

## On Nomadic Posthumanity and the Ethics of Becoming in Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*

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### **ABSTRACT**

This study sets itself the task of deconstructing and defining the very concept of humanity in Cormac McCarthy's post-apocalyptic novel, *The Road*, through the nomadic existence of the father-son duo. It is debated here that the novel shows a Deleuzoguattarian nomadic posthumanity through its protagonists, one that is characterized by interconnectivity with the other, an ethical engagement with diverse modes of existence and a radical rethinking of the rigid binaries of humanity and otherness. Referencing Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's theories of nomadism and its variations, the study examines how the post-apocalyptic landscape acts as an "event" that catalyzes post-anthropocentric transformation. The father and son's constant navigation through the wasteland (of the world and humanity itself) necessitates a continual reshaping of their identities, challenging traditional notions of human subjectivity and fostering a deeper connection with the natural world and other beings. *The Road* offers a haunting yet hopeful vision of a posthumanity that emerges not from the ashes of the old, but from the transformative potentiality of the new.

**Keywords:** Cormac McCarthy, Posthumanism, Nomadism, Becomings, Deleuzian Ethics.

عن ما بعد الإنسانية ذات النزعة البدوية وأخلاقيات الصيرورة في رواية (الطريق)  
لكورماك مكارثي

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### المخلص

تتناول هذه الدراسة رواية كورماك مكارثي "الطريق" ببعدها ما بعد الكارثي، عبر تفكيك وإعادة تعريف مفهوم الإنسانية ذاته من خلال الوجود البدوي لشخصيتي الابن والابن بوصفهما ثنائياً. يتم التطرق ههنا الى أن الرواية تقدم فكرة ما بعد الإنسانية ذات النزعة البدوية الديلوزوغواتارية عبر أبطالها، والتي تتميز بالتواشج مع الآخر والانخراط الأخلاقي مع أنماط الوجود المتنوعة وإعادة التفكير الجذرية في الثنائيات الصارمة للإنسانية والآخر. بتوظيف نظريات كل من جيل ديلوز وفيلكس غواتاري حول نزعة البداوة وتضاعيفها، تشرع الدراسة بتحليل المشهد ما بعد الكارثي بوصفه "حدثاً" محركاً للتحوّل ما بعد الإنساني. إن الارتحال الدائم للأب والابن عبر يباب العالم والانسانية يستلزم إعادة تشكيل مستمرة لهوياتهم، مما يتحدى المفاهيم التقليدية للذات الإنسانية ويأصل لاتصال أعمق مع العالم الطبيعي والكائنات الأخرى. تقدم رواية "الطريق" رؤية مؤرقة ولكنها مليئة بالأمل لمرحلة ما بعد الإنسانية التي تنشأ ليس من رماد القديم، بل من القدرة الكامنة لما هو جديد.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** كورماك مكارثي، ما بعد الإنسانية، النزعة البدوية، الصيرورة، الأخلاقيات الديلوزية.

"And so, onwards... along a path of wisdom, with a hearty tread, a hearty confidence...; however you may be, be your own source of experience."

- Fredrich Nietzsche, *Human, All too Human: A Book for Free Spirits*

#### 1. A Poetics of Event at the World's End

Posthumanism, as presented by philosophers and theorists, aims to challenge the hierarchical structures that have historically shaped our relationship with each other, other species, and the environment. It is a critique and reevaluation of the human and inhuman in the humans as Rosi Braidotti puts it. Where humanism emphasizes the significance of human reasoning, logic, and potential, placing them on a pedestal superior to all other life forms on earth, posthumanism challenges such a teleological approach to human subjectivity (2018, 2). In thinking

beyond human superiority, posthuman thought engages with life past such anthropocentric constructed definitions.

This paper aims to map Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* (2005) beyond the rigid definition of humanity and what this humanity means in a post-apocalyptic setting, employing the key theories of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari among many theoretical concepts. The bleak post-apocalyptic landscape of the novel exposes the deconstruction of human structures and cultivates a nomadic posthumanity in the father-son duo through interconnectivity with the other. This posthumanity is not a negation of their human potential, but a radical redefinition of it through nomadic thought, ethical connection with the other, and an acknowledgment of diverse modes of existence, which ultimately pushes readers to reconsider the fixed binaries of humanity and otherness at the world's end.

The "event" (Deleuze 1990, 1) of the apocalypse in the novel catalyzes exploring the depths of "becoming"-(post)human (Deleuze and Guattari 1978, 10) and the inherent struggle for survival. As Jessica Datema opines, the "human" is an "ontological and nontranscendent project" in which creating a "path" in life constitutes being a human (2010, 145). Constructing fortitudes, languages, and identities all make up the contingency of humanity. In the Deleuzoguattarian philosophy, "[o]ne is not born; one becomes a human" (Daigle and McDonald 2020, 1), meaning it is a process that does not end but includes transformation/becoming in different stages. They call for a renewal of humanity since what humans lack is creation. This creation in the context of the novel comes with the deconstruction of traditional human structures. Through McCarthy's poetics, the world's end becomes a haunting backdrop, an event, that creates the possibilities of creation in the novel.

