of this section is to identify the plot segments and narrative of



McCarthy's novel as an event. Moreover, there would also be an analysis of the relationship between this event and the subjects.

As hinted before, the novel's event is ungraspable and ambiguous as the subjectivity of the characters. Wolfreys (2004) observes how 'event' escapes commonsense concepts such as occurrence, structure, space, time, definition, full representation, and in general, finalizability. Moreover, she adds that event calls into their authority and credibility. Thus, event is to rattle the claims of architectonic arrangements in general. Also, Attridge (1995) states that the act of reading is a possibility of event; if we consider that act responding to a text over and over again. In each reading we respond to the text in a different way. Therefore, while the text is, in regard of its physical being, a same text each time, each reading is unique in a different sense. As he addresses the issue, this responsibility to such an event is a responsibility to the other. A ramification of this is ratified by Patton (2000), which is the unpredictability of an event and the retailing incorporeal transformations. These transformations are expressed in language but could not be fully represented.

The coherence in representation is truly challenged by the nonoriginarity of the apocalypse and the fact that there is no use or possibility for coherent representation in McCarthy's text, "because" in his novel we read of the things that remain from the past that "they used to belong to the states. What used to be called the states" (McCarthy, 2006, p. 36). The once proud post-modernist era is truly lost to the Boy. This, along with the father's abundant remembering of the past, show how the narrative tries to represent that event of the apocalypse but only expresses in some words that raise more questions and force the continuum of the story to flow. Moreover, the unusual expression of the characters and their bizarre statue of subjectivity add to the sense of un-graspability of the narrative's history and originarity. Just within a single sentence McCarthy changes both his point of view and his narrative style: "The dog that he remembers followed us for two days" (McCarthy, 2006, p. 74). This ungrammatical and unpunctuated sentence boosts a sense of fragmentation and alienation both from the self and the other (of language). As the portrayal of the subjects, McCarthy's descriptions of the environment, setting, and the event of the novel is incoherent, fractured, and distant from proper sematic statements.

Regarding their actions and interactions in the world around them, the Boy and the Man remain polemical on the first look. Yet, this is not a difficult point to catch on. However, the significance of this opposition of interactions and decision-makings could be more than this mere foiling process. When they arrive at a house in which people are trapped to be eaten by cannibals, the Man deems it impossible to help them because logically it would put their very own survival at great peril. On the other hand, the Boy cannot realize the level of carelessness about the horrible faith which could have been waiting for those naked people. Father's pure reasoning can be called a pre-Kantian reasoning or pure Enlightenment logic, for he easily rolls out any concerns for those hapless people in his own situation; and the Boy's tendency to consider other choices no matter how mad and undecidable their outcome may turn out casts light upon a deeper aspect of difference in their worldviews and reasoning faculties. This validity of their subjectivity is hard to be determined, and indicates that it is the mad core of humanity; as Žižek (2012) observes, it tries to lift up the Boy's voice, and sometimes the Man's as well.

In the un-graspability of eventness in McCarthy's novel, one can see the shattering of theological reasoning also, while one becomes miserable against its big 'Other', which is a religious or divine presence in terms of wholeness and full presencing. In this regard, one can refer to Ely and the Man's conversation over the present state of the world: "Nobody wants to be here and nobody wants [...] There is no God and we are his prophets" (McCarthy, 2006, p. 143). Moreover, Ely, representing an Abrahamic apocalyptic view, puts his last remnants of faith in a total transformation to an incorporeal status: "When we're all gone at last then

there'll be nobody here but death and his days will be numbered too. He'll be out in the road there with nothing to do and nobody to do it to" (McCarthy, 2006, pp. 145-146). The point that makes Ely's remarks into a thing other than event, is that he believes in an end that is graspable by language in terms of both expression and representation. He desires an end for meaning and possibility; a full arrival of self-destruction in the supposedly full presence of God and death as the big 'Other's of language expressing the apocalypse in the narrative. "Since meaning is grounded in what we do, and since what we do can change and is, anyway, 'not everywhere bounded by rules', there is no final answer to the question what is the proper meaning of an expression" (Harrison, 1999, p, 531). Meaning as incapable to be finalized (Meaning as coming to no closure), as wittily remarked by Harrison, is cleverly embedded and engraved in *The Road*.

