

Deprivation of Ethics after Climate Change: An Eco-apocalyptic Reading on McCarthy's *The Road*

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Abstract

Eco-apocalypse is considered a literary theme that deals with the consequences of the environmental crisis. As eradication occurs in the ecosystem due to human activities, the cycle of the ecosystem has been altered. This alteration brings environmental issues such as climate change and global warming. Climate change changes the cycle of ecosystems that cause apocalyptic destruction to biodiversity. Since climate change (eco-apocalypse) is an inevitable threat to the future world, the questions of what are the physical, psychological, and civil challenges during the apocalypse and what are the possibilities to cope with them are to be discussed. Eco-apocalypse steers the world into environmental and psychological conflicts. The purviews of the research paper are to exhibit the differentiation between regional and global eco-apocalypse and portray characteristics of man during the eco-apocalypse. Climate Fiction massively depicts the world where humans would lose their humanity and ethics because of climate change. Moreover, the research paper aims to provide awareness of the existing eco-apocalypse era and predict the physical and psychological conflicts of man. Hence, the paper displays the unethical world through McCarthy's *The Road*.

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Keywords: Eco-apocalypse, ecosystem, climate change, environmental crisis, ethics, climate fiction

Homo sapiens depend on the ecosystem for acquiring environmental assets such as food, water, shelter, medicine, etc. For instance, our ancient Indian literature has enough corroboration to exhibit how ancient Indians treated nature; their concern for nature in management and preservation is conspicuous. Ancient inhabitants desired to maintain and preserve nature (Bithin, 2). Despite the people who used to get their food and shelter from nature, they provided time for the renewal of the ecosystem and didn't destroy it utterly for their requirements. Eventually, passion for social and cultural growth started to change people's minds to degrade the value of the ecosystem. People began to destroy and eliminate the ecosystem for the sake of their cultural and social development. The eradication of the ecosystem steers into the hazards of eco-apocalypse. Alternation in the cycle of the ecosystem is caused by human activities that transform the ecological atmosphere into destruction. As it continues, the words of Madeleine Fagan cannot be neglected that the "ecological disaster is coming, we are warned, it may be coming soon and suddenly, and its effect will be the collapse of civilization" (228). Buzan states, "the risk to human survival is rising, not just from the chance of natural disasters such as a large space rock colliding with the Earth, but ... through environmental change ... by which we could now commit species suicide" (180). Environment degradation leads to apocalyptic climate change as climate change is particularly the apocalyptic destruction of the ecosystem. Eventually, Climate change leads to immorality behaviours among people. As the eco-apocalypse is the crucial upcoming threat to the world, the questions of what are the physical, psychological and civil challenges during the apocalypse and what are the possibilities to cope with them are to be discussed here.

The research paper aims at providing awareness about the existing eco-apocalyptic era, differentiating global and regional eco-apocalypse, depicting the unethical attitudes of humans during eco-apocalypse, and explicitly portraying the physical and psychological conflicts of humans, to insist that people preserve the natural environment through forestation and inspect the characteristics and nature of man during/after eco-apocalypse.

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Several scholars, researchers and scientists have been revealing the existing ramification of climate change in their research. World organizations have been propounding climate policies for prevention. Nevertheless, the policies cannot be ensured to reach all the people. Therefore, the people's contribution to increasing climate change issues has not been halted. Even the government also traumatizes the environment by emitting greenhouse gases through industries. Based on the research of Giddens, the author of *The Politics of Climate Change*, the temperature has been increasing for 150 years due to the revolution of the industries. The excessive use of coal, fuel and other burning oils is ineluctable in industrial politics and expands the possibilities of global warming. As it is found in *The Politics of Climate Change*,

Over the past 150 years or so, greenhouse gases in the atmosphere have progressively increased with the expansion of industrial production. The average world temperature has grown by about 0.8 degrees since 1901. The temperature of the earth is not only rising, it is doing so at an accelerating rate. From 1880 to 1970, the global average temperature increased by about 0.03°C every decade. Over the period since 1970, the increase has averaged 0.13 degrees per decade. Data released by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration of the US (NOAA) showed that 2010 tied with 2005 as the warmest year since reliable records began in 1880. Every decade since 1950 has been warmer on average than the one before. (Giddens, 11)