In Deleuzian terms, the eventhood of the apocalypse is not a mere influence or a happening over other substances and things; rather it is “the pure expressed within what happens” (Deleuze 1990, 149), meaning it is an expression of change and transformation; a becoming. Moreover, the event is “the *product* of the synthesis of forces” (Stagoll 2005, 90) that actualizes the potentiality of transformations. Events are not just points in time but are distinguished by their capacity to express the potentialities within different circumstances synthesizing different forces that were laden. Thus, the apocalypse brings forth the transformative potentials of the earth and its inhabitants that were concealed through the process of humanization of the earth. John Roffe, commenting on Alaine Badiou’s analysis of the Deleuzian event, regards the event as “effects of bodily interaction or products of states of affairs” (2012, 111) which highlights an interconnectedness of beings and becomings. It is part of the world of the transcendental but also goes beyond this realm for as a singularity, which is “anti-generalities” and “impersonal and pre-individual”, event teams up with the nomadic forces and anonymous “impersonal and pre-individual singularities” (2012, 111) of the universe. One can distinguish an event not from a causal relation or happening but from the “course of their actualisation in some body or state” (Stagoll 2010, 98). The significant dynamic that the apocalyptic event brings to the surface is signified in the response and the interaction of the novel’s characters navigating the post-apocalyptic world which singularizes their complexities and thinking beyond being human towards becoming-(post)human.

To read the posthumanity of the novel, one has to find the ways of becoming-human of the novel and its many “lines of flight” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 2) amidst the cracks that the apocalypse has left behind because for Deleuze and Guattari thinking and creation happen simultaneously. Systems create territories and boundaries that fix and

regulate the flows of desire, thought, and behavior. Lines of flight, on the other hand, dynamic and contingent, represent the trajectories or movements that break away from these fixed and established structures and open up new possibilities for non-restrictive modes of existence. “Nomadology” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 23) in particular expands and makes possible the existence of more lines of flight by the many ways of “deterritorialization”, the process of “following distinct but entangled lines” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 2), breaking free from established structures and creating new possibilities for interaction and growth. Deleuzoguattarian nomadism is a way of thinking and becoming that embraces fluidity, movement, and resistance to fixed identities and rigid structures, continuously adapting and transforming in response to the environment. In the scope of this novel, nomadic thought is a posthuman and post-anthropocentric thought that seeks to deterritorialize and unbalance the fixed definition of humanity and open new ways of becoming.

This takes particular importance as the world as known to humans has ended and characters are left to their devices to fathom the depth of the deconstruction of all structures. In his novel, McCarthy encapsulates the actualization of potentialities inherent in the preceding conditions leading to new realities by setting off the apocalypse as the event that shapes all connections. The roads the characters traverse are nomadic events that enable a dynamic experience of change and becomings. Characters are required to form their actions, and their philosophy, by embracing or rejecting a posthuman perspective in *The Road*, and this allows for a more fluid understanding and the recognition of diverse experiences and perspectives of the characters by the readers.

Rosi Braidotti, a contemporary philosopher and theoretician, using a Deleuzoguattarian perspective views the concept of posthumanism as an endeavor to conceptualize the complex connections that are generated

and simultaneously challenge conventional comprehension of subjectivity and identity (2013a; 2013b). Posthuman nomadic affectivity is “outward-bound and based on complex relations with a multiplicity of others, including non-human others” (Braidotti 2005, 32). This refers to a way of experiencing emotions and relationships that transcends traditional human-centered perspectives. The importance of this nomadic view on posthumanism is that it argues that humanity and human subjectivity are not a fixed structure but a dynamic and constantly evolving becoming. The nomadic subjectivity allows for a heightened level of adaptability and expansiveness in comprehending existence within a rapidly changing environment that is characterized by accelerated technological advancements and social transformations.

### **1. On (Un)framing (Post)Humanity**

At the heart of McCarthy’s *The Road* beats a basic terror of walking in a world in which everything has been reduced to its elements of survival. The narrative tells of the journey of an unnamed father and son through an unfamiliar earth, which no longer is a source of nourishment. Everything is in void and silence, and the cold prevails: “The cold and the silence. The ashes of the late world carried on the bleak and temporal winds to and fro in the void. Carried forth and scattered and carried forth again” (McCarthy 2006, 6). The remnants of a bygone era are ceaselessly propelled by the desolate winds that traverse the vast emptiness. An unnamed disaster hits as a flash of light and “a series of low concussions” (45), in the light of which, T. S. Eliot’s lines seem prophetic: “This is the way the world ends/ Not with a bang but a whimper” (2022, 82, lines 98–99). This has destroyed the entire world, and vegetation and animal lives have almost disappeared along with most of humanity. Half of the remaining humans are cannibals; “men who would eat your children in front of your eyes” (McCarthy 2006, 14).

A mysterious ash covers everything and the sun is cold and despairing. This new earth is no longer that of a human dwelling.

