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Sustainability in a Collapsed World Resource Scarcity and Human Resilience in Cormac Mccarthy's the Road

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Abstract
Cormac McCarthy, an American writer, explores human relationship, survival, hope, life and death,human resilience and apocalyptic world in his novels. His Pulitzer Prize winning novel, The Road, delves into the theme of human capacity for survival in the world of scarcity. This novel portrays the journey of two unnamed characters, father and son, in a post-apocalyptic world. Their journey exposes the sustainability in a collapsed world where they struggle for sustenance and safety as a result of environmental degradation and extremeresource scarcity. They have their journey amidst the threat of starvation and violence which creates a tension between survival and sustainability. They struggle for their survival where they do not have enough food, clean water, and shelter to live. Thisarticle examines how the novel, The Road, portrays the ecological collapsed world and analyses the critical importance of sustainable practices and resilience in the context of scarcity of resources through the lens of Ecological Resilience.
Keywords: *Human resilience; post-apocalyptic world; resource scarcity; struggle for survival; sustainability.*

1. Introduction
Literature mirrors lives, and it explores human society with its characters. It portrays a society where human beings adapt to live their lives. It also explores the complex interdependencies between human and ecological systems. Many literary works detail the connectedness between human beings and the environment. It promotes ecological restoration and regenerative practices. In this context, ecological resilience has emerged as a ground for understanding how natural systems can withstand, adapt to, and recover from disturbances. Ecological resilience is a theory introduced by C.S. Holling. It focuses on the ability of systems to absorb disturbances and still function, as well as the capacity to adapt and reorganize after crises. Ecological resilience "determines the persistence of relationships within a system and is a measure of the ability of these systems to absorb changes of state variables, driving variables, and parameters and still persist." (Holling 1973). Cormac McCarthy is one of the most widely recognized American writers. His novels deal with concepts like life and death, violence, the choice of morality in one's life, and the future of the planet. He explores human relationships, survival, hope, human resilience, and apocalyptic worlds in his novels. His novel The Road (2006) describes the journey of characters in a post-apocalyptic world, amidst the threat of starvation and violence, which creates a tension between survival and sustainability. It deals with the themes of human resilience, morality, and the limits of survival when the natural world is totally damaged. Being a post-apocalyptic novel, it portrays a world in which environmental collapse becomes the reason for severe resource scarcity, forcing humanity to navigate survival in a barren, unsustainable landscape. In this novel, many people, animals, and plants died due to severe resource scarcity. The relationship between humans and the world is portrayed in the novel in the absence of animals and plants. McCarthy's description of the landscape in The Road is central to the narrative. The novel is set in a world where the environment can no longer support human life. The landscape is portrayed as a barren, ash-covered wasteland. The sun is obscured,

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trees are dead, forests have turned to ash, rivers are polluted, skies are permanently gray, and there is constant ash. “Nights dark beyond darkness and the days more gray each one than what had gone before” (TR 1). Characters try to get the ability to find ways to survive and adapt to the new, devastated world. This devastated environment acts as both a literal setting and a metaphor for the destruction of the natural world due to human actions. This setting can be seen as an allegory for what happens when humanity ignores the warning signs of environmental destruction. It suggests that the world could eventually become inhospitable if we continue down a path of resource exploitation and environmental neglect. A bleak and dystopian ecological narrative, this novel, The Road, portrays the ecological collapse and its impact on the survival of humans in a post-apocalyptic world. In this post-apocalyptic setting, the concept of sustainability has stopped existing for many reasons, like scarcity, [1] climate change, dystopian setting, and being a collapsed world. McCarthy skillfully describes the landscape to evoke emotional responses and underscores the ecological destruction as a central force in the novel. Unnamed father and unnamed son are the central characters in this novel. It narrates their journey after a catastrophe. As a result of starvation, the son’s mother committed suicide. The father has lost his family, his wife, his friends, and his house. He has his son remaining with him. For the father, saving his son becomes his mission.

- Did you have any friends? Yes. I did. Lots of them? Yes.
- Do you remember them? Yes. I remember them. What happened?
- to them? They died. All of them? Yes. All of them. Do you miss them?
- Yes. I do. Where are we going? We’re going south. Okay (TR 61-62).

In the novel, the collapse of natural systems leads to the collapse of social systems. People become desperate, and their moral structures break down. Their behaviors become too bad. They hunt other people for their food, and so cannibalism has become widespread everywhere. They sustain women to produce babies for food. The father and the son have to come out from the people who are categorized as bad guys in this novel. They face many terrible situations in their journey, such as starvation, attack, and cannibalism. These terrible natures of the society and disturbances threaten people to maintain their survival. But the father and the son sustain their lives with human resilience. There are many incidents that showcase their strong willpower and belief in ethicality and resilience in the novel. There is an encounter on the road. Armed thugs travel by truck. The father takes care of his son while a thug tries to murder him. The father sees threats, and it makes him strong and confident. The father tries to sustain his son’s belief, and whenever he faces terrible situations, he manages to tell his son that people are the bad guys. [2] But the boy and the father recognize themselves as “good guys.” The father and the son sustain their lives with their resilience and adaptive nature to the new world. When a man attacks the son with a knife, the father shoots that agent. The father holds back two bullets in his pistol as remaining. The father and the son try to find treasures in their worst situation and manage to sustain their lives. The father and the son struggle a lot to survive in a world where all resources have been depleted. They search for food, shelter, and basic necessities, and there is no sign of cultivating the land for a better life. This extreme resource scarcity also forces humanity to confront the limits of survival and highlights the fragility of human survival when ecosystems collapse. But on the other hand, their struggle for survival explains the importance of sustainable living in the present. To live a life in a warmer climate, the father and the son walk to the south. They find a place to live and move to have a better world—“barren, silent, godless” (TR 2). They move towards the ocean, but it is in a gray color covered with ash, similar to the world the son sees. [3] The father has a bad respiratory condition, so he coughs up blood. The polluted environment makes them wear masks, and thereby they try to get the better air to breathe. In the absence of agriculture, they move in a world where