Thus, the involvement of industries in the globe's temperature is inevitable, as government replaces the forests and green environment along with industries. According to Wissenbach, "Development since the industrial revolution has been identified as the cause of global warming" (38). Scientific researchers and literary writers have also been dispensing enthrallment to this kind of issue by portraying the effects of climate change and dystopian life after climate change. Nevertheless, it does not seem to be severed that the conservation of the environment.

According to Wiktionary and Wordsense Dictionary, eco-apocalypse means 'An apocalyptic destruction of the Earth's environment (Wiktionary & Wordsense Dictionary). Apocalypse means the end of the world caused by calamities with the lives

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of very few species of the earth and the "virtual destruction of humanity on Earth" (Northover, 1). According to Gilmore, "The apocalypse is an event that continues to unfold, forcing us to live in accordance with its dynamic and even in spite of its consequences" (4). Similarly, the eco-apocalypse is the climax of the world, caused by environmental calamities, where no ecosystem assists in the survival of people who escaped from the calamities.

According to Fagan, "In traditional apocalyptic narratives, the agent of the end of the world is God: an external force, outside of the time of history" (231). But Giddens argues, "Doomsday is no longer a religious concept, a day of spiritual reckoning, but a possibility imminent in our society and economy" (221). Cleansing the world by destruction is the religious aspect of the apocalypse. On the other hand, Homo sapiens are the agents who bring the apocalypse to the earth's environment. Fedele states that the environmental apocalypse is that "humanity produces too much toxic waste, and that we are rapidly consuming all available natural resources" (169). The result of the destruction of the environment is environmental calamities and climate change, which are eco-apocalypse in which people are fighting to survive.

Environmental or ecological literary texts are different from eco-apocalyptic texts. Ecology or environmental texts serve as eco-centric scripts and explore human activity against nature. Contrastingly, eco-apocalyptic texts show the absence of an ecosystem and the earth's environmental destruction of other species. According to Drake, "Eco-Apocalyptic fiction stands apart from the mythology and tradition of apocalyptic ideas in its absence of rebirth" (1) and "explores human connectivity with the environment when the relationship with the eco-system has been irrevocably severed" (2). Moreover, eco-apocalypse is classified into two types; regional eco-apocalypse and global eco-apocalypse.

Regional eco-apocalypse is the destruction or devastation of the civilisation of humans by neither themselves nor the natural environment. Regional eco-apocalypse is triggered by the destruction of crops fields, forests, and dominating lakes and rivers in a particular village, city or in part of a country. The anthropogenic absence of an ecosystem within a part of a country steers into starvation, food scarcity and so on.

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Urbanization and industrialization play a vital role in the regional eco-apocalypse. Here, the evidence is given below that how deforestation and desertification lead to an eco-apocalypse.

Deforestation can contribute a great deal to drought, loss of topsoil, and ultimately to desertification. A full-grown tree on average releases 1000 litres of water per day, and the Amazon rainforest's 20 billion tons of water released per day impacts the weather globally. Unfortunately, despite the importance of the Amazon rainforest for animals, plants, and humans, the governments of Brazil have allowed possessive individuals and possessive corporations to cut down 20% of it, and there appears to be no stopping this slaughter of nature as Brazil loses approximately one half million hectares of rain forest per year. (Albritton, 107-108)

Destroying lakes and forests in a country to cultivate houses and factories affects the ecosystem which leads to the devastation of the life of humans through starvation, drought, and lack of drinking water. Therefore, the ecosystem of the particular place and the environment of the country are disturbed. For instance, desertification causes tropical seasons and drought by which entire species would die off, and scarcity of drought to feed the entire population of the country (Albritton, 112).