The father and son's existence is dependent on traveling the road, towards the south and the ocean in hopes of finding better living conditions, while avoiding the "bad guys" and as the father believes anticipating "the good" ones (McCarthy 2006, 46). The father creates a binary philosophy from early on in the hopes that this will save his son. The world in *The Road* is charred beyond recognition, that which we know of humanity is gone, and a sense of bewilderment is left as what the posthuman becomings of the earth and the characters could mean. Yet, amidst this desolate terrain, McCarthy offers a glimmer of hope through the concept of becomings as theorized by Deleuze and Guattari. Instead of dwelling on what has been lost, the novel compels the reader to focus on the constant process of transformation unfolding before the eyes. Through a constant construction of becomings, comprehending the total creation of human identities in McCarthy's novel becomes an easier task. Becomings signal a process of transformation in favor of multiplicity against the fixity of fates opposed by rigid human structures. As Rosi Braidotti explains,

Becoming is neither the dynamic confrontation of opposites nor the unfolding of an essence in a teleologically ordained process leading to a synthesising identity. The Deleuzian becoming is the affirmation of the positivity of difference, meant as a multiple and constant process of transformation. Both teleological order and fixed identities are relinquished in favour of a flux of multiple becoming. (1993, 44)

This becoming celebrates the positivity of difference, highlighting an ongoing and multifaceted process of transformation. This view rejects the idea of a teleological order—a belief in a purposeful, directed end—as well as the notion of fixed, stable identities. Reading the novel under the light of the becomings, with an emphasis on fluidity and dynamic



interaction and connection to the outside of being, assists in moving beyond a purely anthropocentric doctrine, and a monological discourse of life, not to shun or venerate the past or the future as the father comes to realize but to live the present as best as one can.

*The Road* challenges the humanism exceptionalism so prevalent in the pre-apocalyptic world. In *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, Deleuze argues that the conventional glorification of humanity, or what he calls “the whole human phenomenon”, not only hinders a genuine and comprehensive understanding of the world but also fails to acknowledge how the entirety of human existence is influenced by reactive forces which only hinder the ability to embrace difference (1986, 86). The challenges caused by humanism have a significant ethical aspect for Deleuze. One aspect is that humanity always has hunted the question of whether there is meaning in life too vehemently and tragically. For Nietzsche and Deleuze, this question is problematic since it poses the problems of “interpretation and evaluation” (1986, 18) instead of focusing on experimentation. Adopting the narrow viewpoint of human interpretation positions a risk to ethics, argues David Ventura, because it disconnects thought from the inherent capacities of experiencing diversity and creativity, obstructive to thought’s ability to participate in the ethical endeavor of generating novel forms and possibilities of life (2020, 9). It is the task of the philosophers and writers using their art of writing to “go beyond the human condition” (Deleuze 2002, 28 qt in Ventura 2020,9), to explore sensibilities related to others, to the earth, and the all-encompassing life.

Deleuzoguattarian posthumanism is a nomadic rhizomatic affectivity, in the sense of “a sensibility, a sensation” (Deleuze 1983, 62) that seeks to connect life to immanence. This nomadic affectivity is not bound by the confines of individual subjectivity, but rather by the intricate interplay between corporeal and material entities and surrounding contexts. The



reference to sensibility by Deleuze suggests that posthumanity or post-anthropocentrism is concerned with developing awareness of the affective and sensory forces of the outside of human conscious experiences. It seeks to engage with the world beyond the human logical or intellectual capacity, emphasizing an immediate and bodily connection to the possible experiences that the new earth is providing. In decentering the anthropocentric tradition, Pramod K. Naya, argues that posthumanism

seeks to move beyond the traditional humanist ways of thinking about the autonomous, self-willed individual agent to treat the human itself as an assemblage, co-evolving with other forms of life, enmeshed with the environment and technology. It rejects the view of the human as exceptional, separate from other life forms and usually dominant/dominating over these other forms. (2014, 4)

In the scope of the novel, and in place of this superior positionality, posthuman ethics is shaped which is based on a materialist foundation with a politics of affirmation of all life forms and forces. Nomadic ethics configures non-unitary modes of subjectivity through multiple alliances with surrounding assemblages of the earth and the chaosmos of the universe. Ethics in *The Road* does not refer to a set of morality, because as John Marks opines, morality is a “way of judging life, whereas ethics is a way of assessing what we do in terms of ways of existing in the world” (2010, 87). Based on a Deleuzoguattarian philosophy, the ethics that is mapped in the novel refers to the multiplicities of becomings in the face of the unknown. Ethics creates a road permeated with numerous lines of flight, signaling an array of interdependency among all entities that inhabit the earth. It is a way of experimenting and creating assemblages of connections to the other; in other words, ethics is a way of becoming-nomads. The assemblage of the earth invites this kind of nomad becomings as a result of the

posthuman condition of the world. In McCarthy's novel, while the father upholds the old worlding's rituals and codes of ethics, the son, whom the father notes is "[a]lways so deliberate, hardly surprised by the most outlandish advents. A creation perfectly evolved to meet its own end" (McCarthy 2006, 35), achieves a higher degree of intimacy and connection to the others in his posthuman nomad becoming.

