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SOSYAL BİLİMLER ENSTİTÜSÜ
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YÜKSEK LİSANS TEZİ

A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF THE ROAD METAPHOR IN AMERICAN
FICTION IN THE NOVELS

ON THE ROAD, REVOLUTIONARY ROAD AND THE ROAD

(AMERİKAN KURGUSUNDAKİ YOL METAFORUNUN *YOLDA*, *DEVİRİM*
YOLU VE *YOL* ROMANLARINDA KARŞILAŞTIRMALI ÇALIŞMASI)

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ABSTRACT

Master Thesis

A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF THE ROAD METAPHOR IN AMERICAN FICTION IN THE NOVELS *ON THE ROAD*, *REVOLUTIONARY ROAD* AND *THE ROAD*

Dilay AYDOĞDU

This thesis aims to provide a close analysis of the road as metaphor in American fiction by combining three different road novels *On the Road* (1957) by Jack Kerouac, *Revolutionary Road* (1961) by Richard Yates and *The Road* (2006) by Cormac McCarthy. More precisely, this study is conducted to suggest new alternatives to the perception of the road metaphor by comparing these three road novels regarding to their approach to being on the road. Since the road metaphor is generally read as a search for joy and adventure, or as a journey of self-transformation, other possibilities for reading this trope are neglected. While Jack Kerouac presents an example of the road as a site of adventure and development, Richard Yates and Cormac McCarthy show how the road can serve alternate and contradictory purposes such as stasis and a battle for survival. Finally, the close analysis of these three American fiction novels gives rise to the possibility of changing critical approaches to the road metaphor by suggesting alternative readings and discusses different functions for the road novel.

Key Words: Kerouac, Yates, McCarthy, Road metaphor, American fiction.

KISA ÖZET

Yüksek Lisans Tezi

AMERİKAN KURGUSUNDAKİ YOL METAFORUNUN *YOLDA*, *DEVİRİM YOLU* VE *YOL* ROMANLARINDA KARŞILAŞTIRMALI ÇALIŞMASI

Dilay AYDOĞDU

Bu çalışma Jack Kerouac'ın *Yolda* (1957), Richard Yates'in *Devrim yolu* (1961) ve Cormac McCarthy'nin *Yol* (2006) romanlarını bir araya getirerek Amerikan kurgusundaki yol metaforunun yakın analizini yapmayı hedeflemiştir. Bu çalışma, sunulan üç yol romanının yolda olma kavramını ele alış şekillerine göre kıyaslayarak, yol metaforun algısına yeni alternatifler sunmak adına yürütülmüştür. Bahsedilen yol metaforu, genel olarak, mutluluk ve macera arayışı, özgürleşme durumu ve daha iyi bir özbenlik kavramına yönelik yapılan bir arayış olarak kabul gördüğünden, diğer olasılıklar metaforun tek taraflı bir değerlendirmeye tabi tutulmasının bir sonucu olarak arka planda kalmıştır. Kerouac, yolda olma durumunu maceracı bir anlatıma dönüştürerek, yol metaforunu yaygın olarak kabul gördüğü şekliyle ele alırken; Yates ve McCarthy yolun aslında durağanlık ve hayatta kalma savaşı gibi farklı amaçlara da hizmet edebileceğini göstermiştir. Son olarak, bu üç farklı Amerikan kurgu romanının yakın incelemesi, alternatif yaklaşımlar önererek ve yolda olmanın amacıyla ilgili karşıt elementleri ele alarak, yol romanına yaklaşımın değişmesine olasılık yaratmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Kerouac, Yates, McCarthy, Yol metaforu, Amerikan kurgusu.

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INTRODUCTION

A life is the sum of each decision made throughout the unique and individual journey of each person. One has to make decisions in every part of life in order to continue the flow of life and consequently, there are decisions that a person experiences or does not experience that affect this flow. Naturally, there is only one option experienced with each decision and others with their possible consequences remain unknown. This makes the acts of choice and decision making central to a person's life. Everything is shaped according to the one chosen path, the chosen person, the chosen job and so on. Thus life consists of a great many forks in a road. If the road is a metaphor for life, its forks become the metaphor for decisions that shape its form.

Roads, used as a metaphor in many works of literature, are of great importance because they signal journey and change. Roads are a matter of being on the move rather than staying stationary and motion can be interpreted as a form of rebellion against the conditions of stagnant life and even life itself. They suggest mysterious changes into one's life that can completely change the current direction of life. This change may not necessarily be negative or positive, since it is a decision taken due to many different reasons. One may decide to be on the road to find out the meaning of life, to simply be in different places, to renew a way of thinking or to take a quest for self. On the contrary, the journey can be a means of escape, survival or even lead to nowhere. However, when once on the road, the reason becomes unnecessary as the focus changes from cause to movement. Being on the move requires being radical and determined so as to have a consistency to endure the

journey and complete it according to its aims. In this sense, there is no need for destinations if the importance lies on the journey itself, since arriving at a point carries no meaning if it is seen as a rebellious movement. However, when this journey turns into a compulsory act or a regressive stagnation, the perception of the metaphor alters.