Another side of regional eco-apocalypse is imminent floods, storms, erosion, landslide or mudslide, hurricanes, and rain sometimes cause apocalyptic anxiety. For instance, Dhanushkodi, a destroyed town in Tamil Nadu, is one of the popular tourist places, which has the Bay of Bengal on the eastern side and the Indian Ocean on the Western side. It was a small and bustling town and had a hospital, a railway station, a higher secondary school, port offices, a church and a temple before the entire town was ruined due to the 'super cyclone with the speed of 270km/hr'. Over 800 people died in the terrific incident and over 3000 people were stranded. Presently, very few fishers live and try to lift their lives there. There is nothing to have as their source of life except fishing (Dhumal).

Moreover, In Bangladesh, Sylhet and Sumamganj districts were destroyed by the floods from Barak and Kushiya rivers. The flood disrupted over 53,000 hectares of

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agricultural land, a shortage of clean water and a shutdown of the teaching environment in 640 educational institutions. Dams were damaged in different areas and over four lakh people were stranded. Many territories or realms have been destroyed by environmental calamities in world history (Wikipedia).

There are much more possibilities to be recovered from the regional apocalypse through the actions of the government nowadays. From every seasonal rain and flood, cities and villages have been recovered with the assistance of the people and government. Generally, the people will be warned before the calamities, and they will be given shelter and food in the camps until the situation becomes normal. Therefore, the regional apocalypse is not the end of the region or territory. It is temporary destruction, as the people who are stranded will be rescued, despite the fact that it leads to the loss of properties, people and life.

Additionally, the Global eco-apocalypse is a major and worldwide debatable topic by world organisations, which is a threat and expectation of the entire world for future and irreversible damage to the earth's ecosystem. Due to this irreversible damage, there is a collapse or misbehaviour in the routine of the ecosystem. Zamora states in her book *The Apocalyptic Vision in America* that "In the Judeo-Christian religious tradition, the apocalypse refers to prophesying, revealing or visions of the imminent destruction of the world" (153). Probably, the word 'apocalypse' means the end of the world. Eco-apocalypse is not the end of the world but travels towards the end. The instances of global eco-apocalypse are climate change, global warming, sea levels rising, dust storms, unusual heat and so on. Garreau's lines are enough to express the eco-apocalypse and climate change crisis that "when it comes to the weather, the world is moving. Wind and flood seem to be playing by new rules" (Garreau, C1).

The difference between regional eco-apocalypse and global eco-apocalypse is reversibility and resilience. A few months or years are enough to recover from the regional apocalyptic crisis. But, no more possibilities of resilience during or after eco-apocalyptic. Very few people might survive with a lack of hope in life. The impacts of climate change are found as environmental crises such as rain and wind in unseasonal

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times, tropical period, temperature rising, sea level increasing, floods, hurricanes, global warming and ice age. Already, the people of the present age are living in the global eco-apocalypse or climate apocalypse.

If a question of what causes eco-apocalypse is raised, the answer must be that eco-apocalypse is probably the reaction of anthropocentric behaviour toward the environment, as humans desire cultural, political and social development, and they are ready to destroy the natural environment from where they get everything. Climate change or global warming as a global eco-apocalypse is caused by the alteration in the earth's ecosystem, it affects the biodiversity of the earth. Foust and Murphy in their article quote the words of Zimmer regarding the rise of global temperature; "the vast majority of climate scientists agree that if we continue pumping greenhouse gases into the atmosphere the world's temperature will climb significantly, and new computer models project a grim scenario of droughts and rising sea levels" (156).