The earth in deterritorializing all life forms relations after the apocalypse creates the opportunity to take the first steps towards the ethics of becoming-nomad and becoming-posthuman. This can relate to the "Mesh" model proposed by Morton's ecological thinking that deciphers life as something that does not have a "fixed identity anywhere in the system of life forms" (2011, 22). Seeing life in such a way is not a wasteful outlook to life with all its "negativity and irony, ugliness and horror" because the same horror and even violence "compel our compassionate coexistence to go beyond condescending pity" (Morton 2010, 17). This view is in resonance with *The Road* where violence has also brought a new form of intimacy and care for the other. The characters' actions in *The Road* exemplify this shift, underscoring the significance of violence as a means to establish intimacy and care amidst a bleak and desolate world. The absolute inhumanness of the new earth removes any chance of representations of beings that have been so prevalent in the modern-postmodern societies of the pre-apocalypse. Now free of these coding machines, new machinic forces in the shape of new earth and new people have emerged that invite one to create an aesthetics of ethical responsibility towards affirming life itself with all its harshness.

Post-apocalyptic narratives usually focus on the question of what meaning is left for humans to live, what more to hope for in the face of total collapse, and what propels humans to move forward or to form an ethics of care for others. The novel ventures even further, exploring a

desolate realm where only a shadowy remnant of humanity remains. Through its exploration, the novel challenges our understanding of meaning and existence. The father and son attempt to deal with these impossible situations while “shuffling through the ash”, trying to survive day after day, “each the other’s world entire” (McCarthy 2006, 15). The characters, thus, create a rhizomatics of survival that is post-anthropocentric, anti-essentialist, and anti-teleological. Each day, they set foot on new roads and maneuver and configure new modes of existence. This adaptation of nomadology instead of teleology emphasizes the significance of creating new lines of flight without a pre-determined itinerary or the imposed hierarchical structures of humans. Forsaking teleology according to Morton is “humiliating— literally, it brings us down to Earth” (2011, 22), and it deconstructs the hierarchical relationship of subject-object in which the subject is always superior to the other. It is a way of becoming that is directly related to the earth, to the new world, through “[r]ethinking the embodied structure of human subjectivity [which] requires an ethics of lucidity, as well as powers of innovation and creativity” (Braidotti 2005, 23). This ethics will be based on a creative relation to the others within the situations and events that are outside human control. James Williams writing on Deleuze’s *Logic and Sense* argues that Deleuze’s moral philosophy is concerned with questions such as “How must I act in order to live with these events?” (2008, 147). The thematics of posthuman nomadic ethics in *The Road* asks the same question of how each individual responds to and experiences his or her becomings.

*The Road* also presents different types of nomadic approaches to the matter of life. When the mother confronts the father about the futility of struggle and emphasizes the necessity of ending their lives, she tells him: “You talk about taking a stand but there is no stand to take. ... You have no argument because there is none” (McCarthy 2006, 57). That

the father does not share her decision to take his and his son's life is seen as absolute futility by the mother. To the mother, the father's resistance probably appears as a patriarchal desire to find a solution, create an opposition, and want to change the status of things. The mother, unlike the father, does not see any meaning or purpose in any of this suffering. To her, it seems more logical and authentic to the natural violence of the earth to end their lives and that is what she precisely does. Braidotti argues that life, which seeks self-perpetuation, is an addiction and one gets used to living in a sense that one does not feel what being alive means. The desire to die, thus, is an intense desire to live (2013, 134) and since the mother no longer finds herself living, as she says, "We're the walking dead in a horror film" (McCarthy 2006,33), she wishes for death to come as a lover.

The nomadism that the mother creates is an intimate relationship with death which as Braidotti claims is the inhuman in all of us (2013, 134). She critically appraises their situation and their closeness to death as it is already among them, not something they could only talk about over dinner. Instead of waiting for death to come, she seeks and invites it, telling the father, "I've taken a new lover. He can give me what you cannot" (McCarthy 2006, 34). Her opposition is the opposition to the Lacanian Real which is the eruption of the "impossible" (Zupancic 2000, 235); something that exists beyond our symbolic and imaginary structures. At the heart of the mother's ethics lies the unacceptance of this event so out of place and time to the extent that for her, the eruption of the real "inscribes itself in a given continuity as a rupture, a break or an interruption" (Zupancic 2000, 235). Zupancic reads the eventhood of this Real

as 'the impossible thing' that turns our symbolic universe upside down and leads to the reconfiguration of this universe. Hence the impossibility of the Real does not prevent it from having effect in the realm of the

possible. This is when ethics comes into play, in the question forced upon us by an encounter with the Real: will I act in conformity to what threw me ‘out of joint’, will I be ready to reformulate what has hitherto been the foundation of my existence? (2000, 235)

According to this, the mother’s nomadic ethics is defined by a resistance to accepting this eruption of the Real, which she sees as an intrusion that disrupts the continuity of her lived experience. Confronted with these questions, the mother thoughtfully seeks the agency that was taken from her: “I was brought to this [world]. And now I’m done” (McCarty 2005, 35). In doing so, she is creating her own becoming–human that rejects the Real in the symbolic realm of their existence, and as Aylin Alkaç suggests it offers no specific agenda, as opposed to a humanist logic, “no positive program”, and neither does it offer “a great founding gesture of a new order” (2019, 79). She embraces the silence of death, thus, connecting life and death in her ethics. This act signals a nomadic posthumanism true to the earth and the ways of deterritorializing one’s self and ways of transformation.