This thesis will examine the road in American fiction since 1950. It will examine the different ways that roads are perceived as an essential part of life, how they encode fantasies of escape and the promise of renewal. However, the initial aim of this study is to challenge the existing genre by presenting new and alternative ways to perceive the road metaphor. Each road narrative carries different perspectives of road life and in order to analyze the genre, specific figures of these perspectives should be taken into consideration. Throughout this study, three different road novels will be examined with the aim of illuminating the characteristics of the genre. As I will argue, there is not a road *novel* but, instead, there are many road *novels*. The genre contains variations and contradictions that should not be disregarded.

From one perspective, roads give a chance of leaving all the confusing and tiring facts of real life and moving them off to take time for breath. Movement promises refreshment and serves as a healing gap, a separation from the current status of life to gain new points of view. Since life is a state of enduring changes, roads are one of the most suitable places to experience these possible changes of mind. Personally, roads serve as mute friends that are near you when you call them. They embrace the intensity of feelings as someone that cares for you without even speaking. It is an isolated action to be on the road; there is merely you and the road

that creates a space, a spectrum of feelings far from the concepts of wrongs and rights. Roads, in this sense, give you a chance to go into a process of self-quest to be able to answer some questions in life.

In addition to offering changes within one's lifetime, being on the road symbolizes a spiritual search of self, a better state of things. It can stand for a quest for the unknown, a kind of gambling with the inner self to see whether there is a way to be happier. As one of the most essential goals, happiness may be placed in the core of this quest because if there is a need to go, there is possibly a source of dissatisfaction and unhappiness that triggers the particular instinct to change places. Roads enable people to experience their quest, if they need one, by presenting continuation and it contains the feeling of hope as a cruel element of this quest, since basically being on the road requires hope to be able to search for a better state of living. Basically, roads were, are, and will be in use as a literary metaphor due to their revolutionary promises and people's needs to be renewed. What makes roads an interesting metaphor comes from their sincere way of functioning as an exit door, a door opened to the world of dreams and desires. As they are flat surfaces that lead from one point to another, these places become something to live on. Being on the road indeed turns into a way of survival for some people. It becomes a way of living for some such that movement is the only way that they can find happiness. Some people can simply survive by travelling, covering distances and discovering new ways of living. Though the aims of these travels may differ, being on the move is related to being in a state of searching, which promises new excitement at the core of this journey. This perception of road fiction is the most accepted, common and basic

understanding of the genre and Jack Kerouac's *On the Road* is the representative of this point of view in this study.

From a different perspective, roads serve as a battle of survival, a necessity to continue living and an obligation to perform. In this sense, the perception mentioned above becomes invalid since this time, being on the road does not mean a search for a better self, hidden adventures or discovery of new ways of living. The road can turn into escape rather than liberty, thus its travelers do not have an option but to move constantly in order to be able to cope with aggravated circumstances. I will discuss Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* to highlight a completely different perspective of the road narrative, which I hope will enlarge a reading of the existing genre by offering a new alternative.

Lastly, the road genre is under detailed examination in terms of a different point of view. Richard Yates's *Revolutionary Road* exists as another possibility to extend the existing understanding of the road novel. This novel is chosen so as to expose a hopeless and reactionary form of the road genre. In Yates' novel, as opposed to its title, the characters become desperate and the dream of being on the road turns into a reason for their collapse. Even these people desire to change their position; roads become dead-end for them that make a revolutionary possibility of this journey impossible. In this case, this novel opens up as a new entry into the genre with its unique perspective of the road metaphor which suggests the desperate state of being stationary.

The road remains as a metaphor that implies various hidden meanings and is experienced differently from person to person. In his collection *Mountain Interval*, Robert Frost's famous poem "The Road Not Taken" was published in 1916. The

poem addresses the difficulty of decision-making and the feeling of regret that comes from the inability of experiencing all options. In order to continue living, a chain of decisions should be made; however, in times of doubt, one may regret their decisions. Frost's poem expresses a desire to experience both paths in these lines:

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,

And sorry I could not travel both. (1-2)

The fork in his road pushes him to make a decision despite his unwillingness and finally he makes his decision by thinking he will take the other way tomorrow. However, he is aware that he may not come back tomorrow as nobody knows where this path leads him and if he "should ever come back" to try the other one which brings the conclusion of choosing the right or wrong path to follow. As is seen, none of the paths' courses can be predicted, and Frost chooses his without knowing what awaits him through and at the end of this path. This condition of deciding without knowing the possible outcomes removes the possibility of being wrong or right since there is no wrong or right path but a path chosen or not chosen. The decisions that determine the flow of life itself thus cannot be evaluated as wrong or right due to the unknown consequences of the not chosen path. Frost, in the last verse of his poem, states

I shall be telling this with a sigh

Somewhere ages and ages hence. (16-17)

The expression of "a sigh" in these lines may refer not to the wrong decision he makes but to the obligation of making decisions which are the basis of life itself over

its course. He simply regrets being obliged to choose, since his decision brings both new experiences and missed experiences.

In “The Road Not Taken,” Frost has attempted to create a different viewpoint for life experience by stating that marking paths as either true or false is a misconception of the whole experience of the road. In the last lines of his work, he states he

[...] took the one less traveled by,

And that has made all the difference.” (19-20)

He believes that his path is the less traveled one and this, specifically, creates the difference between his actual life and his possible lives. In fact, he implies that the condition of the road, being less or more travelled, is of less importance, as regardless from the features of the road, that road is the chosen one which creates the only difference. The other path whether it is more travelled or not, is not a bad or wrong decision. In fact, it is the only decision and that is why it matters and it is the one that can create a difference. As it is chosen, it is the one that is supposed to do the difference as it is, at the same time, the only option that can reveal its consequences.