A tropical climate caused by greenhouse gases leads to rising seawater as ice lands melt due to the global temperature. Based on the National Ocean Service report, the information has been posted that the sea level has been increasing since 1900. Sea levels may increase as a result of the expansion of seawater and the melting of land-based ice due to a warming environment. As per the report of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA);

Many people are interested in climate change and how a changing climate will affect the ocean. With the majority of Americans living in coastal states, rising water levels can have potentially large impacts. Global tidal records from 1900 to 1990 show an estimated four to five-inch rise in global mean sea level. Then, in the 25 years from 1990 to 2015, this global tide gauge network showed the global sea level rising three inches, agreeing with measures by satellite altimeters taken since 1992. Currently, the sea level is rising about one-eighth of an inch per year but is projected to rise in the future. By 2100, sea levels may rise another one to eight feet. (NOAA)

Indeed, the ecosystem has been destroyed since 1800, as the industries and colonies commenced in those days. Currently, the need for technology and machines is

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increasing the possibility of a tropical atmosphere and the ecosystem has not been considered as the major source of living.

As literature is the depiction of global issues, contemporary writers have been writing with the theme of (post)apocalypse. According to Hammond and Breton, eco-apocalypse is 'one of the themes or storylines' of the genre of post-apocalypse fiction. It is the most popular genre in contemporary life (Kranicz, 1). Mousoutzanis states, "Texts like these represent the apocalypse as the result of either a lack of sensitivity to the planet's ecology or the inability of social systems to respond to environmental needs" (459).

As climate change is an eco-apocalypse, according to the argument of Corbett and Clark, climate fiction/eco-apocalypse fiction shows "the so-called invisibility of climate change to be seen, felt, and imaged in the present and the future" and "encourages critical reflection on existing social structures and cultural and moral norms" (4). Climate change and its consequences exist in the (eco) apocalyptic fiction as the themes. Eco-apocalyptic/Climate texts "have been imagining climate futures for almost as long as climate change has been a topic of public concern" (Mayerson et. al., 2). As Milner and Burgmann explain, "contemporary climate fiction, by contrast, is deeply indebted to climate science and therefore overwhelmingly concerned with anthropogenic warming (5), as the reasons for climate apocalypse are human activities. According to Montanya and Valera, "Change of climate that is attributed directly or indirectly to human activity that alters the composition of the global atmosphere and that is in addition to natural climate variability observed over comparable time periods" (348-49). As Ghosh argues, "literature (is) drawn into the modes of concealment (that) prevented people from recognizing the realities" of climate change conflicts (11). Hence, eco-apocalyptic fiction and climate fiction are depicting the future or near-future world, and life of people whose life during/after eco-apocalyptic times.

I A Softing argues, "The death of nature has destroyed civilization and it threatens humanity as such. The dead land is a passive yet relentless destructive force that represents nothingness" (709), as eco-apocalypse is the death of nature or absence of

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nature. Eco-apocalyptic fiction or Climate fiction illustrates not only the end of the ecosystem but also the end of humanity and civilization. It causes social, psychological and civil conflicts due to the absence of ethics and morality among humans during or after the eco-apocalypse. Humans will be attacked by fellow survivors or cannibals and women and children will be raped and killed by the human animals, as the people just have the idea of survival.

The Road by McCarthy is the best evidence of an eco-apocalypse novel, which explicitly explores the life of man in the post-apocalypse period. In the novel, a father, the protagonist, with his son, takes a venture to get food and shelter with a cart after the calamity and encounters physical, mental and civil conflicts across the paths. The questions of what it means to be good, how can be still good when killing or disturbing others, and whether can people find morality and ethics at the end of the world as everyone has a hard wish for survival, are raised through this kind of fiction.

The father in the novel recalls the apocalyptic incident that occurred a year ago. He recalls the horrible event's exact moment in time. Finally, the three started to move away from their city. He and his wife would frequently argue over matters of survival as opposed to self-destruction. She commits herself in an effort to avoid being raped, killed, and devoured due to her lack of resiliency and hope in security. She eventually hopes that dying is preferable to existing in an eco-apocalyptic world. The wife's fear has expressed in the novel, as:

You're talking crazy.