The father, however, accepts the encounter with the Real and the terror that comes with it, and moves beyond his wife’s decision toward his foregoing of “a false world of shadows that must be abandoned for the real world” (Abd Al–Ameer 2015, 63). This terror in the Lacanian sense, comes from the confrontation with the impossible and the choice that the father has to make because by accepting the Real, the father comes out as “‘another subject’ – or, more precisely, it is only after this choice that the subject is a subject” (Zupancic 2000, 235). This process of becoming something other is not clear at the beginning for the father. To stay true to what he thinks is the human in them, the father has begun by constructing a story for himself and his son about the good and bad guys, to be distinguished by the metaphor of the ones “carrying the fire” (McCarty 2005, 72). His dreams confront the Real as in his dream he is

“walking in a flowering wood where birds flew before them he and the child and the sky was aching blue but he was learning how to wake himself from just such siren worlds” (McCarty 2005, 9). However, as it comes to be, his son and he have a different conception of this becoming. Whoever is left alive now is an alien to what was before and this is evident in the fact that the father can no longer recognize himself or his son and several times associates the son with an alien being: “They came upon themselves in a mirror and he almost raised the pistol. It's us, Papa, the boy whispered. It's us” (McCarthy 2006, 68). This is because the father has yet to reconcile with their (post)humanity. He is still trapped in the symbolic realm of his old subjectivity and belief systems and this is why as the text suggests he needs a new light to see the transformation that they are going through.

At one point in their travels, they come upon an old house, and while looking for food, the father finds an old bottle that he thinks can be reused as a light.

They walked through the house again. He found a beer bottle and an old rag of a curtain and he tore an edge from the cloth and stuffed it down the neck of the bottle with a coathanger. This is *our new lamp*, he said.

How can we light it?

I found some gasoline in the shed. And some oil. I'll show you. Okay.

Come on, the man said. Everything's okay. I promise.

But when he bent to see into the boy's face under the hood of the blanket he very much feared that *something was gone that could not be put right again*. (McCarthy 2006, 69 italics added)

Subconsciously, the man knows that they are not what he desperately wants them to be and their subjectivities have been deterritorialized into something unrecognizable, for which he has no words to describe but “alien”. Despite this transformation, the father is bent on putting things

back “right again”. In reality, he is creating “abstract machines” (Deleuze and Guattari 1986, 86) on the go. In *Kafka: Towards a Minor Literature*, Deleuze and Guattari define abstract machines as an ultimate sense:

In another sense of abstract (a sense that is nonfigurative, non-signifying, nonsegmental), it is the abstract machine that operates in the field of unlimited immanence ...: the concrete assemblages are no longer that which gives a real existence to the abstract machine...—it’s the abstract machine that measures the mode of existence and the reality of the assemblages. (1986, 86–87)

The abstract machine is a process of production; “an immaterial element that disassembles any transcendent or symbolic function of technical, concrete, or social assemblages” (Young et.al. 2013, 18). Creating and finding abstract machines require one to see differently, to have a new perception and a new sensitivity, and that is why for Deleuze and Guattari, nomadism is a sensitivity for nomads to create or explore abstract machines that experiment with new perceptions. Ian Buchanan views the abstract machines replacing the unconscious, quoting Deleuze and Guattari, for “the unconscious is there where consciousness goes”. (Deleuze and Guattari. 1987, 284 qt in Buchanan 2005, 75). This means that the unconscious or the abstract machine is an extension and in coexistence with conscious life; they are not separate. Thus, in a post-Oedipal world, it is befitting that the father finds new sensibilities and perceptions through abstract machines. He begins to feel and perceive that the old world is “slowly fading from memory” (McCarthy 2005, 9). The father’s unconscious is not only his storage of memories; it is also a way of finding meaning in existence through creating abstract machines that generate connections constantly.

To ensure the safety of his son, when there is danger, he has to kill or withhold help or abandon people on the road despite his son’s protests. His ethics wears thin in the face of the extreme violence of their



surroundings, and that is why he needs a “new lamp” (McCarthy 2006, 69), a new abstract machine, to cast a new light on their transformatory and nomadic existence. Gradually, he becomes aware that whenever his son forces him to help others, the boy’s ethics evolves as an intimate bond to this new earth while possibly creating a new worlding: Maybe he understood for the first time that to the boy he was himself an alien. A being from a planet that no longer existed. The tales of which were suspect. He could not construct for the child’s pleasure the world he’d lost without constructing the loss as well and he thought perhaps the child had known this better than he. He tried to remember the dream but he could not. All that was left was the feeling of it. He thought perhaps they’d come to warn him. Of what? That he could not enkindle in the heart of the child what was ashes in his own. (McCarthy 2006, 79)

The father realizes that their worldings are completely different and his attempts at recreating the old world are in vain. He also knows that the son’s understanding and connection to this world is much deeper than his for the son is born to this world and is more in tune with its survival paths than he is. He laments his lack of power to shelter his son from the brutalities of this world. However, the father is missing a crucial lesson here, and it is the fact that it is the boy who is going to survive because of his tenderness in the face of danger, which is the essence of tuning to the new earth, creating his understanding of being a good guy. Despite the sheer terror of the void depicted in the novel, this is not a story of despair. Both the father and son do not show signs of a fatalistic approach to life as the mother did. Through these two characters, McCarthy offers a negotiation of posthuman becomings and ethics related to caring for the world and not abandoning it.