Finally, the state of motion requires two things: a road on which to travel and a decision to start to travel. Which roads to take, where to go and how to go become less critical as long as there is a decision and a road. Basically, the idea of making a choice is dependent on the pre-existence of the road. If roads are taken away, the possibility of choice is also taken away. The road is therefore an ontological precondition. Thus, road novels and poetry are important for Americans in the 20th

century since they are the prerequisites for the consideration of alternative journeys, lives, and points of view.

1.1 AN OVERVIEW OF ESTABLISHED CRITICISM ON ROAD MOTIFS: A HISTORY OF ROAD TRAVELERS

Road travel has been a popular subject for Americans since roads carry importance nationally. With the development of roads and automobiles, some American people reached their dreams of travelling the country for a variety of reasons such as looking for a job or adventure. However, as living conditions of people change, the way they travel and their reasons differ as well. At the beginning of the 20th century, people were on the road out of a sense of necessity, of travelling for opportunity, land, or employment. Over the years, people's reasons for traveling have evolved and other reasons have risen such as having adventure or self-enlightenment. However, regardless of the reasons, the road becomes and remains since a genre as it triggers or obliges people in different ways to be on the road.

Firstly, before analyzing some of the features of the road metaphor, it is essential to consider the analytic frame of the road novel in contemporary criticism. The benefits that roads promise turn travelling into something more spiritual, a chance to become someone else, a space between real life and desires, and finally a chance to find what may have been lost in time. It is never merely an action of changing places and as Ronald Primeau starts the introduction of his book *Romance of the Road*, "For most of this century, Americans have treated the highway as sacred

space” (1). This particular interest that has been given the roads indeed functions as an answer to “why so many of these highway travelers want to tell their stories and why so many people want to read them” (1). Road novels, poems, songs or movies function not only as literary works but also as pathfinders for people who have never been on the road before. While reading, watching or listening to these productions, people try to experience the spirit of the journey as a kind of discovery since as Primeau states “space on the road is not a passive background or a completed scene travelers merely pass through, but is itself an evolving interaction of the pastoral landscape and cultural symbols” (3). This revolutionary interaction is the promise of the road, which is a motivation to awake and step into action to gain different insights. Thus, most road stories are preoccupied with the unique perception of this interaction of cultures, people, landscapes and relations.

From a different perspective, being on the road is an unstable continuum since change accompanies the traveler along the road. In her book, *The Road Story and The Rebel*, Katie Mills claims that “road stories usually narrate a conflict, some disruption in a preexisting power dynamic, which motivates a character to go on the road; consequently, a study of the road genre reveals how conflicts change over time, thereby providing a useful chronicle of changing [power trips]” (12). As traveling is a way of being in search of *something*, this process of alternating between former and latter self naturally creates a conflict; however, the conflict can be motivating, since in a sense, these trips enable new beginnings and a clearer vision. Accepting this conflict as a way of healing is one way to accept life as it is. This search for a better life clearly enlightens the vision and leaves judgmental actions and thoughts behind. Mills writes that, “this genre encourages us to imagine new lives, teaching us to

rewrite prohibitions into narratives of possibility” (Mills 19). Since movement is a way of being free and becoming free, it creates new identities by revealing hidden aspects of selfhood. What is more, road stories teach people to consider different viewpoints, or the possibilities of these differences. Nothing is fixed or predetermined on the road because everything comes as a surprise which may be the therapeutic side of this journey. In this regard, Mills writes “By unstitching us from a fixed identity, road stories - more than any other postwar genre – help us see ourselves as agents of our destinies, as protagonists rather than passive characters. As do individuals, subcultures also use the road story to manifest new identities” (21). What Mills expresses here is that road stories can play a rebellious role in their readers’ minds by trying to reconfigure some of the thoughts that became popular in 1950s America. Some people desired safe, usual, and quite lives and did not look for more because they wanted to feel as comfortable as possible. On the other hand, roads promise adventures and these adventures can change people as one of the possibilities. In fact, the ideas stated above are a representative of merely one point of view and may not be valid in every case since people may misread the potential and the promise of the road generally. Mills sees the road *story* as a story about the process of growth, change, and movement. She writes that:

The road presents a way to experience life, affect others, and change ourselves – and the road *story* dares us to dream of a better life. Of course, road films or novels are far more complex than this simple definition would suggest. The road story sweetens up our daily routines and responsibilities with a taste of freedom and spontaneity. But the appeal of this genre lies in something more complicated – a

hunger for new experience and meaning, a hunger that drove Beat writer Jack Kerouac to claim [the road is life]. (*The Road Story and the Rebel* 22)

Mills clearly states that making the decision to be on the move requires daring, a desire to learn how to change and coming to a different state of mind from before. According to Mills, it is quite a rebellious and revolutionary act as it provides major changes and discovery of new perspectives, cultures and ways of living. It is a way of living that clears the possible blindness developed due to the monotony of everyday life. People's dreams are shaped according to their environment, way of perceiving life, education and if trapped in a small world full of pre-learned patterns, dreams and desires will be naturally trapped in these norms and rules. In this respect, the road is a break from the sameness of everyday and makes people be aware of their hunger to live their deeper desires than their current monotonous perception of life if it is possible to see the road in this way. Otherwise, the road may also be the exact reason of monotony, boredom and dilemma.