It was remarked that the Man perceives the Boy as the words of God, and later on, that the boy is portrayed as the torchbearer, God's light. Ely does not perceive the Boy as such nor does he believe in the possibility of a better future and light. Ely, though probably signals the coming of a savior, denies the Boy's divinity. In another reference to religiosity we read that "the secular winds drove them in howling clouds of ash to find shelter where they could. [...] their heads and the noon sky black as the cellars of hell" (McCarthy, 2006, p. 149). Here McCarthy's expression is apparently to introduce the idea that divinity is so indifferent to the harshness and brutality of their status. However, McCarthy's own expression of the Boy as a beacon of hope undermines his consideration of religion, or better to say, ratifies the need for re-inventing religious expressions. In McCarthy's apocalyptic world, in which infants are beheaded and charred to be eaten, the dark of the humans calls for revisiting their subjectivity and reasoning, whether it is secular reasoning or theological. Considering the Man out of the big 'Other' of theology, and Ely dwelling stupidly within it, the Boy is able to doubt the big 'other' of religion and the secular reasoning and Enlightenment. Thus, he is able to see and feel beyond and within the human core of madness. In the eighth section of the novel, when they arrive at a beach and scavenge an abandoned ship for supplies (McCarthy, 2006), the Boy considers the possibility that the owners of the ship might be alive, and refers to them as good guys. He feels the responsibility of not stealing from those good guys. However, his father does not feel the same responsibility. The Man just follows some rules of surviving the menaces caused by the environment and other people by being logical and following what the reason of the Enlightenment dictates. Nonetheless, the Boy is able to be skeptical of the environment, the harsh apocalyptic discourse, and the rigidities of the situation imposed by the big 'Other', language, and religiosity. Thus, he is able to make decisions out of madness which could be considered the same madness that Žižek (2012) assigns to the core of human subjectivity. Wortham (2010) addresses the issue of Derridean responsibility as a duty different from ethics or morality. To be responsible is to be able to decide on the scale of undecidability. In other words, to be free from any rules, presences, or rigidities; imposed by reason or metaphysics of presence. Responsibility requires undecidability, it requires decision-making out of madness.

According to Wortham (2010), the context of responsibility could be identified as "that of the experience of the impossible" (p. 163). So, the positions of Ely and the Man in relation to the un-graspability of the event and the Boy's mad subjectivity is worthy of further considerations also. In this regard, Ely, as a subject within the imposition and ultimacy of the big 'Other', could not keep faith in the claim that the Boy is a light, a mark of the continuity of life and universe and therefore subjectivity. However, the Man, although an adherent to some rules and fixated reasoning, remains loyal to the mad undecidability of the Boy. Nonetheless, there are times in which the Boy can make the Man take a decision that is in accordance with his own un-graspable subjectivity. When the dad decides to punish the

thief of their properties by leaving him naked for retaliation, the Boy cries out and claims that he is the only one that must be caring and responsible for the fate of even the thief (McCarthy, 2006, p. 217).

The struggle over practicing justice by punishing the thief is an apparent protagonist-antagonist struggle or imbalance. By considering what has so far been said, however, it is also possible to assume this struggle as an inter-protagonist conflict. The Boy and the Man hold two very different oppositions over perceiving justice and responsibility. When finally they arrive at the river side, they reach a vital point for asking a question: "Well what are we" (McCarthy, 2006, p. 232). These two's journey could also symbolize an internal conflict within the human subject/ivity that leads to a realization that exists between the subject and the other. While the Man is able to get in touch with that radical alterity of the big Other only through dreams but fails to realize those dreams as a glimpse into the undecidable event of their current status, the Boy's mourning for his father's death expresses a state in which the subject is able to accept the big 'Other' but simultaneously feeling uncertain about its dominion and thereby rejecting it. When the woman from the family that takes the Boy into their own amidst tries to talk to him about God, the Boy prefers it and is more comfortable to talk to his Father as well, and the woman adds: "the breath of God was his breath yet though it pass from man to man through all of time" (McCarthy, 2006, p. 241).