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there is resource scarcity and try hard to find things to survive. The resource scarcity makes the people find ways to sustain their lives. The father and the son meet an old man. He is starving. It forces him to eat what they offer him without uttering a word. “The old man lowered his hand from his head. [4] He blinked. Gray blue eyes half buried in the thin and sooty creases of his skin” (TR 174). Thus it details the need for sustainable practices to survive. Sustainability is a central concern in The Road. McCarthy portrays characters’ survival strategies, their perseverance despite the overwhelming loss of nature, and the proposition for how humans adapt to extreme environmental challenges. When mother chooses to die, the father prefers to live and makes his son live even in the place where they could see people who fight for their survival. They have a prolonged starving in their live and it leads them near to death for many times. The mother mocks them for having struggle in the world. The father and the son recognize themselves as “the good guys” and they feel that they “carry the fire”. The father advises his son not to worry about anything and manages to sustain his life. It shows the need of adaptive capacity and human resilience to survive in a collapsed world. There is a sign of the adaptive capacity of systems such as understanding and learning new circumstances and trying to and adapt it. The father and the son, as part of the human system in this devastated world, exhibit resilience by adapting to their environment. They survive with their immediate needs like scavenging for food, seeking shelter and avoid dangerous situations such as encountering violent groups. They have their own path of resilience within the collapse. Their survival is marked by their ability to protect and care for each other. They represent a social-ecological resilience. They do not recreate their previous life, instead, they adapt to their new environment. They care for each other, maintain a sense of moral clarity, and adapt their relationship to a resource-scarce world. The father and the son move along the road throughout the novel and search for their food and other needs. They come across a different range of humanity, starting from goodness to wickedness. They visit empty houses to look for some leftover food. “The country was stripped and plundered years ago, and they found nothing in the houses and buildings by the roadside” (TR 193). The father prioritizes moral resilience, even in a collapsed world. His continuous effort to sustain his son’s sense of hope and humanity is a note of moral adaptation. The boy also expects ethical consistency and reason for their even simple movement. It becomes a challenging task for the father to maintain as good guys carrying the fire in the harsh realities of life. There is a plantation home which has food, a farmhouse with underground bomb shelter, etc. The son worries that they are stealing other’s food, when they take food from the house to save them from their death. He later feels better when he convinces that the owner of the food is dead and it is not wrong to take it for their need and especially for survival. When the father sees a thief and demands him to take off all his clothes and shoes, the son persuades the father to return the man’s belonging. But they could not reach him. The son feels for him and cries; “we did kill him” (TR 260). As a response the son refuses to converse with the father. It brings out his moral and social resilience even in the most horrible situation. The survival of the son is very important to the father. But for the son, he has a good compassion with other people and could understand their needs. He is ready to save any body he sees on his way on the road. He desires to help people who are in need. He mourns for people who struggle a lot to get their food to lead their life. He persuades his father to share their food with the needed people. It shows his faith on humanity, desire to help others to live and his ethics in a collapsed world. The father also manages to sustain his son’s faith till the end of his life in this novel. At the end, the father’s health becomes worse as he walks long. When the father is sick, the son asks about another boy he saw walking alone. It reveals his effort to save others even though they are in a very poor and terrible situation. On his deathbed, the father wants his son’s sustainable life after him too. When the son inquires of the father about his future as alone, without his father, the father gives the son the last words. The father makes the son sustain the life by saying that goodness will reach the son. After the

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father's death, the boy has to survive without the help and guidance of his father. It is his choice either to live or to end his life. But he is not to give up and has a desire to live. He does not hide himself from the danger and collapsed world; instead, he joins with a group. The son feels for the father's death with the body for three days. After that he moves from the place towards the road with the pistol, which depicts his choice of sustainability and human resilience. When a man comes to him and asks about the father, the son tells him about the father's death. The man feels for the son's bad condition and takes the son with him. The man swears to the son that they are good people and do not use others as their food. It gives him hope for a future, joining with a community and becoming a part of it. It offers a chance for a new cycle of growth. Thus it shows the possibility of human bonding even in a collapsed world where there is a strong resource scarcity.

Conclusion

Thus, The Road highlights how both the environment and human systems exhibit resilience in the face of a collapsing world. The novel portrays the ability of individuals, like the father and the son, to adapt and survive in the face of an ecological collapse. In this novel, the collapse of ecological systems and human society makes the characters rely on their physical, mental, and moral resilience. They adapt, reorganize, and endure all in the catastrophic ecological and societal breakdown. Their survival shows the importance of maintaining values and hope amidst destruction, embodying the idea of adaptive resilience in a radically altered world.

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