As mentioned in Robert Frost's poem, "The Road Not Taken", there is not a state of being wrong or right on the road, there is merely a decision to be on the road. Its impact on identity can be only activated by the existence of a road and a decision to make this journey happen to "sweeten up our daily routines". Finally, roads function as a process of orientation that can lead to different consequences: to a better self, an opportunity for adventure, a cul-de-sac, a dilemma, a fight for survival and simply a necessity according to the intentions of travelers and the decisions they make.

In their book *Hit The Road Jack*, Gordon Slethaug and Stacilee Ford collect different essays about American roads and answer the question of what the American Road is by presenting a different viewpoint to the metaphor: “The American Road is indeed a trope, myth, and important symbol of an exceptionalist USA, but it is a vitally important idea to understand, unpack, and refashion. Like roads themselves in the USA, the metaphor of the road is always under construction” (12). Slethaug and Ford claim that roads are the national symbol for Americans and the metaphor turns into a cultural currency that constantly changes in accordance with the conditions of time. In order to put the idea of perception change of the road metaphor Slethaug and Ford advance the idea to its development over time:

Only well into the nineteenth century did men and women go on the road to work or relax, be alone or enjoy companionship, satisfy curiosity or follow dreams, and explore all those things that we now identify with the road. From that time “the road” became increasingly complex image, metaphor, and icon -or trope- for nation-based exploration and exploitation, the journey of families in pursuit of better living conditions and of individuals who hoped to discover more about their identities, and in the process, overcome difficulties and limitations in transforming themselves. (*Hit the Road Jack* 13)

As seen in this passage, the reasons to be on the road vary and when more and more people have started to be in motion, and there is a possibility for travel to turn into a way of meditation, a different level of understanding which enables a different communication between the traveler and the reader. However, as said before, Slethaug and Ford give place to merely one possible perception of road traveling.

The process of traveling may help fix the problems of life, as well as being freed from limitations only in one point of view. On the contrary, the road itself may be the reason of difficulties, various limitations and related problems or it may simply serve for nothing at all as a dead-end. Keeping other possibilities in mind can create a difference apart from what Slethaug and Ford have put forward by adopting the most common way of reading the metaphor.

While road travel increases and gains different and deeper meanings, new productions of writing help this metaphor to develop as a cultural way of understanding of American culture, according to some critics. Since these journeys carry national, spiritual, individual, and cultural significance, with each development of the country, the cultural sphere has been renewed and individual desires have also gained new directions. Technological changes have also affected the road metaphor by adding new dimensions to the form. One of the most important of these changes was the invention of automobiles. With this technology, the development of roads accelerated and road traveling gained wider use. "As cars were introduced and roads developed more strategically, the road's relation to adventure continued, but became culturally embodied as an East to West journey that could be taken individually, with buddies, or with families" (Slethaug & Ford 8). In this respect and from a single dimension, these developments obviously triggered American's desire to feel free, independent, and spontaneous and it made road traveling quite inevitable, especially since roads and cars gave the chance of freer movement. Their existence created a practical possibility of escape in the minds of Americans.

Different centuries created different road travelers who matched the technologies of the time period. People found various ways to cope with undesirable

living conditions and they chose different ways to be on the road. Before the 20th century and in the first half of the 20th century, the traveler of literature particularly the old picaresque, is quite random and “most often an innocent but (mildly) delinquent figure who, for one reason or another, is at least temporarily dislocated – removed from any particular place – in order narratively to enter an expanded space” as Rowland Sherrill describes in his book *Road – Book America Contemporary Culture and the New Picaresque* (3). Sherrill puts the difference between the old and new picaresque quite clearly and advances by saying: “Thrown back solely on his or her own wits, this character is loosed to travel the highways and by-ways of the land” (3). Basically, the old picaresque narrative presents randomly and disconnectedly traveled places of the character and his/her visits to different social environments and structures.

On the other hand, during the second half of the 20th century, the features of the picaresque, has evolved to something different with the change of living strategies consistent with new living conditions. According to Sherrill, for the new picaresque,

the movement through these experiences – and from one episode to the next – tends to follow not a course of escape from the last place or a manipulation of events toward the next place or the promise of material gain in some other place but a career of pure fortuity, coincidental discovery, new curiosity, odd lead, or simply a restlessness animated by hope to move on. (*Road – Book America* 45)

As seen here, the evolution of the new picaresque, and more specifically the American road travel narrative, has adopted necessary changes and turned road

traveling into a search for hope. This time, a change of place is instigated by the curiosity of new terra incognita and this transformation changed both the material and spiritual goal of movement. It turned into an attempt to see the things as they have never been seen before or, “to be open to the strange in the familiar and the familiar in the strange” (Sherrill 69). The new traveler embraces the oddness of welcoming new experiences and accepts them as familiar to ease the process of growing into the role of stranger. In this way, the road leads this new traveler to “an opportunity to start over, to begin again, innocently to refuse the captivity of the deeper or more recent past, and to explore the new world anew” (Sherrill 68). The road turns into a path opening to a completely new world that extends in front of its traveler. Ultimately, “the new picaresque is more than merely a small and curious section of a chapter in literary history, that the road work it proposes also moves into broader social and cultural spheres in America” (Sherrill 80). This new traveler wants to be free in the free lands of America that seem like a treasure, in addition to the benefits of new individual experiences. Basically, over time, traveling turns into a way of adventure from its roots as a necessity, but since the road is recognized differently by each traveler, the effect and intention of the journey can create a difference among these experiences.

