



# Psychoanalysis Of Father-Son Duo In Cormac Mccarthy's Post-Apocalyptic Novel "The Road": A Study

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## **ABSTRACT: -**

The Road by McCarthy is categorized as one of the best novels written by him with an apocalyptic theme not only apocalypse but also others aspects are also dexterously combined in the novel to achieve a higher degree of excellence like the description of a world just after devastation and holocaust although the cause of the apocalypse is ambiguous and obscure might be a nuclear holocaust or something else. The relationship dynamics of the main two character in the novel are the prime focus of this article and the Freudian psychoanalytical stances are adopted to draw an inference on the topic of the same to analyze the father son relationship confrontations and how they two together faces the same scenario with two different perspectives on life. The purpose of this article is to find out the purpose and meaning in the relationship of both the father and child in a world shattered of purpose, law and meaning and how bond and relationships works as a driving force in life to live a better and fulfilling one amid chaos as well as carry out one's duty and responsibilities where it seems meaningless and develop an optimistic outlook. Freud's concept and interpretation of ideas of id, ego and superego has used to analyze the father-son relationship using secondary data form sources widely.

## **KEYWORDS: -**

Apocalypse, Id, Ego, Superego.

## **INTRODUCTION: -**

Psychoanalysis gets prominence in the hands of Jewish born Austro-Hungarian persona named Sigmund Freud, who himself developed a keen understanding of human mind based on experiments and observation of human behaviors in different situation and circumstances. His psychological treatment primarily focuses on the patients dream, thoughts, memories/ reminiscent of the past and human emotions which he uses for treating his patient. "The Interpretation of Dreams" in the year 1899 by Freud, he stated that "The interpretation of dreams is the royal road to a knowledge of the unconscious activities of the mind" (Freud, 1899).

Not only Freud but also Carl Jung and Otto Rank are some of the prominent psychoanalytic thinkers who are closely related with human thoughts and emotions and forms conclusion on the basis of it. Freud another prominent work "The Ego and the Id" (1923), where he introduces the concept of 'Superego-Ego-Id' in

place of the conscious, preconscious and unconscious mind and its formation, which he elaborated previously in his renowned work “The Interpretation of Dreams”.

American novelist, screenplay and short story writer Cormac McCarthy’s “The Road”(2006) which widely known as a post-apocalyptic novel, in this article the focus shifts from it rather it’s on the psychological aspects of the ‘Father-Son’ relationship in a new dimension where life is not just about living life to the fullest as a gift but also the realities offered by apocalypse where survival becomes priority and constant struggle for existence is prominent. The article focuses on and tries to answer the psychological bond between human mainly father-son in apocalyptic situation and their state of mind and its developments through out the novel. The methodology is analytical in nature based on secondary sources of data from literary magazines, journals, web sources and e-books. The article also served as a document to portray the love relationship between father-son to the utmost form purely based on selfless love of his father towards his son in a situation where father is aware of his impending death.

### **CONCEPT OF ID, EGO AND SUPEREGO: -**

Sigmund Freud, though uses the German words “das Es”, “das Ich” and “das Über-Ich” respectively “the It”, “the I” and “the Over-I” which altered by his translator James Strachey in Latin and later printed or known as “id”, “ego”, and “superego”.

According to Freud’s model of the psyche, the id operates in the primitive level and instinctual part of the human mind that contains sexual and aggressive drives and hidden memories, the superego on the other operates as a moral conscious and ego as rather realistic part of the mind which meditates between the id and the superego. Freud also compare ego in its relation to id, to a man on horseback; the rider must harness and direct the superior energy of his mount, and at times allow for a practicable satisfaction of it urges. The ego is thus “in the habit of transforming the id’s will into action. As if it were its own”.

Id can also be understood as the needs, desires and impulses of a new born unknown to the reality where superego is the known more experienced persona aware of societal norms, laws and rules as a close interaction between others like parental demands and prohibition in childhood. And the ego works in between these id and superego to maintain a healthy and peaceful way to direct a person in more logical and unbiased way.

### **APOCALYPSE: -**

The term ‘apocalyptic’ derives from Greek apocalypse, ‘to disclose’, and Apocalypse is the name given to the last book of the New Testament, The revelation of St John. Such literature comprises prophetic or quasi-prophetic writings which tend to present doom-laden visions of the world and somber and minatory predictions of mankind’s destiny. An early example is Wulfstan’s homily to the English (c.1014) (dictionary of literary terms and literary theory,2014, p.47).

Though in the 20<sup>th</sup> century mainly after the world wars concepts, ideas related to apocalypse changes and more focus is on man-made apocalypse devoted of love for mankind, humanity, morality and ethical notions of life. Such one is McCarthy’s “The Road” (2006).