No, I'm speaking the truth. Sooner or later they will catch us and they will kill us. They will rape me. They'll rape him. They are going to rape us and kill us and eat us and you won't face it. You'd rather wait for it to happen. But I can't. I can't. She sat there smoking a slender length of dried grapevine as if it were some rare cheroot. Holding it with a certain elegance, her other hand across her knees where she'd drawn them up. She watched him across the small flame. We used to talk about death, she said. We don't anymore. Why is that? (36)

Thus, there are two kinds of people: survivors and others with a lack of resilience. Survivors like the father in *The Road* want him and his son to live in the dead land. Thus,

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the climate apocalypse triggers the mind's conflict between life and death. The fear of life indicates them dying before they will be killed by others. The father considers his family as 'survivors' as he has hope and the wife considers themselves as "walking dead in a horror film" (36).

During the eco-apocalypse or climate apocalypse, ethics and morality do not exist in the world. The people commit to what they need and think for their survival. Their involvement in unethical activities is found by expressing the wife's fear of death. Moreover, the novel has many human antagonists as merciless road agents and armed scavengers. When they captured the father and the son, the father uses a gun, which has only three bullets. The novel expresses how the father saves his son from the killers;

He was a big man but he was very quick. He dove and grabbed the boy and rolled and came up holding him against his chest with the knife at his throat. The man had already dropped to the ground and he swung with him and levelled the pistol and fired from a two-handed position balanced on both knees at a distance of six feet. The man fell back instantly and lay with blood bubbling from the hole in his forehead. The boy was lying in his lap with no expression on his face at all. He shoved the pistol in his belt and slung the knapsack over his shoulder and picked up the boy and turned him around and lifted him over his head and set him on his shoulders and set off up the old roadway at a dead run, holding the boy's knees, the boy clutching his forehead, covered with gore and mute as a stone. (44)

The novel sketches some characters as man-eaters who capture people and eat them for food. Human against nature becomes humans against each other unethically. As people depend on the ecosystem for food and other amenities, people raise each other when there is deprivation of the ecosystem. The father and son find naked and kidnapped people on the clay floor when they search for food. They notice a man who has already been half-eaten. As his son is ill, the father moves away without helping them, when they asked help to take them away (75-76). Indeed, there are no ethics and moral values for the protagonist and antagonist during the apocalyptic time. Everyone wants to survive and not be killed by others. The difference is that the protagonist kills

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for self-defense and the antagonist kills for grabbing other sources. Eventually, there is no humanity around the world. As a father, his love and care for his son are expressed robustly. The conversation between father and son reveals the father's will to save his son from bad people. He is always ready to protect his son, as these lines explain,

You wanted to know what the bad guys looked like. Now you know. It may happen again. My job is to take care of you. I was appointed to do that by God. I will kill anyone who touches you. Do you understand?

Yes.

He sat there cowered in the blanket. After a while, he looked up. Are we still the good guys? he said.

Yes. We're still the good guys.

And we always will be.

Yes. We always will be. (52)

Thus, eco-apocalypse fiction depicts a futuristic world without ethics and with the existentialistic ideas of the people. Despite the fact that it is just an imagination of an author, the inevitable truth is that the present age is entering into the apocalyptic world literally. The industrial revolution plays a vital role if the reason behind the imminent climate apocalypse is meditated. Industrial countries are responsible for global warming and the emission of green gases. Many researchers and scholars concentrate on climate change policies to mitigate the consequences of climate change. Prime actions by industrial countries are needed to control emissions for the future. Combating global warming is not easy without proper policies. Climate cannot be reversed and the people cannot cope with what has changed in the climate. Preserving a green environment is mandatory to save the climate, instead of holding technology and machines that will not assist any species of the earth, during the eco-apocalypse, due to the shortage of power sources, fuels and so on. Prevention is needed like creating forests, lakes and rivers, policies for preventing water and food and so on before the time has ended. Instead of deforestation, and polluting water and air, the government could make greens by planting plenty of trees and plants in the wastelands that might protect our environment

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as well as our lives from the climate crisis. Moreover, the research paper provides a way for further research to examine the ways to bring the importance of land ethics among the people. Hence, the research paper stands with eco-apocalypse fiction which insists readers maintain environmental ethics with land and earth and not enter into the dystopian world where no ethics would be followed.

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