Travel and the road are shaped according to the needs of travelers since they see what they want to see through the lens of their desires. The route is changeable according to the constantly and spontaneously reshaped experiences on the road, and if this journey is experienced positively, then it may seem to be an expedient space: “The genre continues to appeal because it lets us recast our image of ourselves. Getting away, we are free to be different; in the invigorating, free-floating space of

the temporary nomad, we can challenge what has been dominant and explore emergent values and dreams” (Primeau 16). Since people’s desires to break away from constricting social norms seem to continue throughout their lives, roads will also continue to be a kind of protest to explore for more. From one perspective, it is an uprising, a rebellious act to reconsider the norms and contrasts of life such as being strange or familiar, old and modern, right or wrong and so on. As a result, “road narratives stretch beyond literary constraints and into a socially constructed dialogue about who we are, where we’ve been, and where we might yet still go” (Primeau 16). It becomes an objective of Americans who question the form of their existence. Being on the road, thus, rejects desiring and celebrating what has been served to them. It is their duty to find out their own sense of the flow of life because of “the sense of mission Americans feel so central to their national experience” (Primeau 51). This sense of seeing road travelling as a national pastime saves Americans from getting lost in demanding everyday life but rather on the roads. Primeau shows taking road trips are not related to the level of maturity, economic conditions or any other factor except from a deep desire for the unknown.

Roads can create different consequences in people’s lives. Since where the road leads and why this journey starts may change from person to person, the features of this experience also differ. However, independent from these factors, the road functions as a teacher by different means. Failure, wrong decisions, celebration and discovery come together to form a kind of experience and creates a learner and a teacher as some famous road authors such as Walt Whitman, John Steinbeck, Jack Kerouac, to name the most well-known, tried to show in their works. These and many other authors of this genre clearly reflect a different understanding of the road

metaphor, and the figure has gained multiple meanings. These various intentions hold contradictions and oppositions together because the road metaphor can be accepted as a way of search and at the same time as a way of survival or death.

As a powerful example for road travelers, William Least Heat Moon evaluates the process of traveling as a metamorphosis from a necessity to “the addiction of the traveler” after “a sense of the unknown” (qtd. in Primeau 70). According to him, being on the road turns into a “therapy through observation of the ordinary and obvious, a means whereby the outer eye opens an inner one” (qtd. in Primeau 70). As Least Heat Moon states, since travelling functions as a kind of therapy, having a destination or arriving somewhere becomes unimportant, hence the focus is on the time spent on the road and what the roads bring. Related to what Least Heat Moon expresses, George W. Pierson’s “the M factor” (Movement, Migration, Mobility) in *The Moving American* (223-25) has mentioned the addiction to the feeling of being on the road and how this motion indeed brings peace again as a therapy for Americans: “Soon motion breeds optimism in the view that we can always change and that change is always for the better” (qtd. in Primeau 87). What Pierson suggests here is the one side of the metaphor that focuses on the possibility of recovery. As I will argue, the road experience is highly changeable in terms of conditions, necessities, needs and the reasons to be on the road.

1.2 THE ROADS BEFORE US

The American road narrative genre has been growing over the twentieth century through road songs, films, and novels. In fact, as long as the romance of being on the road lasts, the productions of the genre will continue to be produced. Within the frame of this study, I have selected three road novels: Jack Kerouac's *On the Road*, Richard Yates' *Revolutionary Road* and finally Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*. I have chosen these three novels in particular because they configure the road in quite different perspectives. Though each of the books focuses on the road as a metaphor, the authors' approaches are unique since each road novel expresses different values and is concerned with different problems. For that reason, the differences between these novels will hopefully show new and different applications of the road metaphor.

Firstly, one of the most popular road novels, Jack Kerouac's *On the Road* will be read according to the road's functions in the novel. In this novel, the road metaphor is used to present a need for adventure, an action of liberation, a random decision to take and a discovery of the new. Kerouac creates a free world for his characters, and the narration focuses on the surprising excitement and experiences on the road. These characters decide to be on the road or in motion because it is a way of perceiving the world. They simply live like this. By changing places and knowing new people they live new experiences without any fixed destinations or plans. For Sal Paradise, the narrator of the book, and his friends "the road winds from past to present and encompasses all segments of society, regardless of appearance, ethnicity, age, gender, sexuality, or economic standing. For all of its risks, dangers, and

disappointments, the road has held the promise of discovery and new occupations” (Slethaug 14). As Slethaug states, for Kerouac’s characters being on the road is one of the best thing that can be done in America, since they live with the idea of changing places. Having leisure time by driving on the road as heroes of their own lives is their only purpose because they have committed themselves to the road.

In their quest, the characters rebel against the social norms and patterns by adopting their own rules, patterns and way of living. There is no need for Sal Paradise and his friends to meet the demands of the society by presenting a neat example, since they have the roads where they can be accepted as they are without any change. As a result, they try to find themselves on different roads, in different places and with new people. The road metaphor functions as an opportunity for these young people and they use this opportunity with enthusiasm to gain different perspectives without thinking what is wrong or right.