### **DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS: -**

“When he woke in the woods in the dark and the cold of the night hid reach out to touch the child sleeping besides him. Nights dark beyond darkness and the days more gray each one than what had gone before. Like the onset of some glaucoma dimming away the world. His hand rose and fell softly with each precious breath” (McCarthy,2006, p.1)

Sigmund Freud talked about past trauma, childhood traumas in relation to id, ego, and superego formation. In this novel by McCarthy the father who is aware of the present situation of their lives and the surrounding himself finding solace who recently lost his near and dear ones like his loving wife committed suicide and his friends are no more and become part of his memory. He himself suffering from an unknown disease which he later discovers and dies afterwards but another part of the story gives us a close encounter of his role as a dutiful, responsible and loving father who made a promise to never leave his child or son

alone what might be the circumstance is. Superego as per Freud is the morality which forms as a result of understanding parental demands and internalizing rules and norms and also id as an impulse, desire and need. the fathers longing for his son safety becomes his priority in the novel.

“With the first gray light he rose and left boy sleeping and walked out to the road and squatted and studied the country to the south. Barren, silent, godless. He thought the month was October but he wasn’t sure. He hadn’t kept a calendar for years. They were moving South. There’d be no surviving another winter here” (McCarthy,2006, p.1)

Emotion and understanding of the reality have struck the father and he himself with it strives and keeps him motivated. “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.1)

The first conversation of the novel between father-son goes like

“Then he opened his eyes: Hi, Papa, he said

I’m right here

I know”. (McCarthy,2006, p.1)

The son himself knows that his only existential root is his father and he wants confirmation and wants to assure his father's presence beside him in days of turbulence. His fear and confronting the situation of the surrounding makes him hopeless and he unknowingly questions his existence and also later he confesses to his father about his wish to be with his mother i.e. to die and unite him in death. The father here not only as a male figure but also as a mother figure works and tries to maintain and provide both the parental support and care one as father and one as mother. The child also wants his father to tell him story and memory line sharing of his time, experiences and father also finds himself in it so he also whenever possible continuous to communicate and elaborate what as a persona he encounters in his life time before catastrophe hit him and others hard.

“You can read me a story, the boy said.

Can't you, Papa?

Yes, he said.

I can. (McCarthy,2006, p.2)

Long conversation between son and father upon realizing present condition and scenario and past trauma's struck by devastation and debarred of basic amenities of life and needs of belonging, feeling of attachment and detachment constantly become a matter of concern for the both protagonist in the novel and also about their own survival rate is also become so uncertain because some days they are with left over food or in search of it. The basic needs to sustain a life is the only concern and in episodic manner father and son indulge in eating and saving the left over for future use and also father teaches his son how to leave in this way. McCarthy shows the son as one who has the ability to carry on the race of human aftermath of the devastation and starts a new generation but the child tires to find solace in his father's affirmation. He constantly asks one question that are they going to die or not? (McCarthy,2006, p.3).

Constant lesson and sharing in between father-son, conscious sharing of faced realities and thoughts and ideas provokes as a result of past encounter. According to Freud, ego meditates between id and superego and also the demands of external realities and the constraints either moral and critical ones. Father who is well aware and known to the situation shown as a figure much driven by ego rather than id which is prominent in the son and superego which he develops from his father encountering and learning how society works from his father not totally but in fragments. Both the boy and the father being a family lose one's mom and one's wife. The psychological and mental condition can be just as gloomy and pale as the world surrounded them but the sense of relief and by one's side give them the drive to keep moving and adopt a optimistic outlook towards life. The constant struggle for survival is shown in episodic manner and the scene itself justify that the country is devoid of hope and can be sum up in few words as ‘Godless’, that actually post-apocalyptic novels tend or intended to portray to give the readers a sense or feeling of how world and life might be without society, order, law, and after all lose of identity and existence as a result.

Although it is empty, barren, infertile but small act or gesture of kindness, love and father-son playful display

“...he put the boy in the basket and stood on the rear rail like a dogmusher and they set off down the hills, guiding the cart on the bobsledders. It was the first that he'd seen the boy smile in a long time”. (McCarthy,2006, p.5)

Psychological state of the duo and their past and present memories and conditions, fathers love and son's reciprocation of it shows how the toughest of the time can be faced and overcome by love, sharing. Father here also adopts the role of teacher and guide and passes the son with the worldly knowledge sometimes abstraction in the form of philosophical truth and sometimes material knowledge of societal life.

“What is that. Papa?

It's a dam

What's it for?

It made the lake. Before they built the dam that was just a river down there. The dam used the water that ran through it to turn big fans called turbines that would generate electricity” (McCarthy,2006, p.5).

The novel although can be effectively studied from numerous perspectives but the father and the child can be considered as an ideal father-son duo which can further be cited or can be taken as a base for developing and measuring or can be served as aa perimeter for further writings and elaboration which McCarthy presented. The son can't be a mere child devoted of love and normalcy of life but amid these he himself has the necessary moral and psychological understanding which is also justifies in his action where his father gives or put the entire coca cola, for drinking in his son's cup the son instantlyforbids him to act like this and he affirms that he will not tolerate it. Here the action is not out of anger but out of shared love, care and affectionate bond shared by the both one as a son and other as a father to the former. The son often got frightened from instances and when they both experienced an earthquake he conveys his fear to his father about his state of mind. Constant fear is dominant in the child.