## 2. The Ethics of Becoming–Other

The father–son’s posthumanity is framed not only through their survival but also their connection with the “structure–Other” (Deleuze 1990, 308). This other does not necessarily allude to a certain individual or an object but it implies a structure/organization that is in connection with others and which produces subjectivity. This subjectivity, historically, has always been subordinated to the self alone (excluding the other), or at best in a hierarchical relationship to the extent that “[s]ubjectivity is equated with consciousness, universal rationality, and self–regulating ethical behavior, whereas Otherness is defined as its negative and specular counterpart” (Braidotti 2013, 2). For Deleuze, other is an expression of the possible which avoids the social relations of master–slave dialectic construed since Hegel. Deleuzian ideation of the structure–Other problematizes any preoccupation “with rationality, the law, and the self–interested agent” (Raynold 2008, 67). Its connection to actualizing possibilities is a nomadic trait that highlights the other’s ethico–political dimension of going beyond the boundaries of human–making. In McCarthy’s story, otherness and subjectivity are not merely subverted; they are becoming something altogether different, interconnected in a rhizomatic way, smoothing their relationality. The posthumanity of the narrative itself, a “minimalist rendition of [the] story that has reduced the real to the temptations of the zero degree of existence” (Al–Zubaidi and Mahdi 2014, 866), is an invitation that opens up to the “others within” and “non–human others” (Kristeva 1991, 22) in the reader. This clearly can be seen in the way the father avoids the others on the road while the son invites the creation of minor communities. The nomadism of becoming–other is not a negation of the characters’ humanity and breaking it into utterly unrecognizable pieces, but a way of actualizing the possibility of extending life to the other, instead of taking it or diminishing its potentials.

A Deleuzian analysis sheds light on the significance of the structure–Other in creating an ethics of care. In McCarthy’s novel, the father and son’s attempt to formulate their ethico–political engagement in the novel is illuminating. It is through an encounter with the structure–Other that the relationality of subject and object becomes clear; not as hierarchical relations but a connection relating to immanence. While the father and son are not most of the time in the presence of others, their habits and daily routines are formed based on their perception of the presence/absence of others. They still are perceptive of their temporal and spatial traverse despite the absence of human signs because “the Other is initially a structure of the perceptual field, without which the entire field could not function as it does” (Deleuze 1990, 307). This signals the potential that others provide in finding lines of flight. Deleuze writes of this structure:

Filling the world with possibilities, background, fringes, and transitions; inscribing the possibility of a frightening world when I am not yet afraid ...; constituting inside the world so many blisters which contain so many possible worlds—this is the Other”. (1990, 310)

The importance of emphasizing perceiving the structure–Other in making a connection is that it steers away the attention from a binary subject–object relation to a multifold rhizomatic experience of perceiving the world’s possibilities. Experience in a Deleuzian sense is “the capacity to affect and be affected” (Semetsky 2005, 91). It is not a subjective or individual phenomenon but an experimental event which pushes the thought to transcend perception. Thus, experiencing the structure–Other (perceiving it, being affected by it, and affecting it) emphasizes the reality of the world the father and son are inhabiting; a cruel, cold, and frightening world but with occasional kindness and sacrifices. It creates a non–verbal language for the world. This is not to say that the humanity of the father and the posthumanity of the son are total and

finalizing. It is the father that shuns away from the possibilities that the structure–Other represents. His connection without him realizing it, ironically, gets them closer to the devastated earth than to the human community. He, in a Deleuzian sense, is a liberator of the (non–human) elements of the earth as Ventura would put it, unconcealing the possibilities of the earth.

Within this newly formed organization, the components that were previously structured and organized by the Other are now set free: “the de–structuration of the Other does not result in a disarray of the world, but rather the separation of a pristine element that is finally emancipated” (Deleuze 1990, 313). Ventura explains that, elements become liberated because they are no longer subordinated to the structure of resemblance or possibility that the Other previously imposed upon them. This newly liberated order therefore brings about some of its own distinctive effects. In it, perception can no longer be taken as that which is relativised by the Other. The absence of the Other ... allows the entry into a present, that is, where each thing resounds in all its splendour and mystery. (2020, 44)

The otherness of the son and father bears witness to such efforts to perceive a potential for existing and that is why the father sees a fire in his son. Connecting to the structure–Other helps them to “repopulate the world with Others (who would still be [themselves]) and to maintain the effects of the presence of Others when the structure has failed” (Deleuze 1990, 353). It is through their connection to the earth as the other, and to the other people on the road that the father and son come to fabulate two different sets of ethics. As Deleuze explains in conceptualizing the otherness, this world itself is “something wholly other (un tout–autre) than the Other; not a replica, but a Double: one [which] reveals pure elements and dissolves objects, bodies and the earth” (1990, 317). The son is this other who creates a wholly other–world,

completely different than his father's and mother's. Affected by the earth, the father-son relationship is also one that encompasses each other as the narration suggests, "each the other's world entire" (McCarthy 2006, 5). Through each other, both create a nomadic ethic that is a continuation of the earth's rhizomatic un-worldly structuring of posthumanity.