In the second chapter, Richard Yates’ *Revolutionary Road* will be examined to present an opposing world, especially in regard to the situations in which roads cannot function. In this novel, roads turn into dead-ends that are far from being revolutionary. Yates creates his characters April and Frank Wheeler and the story advances around their desperation and desire to move away. The Wheelers presents a generation of post-war Americans pursuing the American Dream. This young couple lives in the suburbs and set a family there with two children and neighbors. Though their lives seem comfortable and secure in the beginning of their story, things become worse when April eventually recognizes that they are trapped in a lifestyle that they do not believe in. On *Revolutionary Road*, life is fine for the other neighbors, since they do not question, demand more from life, nor desire for better

conditions. Hence, in this environment, the Wheelers turn into renegades who are looking for a way to escape to Paris. However, the roads cannot make their revolutionary promise and function as a rescuer. Instead, their desires and dreams are killed due to their individual differences and conditions.

Yates tries to make his readers realize and adopt a different perspective of road novels: that roads can be *reactionary* in some cases. They do not always bring happiness, freedom and conformity to its travelers. Rather they may function as a cul-de-sac and destroy the lives of people. As the roads trigger people's desires to go, they may function in an opposite way and trap people in a state of rest. In this novel, the road does not allow the Wheelers to construct a new way of thinking, experiencing and living that closes doors rather than opens them to new beginnings.

The last chapter of this study is on Cormac McCarthy's novel *The Road*. McCarthy confronts his readers with a post-apocalyptic environment in this novel which deals with the survival journey of a father and his son in an already corrupted and dying world. This father and his son are literally on the road all the time, since roads become their home. The setting of the novel makes being on the road obligatory, since they have no other choice than that if they want to survive. They have to move constantly because the world they try to survive in is cruel, and stopping moving clearly means the end of their lives. However, they are not on the road to gain new experiences, to see different places and people, to pursue better life conditions or to have adventures. Instead, their only reason for being on the road is survival. They want and try to survive in an already dead world. McCarthy reflects the effects of this apocalypse on people in different ways. Some of them stay "good" and cope with their problems without causing any harm whereas other people turn

into “bad” people who harm people on purpose. The father and the son stay good and continue to be on the road to reach the south of the country, possibly America, which may increase their possibility of survival.

The novel deals with the road metaphor in a different way from the two others, and in McCarthy’s world, roads do not signal freedom, pursuit of desires or hope, but various dangers. The experience, this time, is unique because it is full of worries and fear. Even though the reason of this apocalypse remains unexplained, the drastic condition of the world is an indicator of what may happen if viciousness spreads. People’s treatment of the environment and each other carries an immense impact and may be one of the reasons for this condition. McCarthy, in a way, reflects his experiences of his world and imagines some possible consequences of being capable of absolute atrocities. From this perspective, it is written critically to serve the purpose of showing a totally different understanding of the roads: roads as sources of danger, fear and anxiety. Roads clearly function not as an option for experience but as a location of suffering, since this time characters are not willing to be on the road and it turns into a kind of pain. They have to follow a route in a hope of finding a livable environment for themselves, thus all other positive gaining of the road disappears and the road becomes a metaphor for survival.

This study is conducted to present different understandings of the road metaphor by focusing on how the road directs its travelers. The main purpose is to explore and analyze the multiple and contradictory applications of the road as a metaphor. Through the varied application of the metaphor of the road, the road narrative reveals itself to be more complex than simply a liberatory form. Kerouac,

Yates and McCarty present several perceptions and perspectives of the road that cannot be reduced to a single, unambiguous device.



CHAPTER I

THE SPECTRUM OF REASONS FOR BEING ON THE ROAD

History as a total process disappears; in its place there remains a chaos to be ordered as one likes. Georg Lukács

Jack Kerouac's 1957 novel *On the Road* exemplifies the dream of self-discovery and escape from banality. As the first novel under consideration in this study, *On the Road* presents a common understanding of the road metaphor and reflects its features in late 1950s America. Through the perspective of Salvatore "Sal" Paradise, the novel focuses on the many different feelings of and purposes for being on the road, such as experiencing new lives, having adventures, and searching for a meaning in life. In fact, in the very first page of the book, Sal Paradise mentions his plan to go but also laments that he cannot really do it now, as if he is waiting for an inspiration or a source of courage. "With the coming of Dean Moriarty began the part of my life you could call my life on the road. Before that I'd often dreamed of going West to see the country, always vaguely planning and never taking off" (3). Thus, Dean Moriarty functions as a spark for Sal to make him come out of the motionless cycle of desiring and planning, but doing nothing. In the way Kerouac adopts it, being "on the road" requires being in search of *something*, and it suggests that "[h]ow to live seems much more crucial than why" as John Clellon Holmes also suggests in his article "This is the Beat Generation" (10). What may be the aim of living and how to best understand the motions of life are open questions paired with

the experience of traveling. In other words, travel becomes a metaphor for devising new questions and answers.

In the novel, something in everyday life, in beliefs or in relationships frustrate the characters so much that their movement becomes inevitable. Since staying still will not yield answers to their problems, going seems to be a means of pursuing an answer to the questions they pose to life itself. In other words, according to the characters of this book, the important event is not finding answers but being on the move and being on the journey itself. In different ways, Sal keeps asking himself, “What was I doing? Where was I going? I’d soon find out” (125). The journey he takes is a cycle of losing and finding purpose again and again because it holds different answers and raises new questions. The characters do not seem to be interested in what these answers may be; rather, they would like to move to experience the sublimity of life in time: “Let’s go, let’s not stop – go now! Yes!” (182). First and foremost, “[...] the road is life” (192). As a result, life will be lived when one minds the road.