“I'm so scared.

I Know. It's all right. It's gone.

What was it, papa?

It was an earthquake. It's gone now.

We're all right. Shh. (McCarthy,2006, p.8)

Unexperienced son the psychological state of an innocent child and his encounters of earthy phenomenon and mixed sort of feelings and fathers'Constant assurance leads the outer and inner state of the son. According to Dorson (2012), the father's action often oscillates between necessary ruthlessness and poignant tenderness, reflecting the moral ambiguity inherent in their world. The scarcity of resources and the pervasive threat of violence necessitate decision that challenges conventional morality. For instance, the father's willingness to kill to protect his son underscores a primal survival instinct” which can be marked as id of the father from Freud psychoanalytical stance. According to Bloom (2010), the father and son's interaction provide a poignant commentary on the nature of parental love, highlighting the lengths to which a parent will go to protect their child. The son often shows feelings towards others in need, though later become aware and accept the reality when father tells him that they can't do anything as they themselves are in need of it.

“He's been struck by lightning.

Cant we help him? Papa

No. we cant help him”. (McCarthy,2006, p.15)

Which actually later revealed that the father actually cares so much for his child's emotional needs that he tries to pour him with the knowledge and ease out the gap in between them which arises out of little misunderstanding of the situations. Also, their shared emotion about son's mother and the husband's wife actually are the same woman who eventually died due to her fear, anxiety and unwillingness to carry on the life in fear of getting trapped and raped and eventually killed by the cannibals who are human's turn cannibal's aftermath of the apocalypse as per McCarthy's description of the same in the novel "The Road" (2006).

"I wish I was with my mom", (McCarthy, 2006, p.16)

But the father forbids him not to indulge him in thinking likewise rather cherish him to be with him and continue the journal and asset him later that they are good guys and God wants them to continue the legacy and the child is nothing but the reflection of God and he has the fire within himself the restore life after every think settles down in course of time.

"And nothing bad is going to happen to us.

That's right.

Because we're carrying the fire.

Yes, because we're carrying the fire" (McCarthy, 2006, P.25)

Little gesture of love while the father made the flute from a piece of roadside can for the son, when he himself shares his memories of his friends and loved owns his son which reestablished the bond and hold them together amid the chaos.

"This is what the good guys do. They keep trying. They don't give up" (McCarthy, 2006, p.43)

Distinction between good and bad valuation and proper judgement of human and things around has also been taught by the father to his son.

Movements of happiness in basic needs while fulfilled suddenly also shared by both of them when they unknowingly discovered a basement full of shored foods like tomatoes, peaches, beans, apricot, canned hams, corned beef. Hundreds of gallons of water in ten-gallon plastic jerry jugs and many more. Morality, gratitude and also passing of own cultures to his son and the little gestures in support of it like after they ate up the found food in the basement in the house, the father actually feel pity and also gratefully prayed for the wellbeing of the family. He not only aware the son of the realities but also told him they might not be the last good humans on earth. Even the father teaches the life skills of survival knowingly he's days going to end soon and later the realization of his father's condition makes him confront the reality too but as a dutiful son struck by reality of human existence and limitations continues to give and extend support to his father at that stage he understood that he has to carry out his life alone and the father also knows that he himself to some extend provide his son with the skills necessary to live and continue the legacy. Lastly the day when they both apart from each other one with the experience and memories and other with the hope, pain, dilemma and longing to live by his son.

"You need to go on, he said. I cant go with you. you need to keep going. You don't know what might be down the road. We were always the lucky. You'll be lucky again. You'll see. Just go. It's all right. (McCarthy, 2006, p.90)

"I want to be with you.

You cant.

Please

You cant. You have to carry the fire.

I don't know how to.

Yes you do

Is it real? The fire?

Yes, it is.

Where is it? I don't know where it is  
 Yes, you do. It's inside you. It was always there  
 I can see it" (McCarthy,2006, p.91)

The bond and relationship between the father and son in the novel have no physical limitations and it is rather can be described as an eternal bond.

## **CONCLUSION: -**

Freud concepts of human psyche and its components are shown in episodic manner in the characters of the novel i.e. in the father and son how id, ego and superego and dreams and memories shape their behaviours throughout their journey is also supported by providing excerpt from the text by McCarthy. What psychic elements and its association helps and leads the father son in the novel and actually hopefully carry out their life as well as the acute bond between the father and son also shown in a manner where they can be a symbol of ideal love and relationship and become epitome of their own. The duty, responsibilities of both the father and son also justify that love along with sense of responsibility can be work as a leading force to overcome physical and mental obstacles and circumstances and focus on the things we can control rather than wasting time thinking uncontrollable and face as well as see reality as it is.

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