The boy represents the novel's "ethical alternative" (O'Connor 2017, 9) to the striation of the earth and structure-Other. On several occasions, he chastises the father and even stops talking to him to show his disobedience and dissatisfaction with the father's ethical double codes. On one occasion, he sees a little boy by a farm and pleads with his father to search for him. In tears, the boy makes a case to take the child along: "We should go get him, Papa. We could get him and take him with us. We could take him and we could take the dog. The dog could catch something to eat" (McCarthy 2005, 73). His insistence to take on others with them is more than a means of survival; it shows the son's ethics in the face of nihilism and lack of sensibilities. In a different setting, the boy reprimands the father for leaving a man who had tried to steal their food and the father had left him naked in the wild. When the boy breaks down in tears, pleading to the father, "[h]e was just hungry, Papa. He's going to die" (McCarthy 2005, 31), he is trying to reach out and connect to the lines of flight of the thief and the father at the same time; to arouse compassion in his father towards the only structure-Other that matters in the present and not only the future but the father is late in his comprehension of the son's politics of life.

Gradually and unwillingly, the father is drawn into the rhizomatics of the son's nomadic posthuman existence eventually. His dreams pull him into this ethics more than he is willing to admit. When he dreams of his dead wife,

[i]n his dream she was sick and he cared for her. The dream bore the look of sacrifice but he thought differently. He did not take care of her and she died alone somewhere in the dark and there is no other dream nor other waking world and there is no other tale to tell. (McCarthy 2005, 20)

This alludes to the discrepancy in the father's action in narrating stories as well. If he had cared for more people on the road, he would have more stories to tell. Because he abandons the others, what he feels with them upon remembrance is darkness. Only with his son, whom he feels the most connection to, he always sees a light. While the father believes that his safety comes from adhering to the old ways, the ultimate ending of the novel points to the opposite of this way of living. It is the nomadism of the son brought about by his inclusion of the structure—Other, and by his care, that summons the people to create a minor community, and it does. Another family takes the son with them and keeps him safe when the father draws his final painful breaths in tears. What the novel shows, O'Connor argues is that

the boy's superior moral vision emerges from the tragic acceptance of violence at the core of all things, from the acceptance of the inescapable fact that any attempt to construct security, community, and civilization is irredeemably precarious and subject to the broader dissolution of the world. Only violence, contestation and struggle can help discern the ethical illumination of the future, rather than the pragmatic realism of the father. (2017, 8)

The boy's nomadic vision is grounded on pragmatism related to the earth and a future different from that of his father. His veneration of each life they encounter on the road elevates him above the other characters in the novel making him truly a symbol of salvation as a condition of leading a positive life on this new earth.

The father's attuning to the son's faith in caring for the world finally comes to a fruition but only at the end of his life. Here he urges the son to move forward without him. It is only at the end that the man has to leave his son behind that he resigns to share his son's faith in believing that the son can find good people to help him survive. Not only did this encourage him to press on, but in the answer to his son's wondering about the fate of the other, instead of brushing the topic aside, he engages with a possibility that he did not consider before. In this final instance, the son asks if the father remembers the little boy that he saw at the farm.

Do you think that he's all right that little boy?

Oh yes. I think he's all right.

Do you think he was lost?

No. I don't think he was lost.

I'm scared that he was lost.

I think he's all right.

But who will find him if he's lost? Who will find the little boy?

Goodness will find the little boy. It always has. It will again. (McCarthy 2006, 170)

While it is clear that the son is speaking of his fear of being lost after the death of the father, he is also concerned for all the lost souls they have encountered. The father ultimately presents his faith in goodness-to-come. The father's faith is finally shaped through his desire based on a "chance" encounter with the good guys; a chance that is "the bringing of the forces into relations, [and] the will to power is the determining principal of this relation" (Deleuze 1986, 53). The faith in this chance or the Nietzschean "dicethrow" is not a blind act of resignation or desperation. It is a strong nomadic sensibility against nihilism and negation that opposes the will to live, against what the Nietzschean ressentiment, or the bitter reactive response of revenge against injustice



and finding fault or blame in the other, which is anti-ethics and anti-becoming. To make sense of ethics in Deleuze's words one has to "not to be unworthy of what happens to us" (1990, 146) and to will the event. To will the event, one develops a love of fate, or *Amore fati* which affirms that not only "misfortune is present in all events, but [it is] also a splendor and brightness which dry up misfortune" (1990, 148). Embracing all the misfortunes of what they have gone through, the father becomes worthy of what has happened to them and thus, he is "to be reborn, to have one more birth, and to break with one's carnal birth—to become the offspring of one's events and not of one's actions, for the action is itself produced by the offspring of the event" (Deleuze 1990, 149–150). The father accepts the events and develops a faith in the event-to-come. The father tells his son that he cannot kill him because he now believes that "you're going to be lucky. I know you are" (McCarthy 2006, 235). By resigning from his job of protecting God's fire, and giving the *chance* a chance to affirm life, the father is confirming a becoming which Nietzsche and Deleuze associate with chaos and multiplicity and a line of flight (1986, 26).