## CONCLUSION

Perhaps one can propose that Post-modernism is the era in which there is little chance for originality and fabrication, and that its fabrication often faces degradation and is expressed through well-wrought but dark narrational statements. According to Elliott (2015), the American interest to reenact the past is shown in literature as mingled with a strong enthusiasm that wants to make it highly fantastic. Cormac McCarthy has taken a leap ahead of this fantasization of America. So, in *The Road* he represents a dark fantasy of its future. In this post-post dark apocalypse of modernism, he has radically changed both reality and fabrication. In the after-postmodernism epoch, and in the horror of its unknown apocalypse, all the meanings and symbols of simulation are radically transformed or destroyed. In this era, there are effective forces at work for the survival of the subject. McCarthy's novel proves a significant representation of these forces.

As it has been observed, in the postmodern era subject/ivity is facing a perilous environment through which it has to find its way. The present readers believe that in the light of Žižekian and Derridean theories we can see how subject/ivity finds its way through this perilous environment. As it has been observed, the Pure, finalized, and fully-present faith in religion or pre-Kantian reason cannot be considered as the origins of subjectivity and its decision-makings. This faith and subjectivity are both inconsistent and unreliable. They constantly change and go through alterity; sometimes in radical forms as in Ely. Moreover, the notion of Enlightenment and the consequent matter of the human faculty of reasoning, which McCarthy's novel dramatizes, flow in a certain tendency that goes with both pre-Kantian and post-Kantian climates, and this is in accord with Žižek's (2012) considerations of the dark night of the human subjectivity. Accordingly, in the undecidable event of the novel, subject/ivity gets in touch with its very mad core which is both skeptical and critical to the supposedly whole presence of the big 'Other'. Yet, there are moments that show the subjects are struggling while being completely ignorant towards the big Other; or completely yielding to it. Ely and the Man exemplify this futile struggle, for the former expresses the divine religion and the latter does the same with the pre-Kantian logic and reason.

However, the man's journey to the End of the novel which is interestingly a new beginning, unlike Ely's, expresses a vital point. In the story's undecidability and eventness,

the Boy represents that mad and ungraspable core of the human subject/ivity. That mad and ambiguous core, as we have learned from Žižek (2012), is the dark of the night. While the Man believes in the boy as the fire-bearer, Ely denies that the Boy could be a beacon of hope or the words of God. Even the family that finally takes the Boy into their custody keeps his faith. Like one who keeps faith in reason in Derridean reading of the Enlightenment, the man keeps faith in the potency of the Boy's subject/ivity though he cannot remain faithful to it in the whole event. Even when the context is un-graspable or undecidable, and the subject tries to remain loyal to reason, only a certain faith is able to revisit and re-invent decisions in the context of an event.

While Ely abandons his faith, the Man keeps his faith in reason and Enlightenment of which the Boy is an expression if not a complete representation. As such, representation seems to be impossible. Thus, we have observed that for the subject/ivity it is impossible to act really independently from the big Other and language. As well, to act thoroughly within the language as if it had the potency to shape a coherent and fully present definition/determination of subject/ivity is prejudice and blind faith. Ergo, it is a distrusting incoherent subject that can revisit and doubt the language and the big Other so as to gain an unbiased reasonable faith. At the close of the novel, this faith makes it possible to perceive a new beginning. It also brings up the possibility of both secular and spiritual prayer as it is noted by the woman.

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