Being *on the road* was simply *being* on the road according to Sal Paradise and his friends Dean Moriarty, Carlo Marx and many other people with whom they come into contact. These young people see the world and life differently and cannot resist their urge to travel. Hence for them, there are no forks in the road, no compulsory decisions to make, nor any real concept of arrival. As Sal writes, “We were all delighted, we all realized we were leaving confusion and nonsense behind and performing our one and noble function of the time, *move*” (121). For Sal and Dean, if there is a road, then there is no problem. Where it is going is insignificant to them. It is simple and complicated at the same time, since being on the road requires

questioning most of the time. Ironically, what will happen at the end of the road, where they will go next and what they will do in the future are the questions that eventually cause them fear, doubt and anxiety. On one hand, they are concerned about valuing the present, and on the other hand, they are quite concerned with the future and how it will be shaped. Regarding a disagreement in New York, Dean explains what he means by valuing time to everyone in the car when he says, “Now dammit, look here, all of you, we all must admit that everything is fine and there’s no need in the world to worry, and in fact we should realize what it would mean to us to UNDERSTAND that we’re not REALLY worried about ANYTHING. Am I right?” (121). Dean, who lacked a father figure, learned to travel America in order to compensate for tough youth in a youth reformatory. Moreover, he tries not to focus on his own feelings and he didn’t like to grieve for what happened in the past. In a way, he believes that doing so would inaugurate a banal and situated life devoid of the excitement he craves. The reason Sal saw a different Dean (independent from the possibility of Dean being correct or wrong), lies behind the reason that Sal shares Dean’s feelings. As a writer, Sal craves a muse and Dean fills that role because of his energy, joy, and pursuit of a life beyond the conventions of his time. Later in the novel, thinking about Dean’s new child on the way makes Sal realize a different part of being on the road, a tougher part of it:

Dean took out other pictures. I realized these were all the snapshots which our children would look at some day with wonder, thinking their parents had lived smooth, well-ordered, stabilized-within-the-photo lives and got up in the morning to walk proudly on the sidewalks of life, never dreaming the raggedy madness and riot of our

actual lives, our actual night, the hell of it, the senseless nightmare road. All of it inside endless and beginningless emptiness. (*On the Road* 231)

As much as Dean, Sal chases a life far from ordinariness and chooses to observe and be the part of a “madness” they have created for themselves, a world full of mad people, mad ideas, mad nights, because they fear living in the safe world of the sane. They believe the nature of this world and human society are unstable. So to live a meaningful life, they know that they need experiences that may bring them close to the *madness* of pure experience. However, in this passage, Sal reflects on the difficulties of being on the road, instead of listing his possible enlightenment or adventures. This time, their riot seems so tiring and “senseless” that imagining their lives from the eyes of their children makes this endless “riot” seem almost ordinary in itself.

Sal begins his life on the road because he wants to be a writer and because he knows that Dean Moriarty is a man with wide and varied experience travelling the United States. He states that he has become restless and writes, “[...] my life hanging around the campus had reached the completion of its cycle and was stultified [...]” (9). Sal is a writer who craves new experiences to feed him creatively and Dean was the new experience itself with his unique intellect and sense. Sal writes that:

Dean’s intelligence was every bit as formal and shining and complete, without the tedious intellectualness. And his ‘criminality’ was not something that sulked and sneered; it was a wild yea-saying over burst of American joy; it was Western, the west wind, an ode from the

Plains, something new, long prophesied, long a-coming. (*On the Road*

9)

Dean's nature and wildness provide a unique perspective for Sal and Sal associates him with his hunger to travel the country. Moreover, this association and Sal's trust of Dean's experience leads to Sal's romanticization of Dean. Being a child and a grown-up at the same time, Dean was "just raced in society, eager for bread and love" (10). He has a modest perspective of life which asks for more and at the same time less. He rejects the part of the society he lives in, but also demands its excitement and love.

Yet Dean is revealed to be weak inside and his quest for his father makes him weaker over time. There is a hole in his world that he tries to fill with women: "Every new girl, every new wife, every new child was an addition to his bleak impoverishment." (119). By refusing to be motionless and demanding new experiences, Dean tries to consume every feeling on earth without really feeling them. His hunger to meet different woman, in fact, comes to light as an escape of his own truth. He was burning with the desire of experiencing unknown feelings, places, people and roads. He rejects what he was supposed to be and do and becomes a person free from any kind of predetermined role. Dean turns his feeling into a habit in order to cope with its effect on him. The sense of movement can be his tool to forget about the past and focus on the moment to find joy.