The father's final words show his ultimate posthuman transformation as his faith is "tearing the eye from the body" (Colebrook 2014, 15), finally seeing in new lights the future of his son: "There was light all about him" (McCarthy 2006, 167). This view is not the same initial dichotomy of the father who had divided the world into good and bad. The father develops a kind of faith that because the son is "the best guy", he will find goodness because he will connect to the others and this is the event/abstract machine that will save him. This connection/abstract machine/line of flight comes from the nomadic thought that the other and the self are not separate things. A man and his family find the little boy after his father's death. The son hesitates if the man is one of the good people and asks the man repeatedly: "How do I know you're one

of the good guys?” to which the man replies: “You don’t. You’ll have to take a shot” (McCarthy 2006, 171). The son is also tested on faith in the chance encounter. In the end, it comes to having the trust that his father could not show if he were alive. The man with the family has done something that the father refused to do when the son asked him to look for the little boy on the farm, and that is to test the possibility of creating a community based on trust and care because communities challenge the dissolution of ethics and beliefs in life’s rhizomatic lines of flights.

It is reaching this conclusion that an answer is provided to the question haunting the reader since entering the rhizome of the book: How can nihilism and morality reconcile and create possibilities of living side by side? How can one narrative be the source of beauty and horror at the same time? To dance with these questions as Nietzsche’s mad prophet on the edge, one has to form an ethics that is not based on objective morality but “as a conjoined acting and representing in response to events” (Williams 2008, 148) that they are going through.

What McCarthy shows us is not a redemption of the old world but how the world could have been saved if everyone was a becoming–earth, and becoming–other; a becoming that shoots lines of connectivity and intensity to all surrounding and is not built on a hierarchical need to be impactful. If there is to be any redemption it comes in the form of love because love knows no boundaries and structures. It is “the stuff of chaos” as Slavoj Žižek proclaims (2009, 00:41) which mirrors the kind of love that is developed in the novel between the father and son and the son and the rest of the world. Žižek calls love the imbalance in the world as he explains:

Creation is a kind of cosmic imbalance, cosmic catastrophe: things exist by mistake. And I’m even ready to go to the end and to claim that the only way to counteract this is to assume the mistake and go to the end.

And we have a name for this: it's called love. (Zizek 2009, 00:44–00:56)

For one loves despite the contingency of the earth, not because of it. Love is the imbalance in the imbalance of the void but it is also the one factor that brings beauty and tragedy to it. Love makes the chaos of the cosmos worth enduring. In an interview, McCarthy characterizes his novel as a love song to his son (McCarthy and Winfrey 2007, 3:20). In the novel, both the mother and father admit that the father is still alive because of the son as “the boy was all that stood between him and death” (McCarthy 2005, 15). While it is true that “[w]ords expand insight” (Mahdi 2018, 87), and in his last moments, the father confesses by telling the son, “You have my whole heart. You always did” (McCarthy 2005, 169), the words also “never fully express [the feelings]”, as “the gap between” one and the other “is never altogether closed” (Mahdi 2018, 87). It is also through the sacrifices of the father and son that the singularity of their love comes forward.

The novel showcases how subjectivities are transformed due to this care and love, and with the acceptance of love comes the mystery of acceptance of living in an uncomprehensive world because love is to look for forces that expand the mystery of life not shrink it. This is the note, on which McCarthy ends the novel with; an eternal return to the mysteries of existence. Affirmation of life and a people to come go on in a circle as long as one finds a mystery of flight:

Once there were brook trout in the streams in the mountains. You could see them standing in the amber current where the white edges of their fins wimpled softly in the flow. They smelled of moss in your hand. Polished and muscular and torsional. On their backs were vermiculate patterns that were maps of the world in its becoming. Maps and mazes. Of a thing which could not be put back. Not be made right again. In the

deep glens where they lived all things were older than man and they hummed of mystery (McCarthy 2006, 174)

The novel teaches the readers to read the mystery and contemplate the thousands of lines of flight. The earth remains “unmappable” (McCarthy 1998) regardless of thousands of journeys upon its surface although the impossibility of doing so does not stop the ambulation of the characters on the earth. The loss of coordination does not signify the loss of direction but renews a tale of paradoxes of life. As Deleuze says, “The force of paradoxes is that they are not contradictory; they rather allow us to be present at the genesis of the contradiction” (1990, 74). The paradox of the incomprehensibility of struggles of (un)becoming–human while navigating the new earth and worlding it and tuning to its song, only intensifies the beauty of the ethics created throughout such contradictory conditions. The mystery of the moments of creation joins the onlooker and the earth in an intimate moment of becoming; neither subordinate to the other but both entangling in the enigma of creation and life.

#### **4. Conclusion**

The poetics of the post–apocalyptic nomadology in McCarthy’s *The Road* challenges traditional notions of identity, society, structure, and movement. It explores the idea of individuals as nomads, constantly navigating and creating new connections within a chaotic and ever–changing world. Posthumanism in the novel also furthers the nomadic affectivity exploring the new scope and boundaries of ethics and thought, in a continuous negotiation with the other. The novel maps the multiplicity of nomadic posthuman thought and how to live life in a world that does not resemble a human world. The analysis focuses on how the characters’ experiences challenge traditional notions of human identity construction and highlight the emergence of posthuman qualities,

including the concept of nomad-becoming and the care for other in a post-apocalyptic world.

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