A quest is supposed to provide answers to ease the path of life; however, its nature creates more fragments that may result in the loss of all the answers that had been found previously (or assumed to be found). "Home" is a conception of birth; it is a place where awareness of being alive is first realized and home is a place that

makes the definition of one easy. It is definite, precise and what it is. Thus, whether being far from home makes one a stranger or not is the question required to have a sense of meaning. Sal writes:

I woke up as the sun was reddening; and that was the one distinct time in my life, the strangest moment of all, when I didn't know who I was – I was far away from home, haunted and tired with travel, in a cheap hotel room I'd never seen, hearing the hiss of steam outside, and the creak of the old wood of the hotel, and footsteps upstairs, and all the sad sounds, and I looked at the cracked high ceiling and really didn't know who I was for about fifteen strange seconds. I wasn't scared; I was just somebody else, some stranger, and my whole life was a haunted life, the life of a ghost. (*On the Road* 15)

In this quest for self-discovery, Sal suddenly realizes that he actually loses himself and turns into a total stranger. Being far from his home can create this illusion of belonging nowhere and becoming nobody. That is why he may feel that he actually does not get used to this way of living as he thinks he can. Additionally, it may be a moment of realization and concern about what he is doing with his life. He is concerned about his past, present and the future together and this concern may make him feel like somebody else. His quest for self conversely ends up with a loss of belonging that creates a sense of being trapped between his present and future, his desires and responsibilities, his hunger and his longing.

Seeing travelling as a way of living makes it easy to comprehend Sal and Dean's way of seeing life. Their initial motivation to live comes from this very feeling of constant leaving. The exploration of the new is always experienced as joy,

since it helps them diminish the feeling of a life suspended. Sal writes that “He and I suddenly saw the whole country like an oyster for us to open; and the pearl was there, the pearl was there. Off we roared...” (124). Being on the move was holy to them, as the road reflects the real life like a mirror. ‘IT’ (115) was somewhere out there, and it was their divine mission to find out.

The dialogue between Dean, Carlo and Sal on “the machine” attempts to show the boundaries between consciousness and the unconsciousness and its flexibility. Whether the struggle to attend a meaning to everything offers a freedom or madness is a discussion, since the machine cannot be turned off anytime even if it is desired to do so.

‘Ah child,’ said Carlo. ‘We’ll just have to sleep now. Let’s stop the machine.’ ‘You can’t stop the machine!’ yelled Carlo at the top of his voice. The first birds sang. ‘Now, when I raise my hand,’ said Dean, ‘we’ll stop talking, we’ll both understand purely and without any hassle that we are simply stopping talking, and we’ll just sleep.’ ‘You can’t stop the machine like that.’ ‘Stop the machine,’ I said. They looked at me. ‘He’s been awake all this time, listening. What were you thinking, Sal?’ I told them that I was thinking they were very amazing maniacs and that I had spent the whole night listening to them like a man watching the mechanism of a watch that reached clear to the top of Berthoud Pass and yet was made with the smallest works of the most delicate watch in the world. They smiled. I pointed my finger at them and said, ‘If you keep this up you’ll both go crazy, but let me know what happens as you go along.’ (*On the Road* 45)

Sal, the writer of the group, wants to join in their ritual of being lost in thought as a silent listener and observer, while Dean and Carlo discuss the condition of “the machine,” although they know they cannot turn it off in their search, as all that matters is that machine, the mind, which shows them the path to madness or sanity, a state of drunkenness coming from the overwork of the machine. Since their mind is their source creativity, they both want it to be open all the time and also abandon it from time to time to be able to rest. Consequently, they do not merely travel on the road, but also in their mind and gain different wild experiences by doing so.

2.1 LIVING LIFE AS A REJECTION: REJECTION OF AUTHORITY

Being different, refusing the rules and creating a new perception of life require a great deal of energy, courage and thinking. It is a dare taken against society, against a powerful set of norms. Kerouac’s characters’ quest for self, life and time is a challenge to these norms. While searching for joy and living the moment, the approval of society is less important than their own valuing of time. In his book *Capturing the Beat Moment: Cultural Politics and the Poetics of Presence*, Erik Mortensen explains the situation by saying, “Rather than contribute to the American economy, Dean uses time to serve his own ends” (30). In his own world, Dean is the only person in charge to decide how to spend his time since “time does not employ Dean, he employs time” (Mortensen 30). His desire to freely spend his time clearly states his other desire: to be free from all kinds of notions, even time. Sal thinks Remi has already achieved it in his own world: “And though Remi was having

working problems and bad love life with a sharp-tongued woman, he at least had learned to laugh almost better than anyone in the world, and I saw all the fun we were going to have in Frisco” (56). Remi sets no reasons to be happy indeed, and just try to focus on the feeling of joy without depending on any other outer factors. The problems he has do not prevent him from valuing time; and directing his own life on his desired path shows that he needs no other thing to be happy in this life.

Living in the postwar era influences these characters in terms of how they look for enthusiasm in every moment regardless of whatever place they are. Witnessing unfortunate events may direct them to value everything and acting against banal social norms makes them rebellious. After all, “this is the story of America. Everybody’s doing what they think they are supposed to do” (61). Remi, for instance, justifies his habit of stealing by saying “The world owes me a few things, that’s all” (62). Remi is innocent of any crime according to his own beliefs because “he was out to get back everything he’d lost; there was no end to his loss; this thing would drag on forever” (63). Someone or something was taken from him, and now this was his turn to return justice. With this purpose in mind, the right thing to do completely changes and it becomes highly personal. Sal considers Remi’s point of view in a broader sense and says, “I suddenly began to realize that everybody in America is a natural-born thief” (64). The deep dissatisfaction and disappointment served by the world make them feel that they do not belong to the common way of thinking and living. Everyone is unhappy and the reason is the same. When there is so much injustice and ruination, the only concern is to fulfill one’s own desires. Sal says, “I forgave everybody, I gave up, I got drunk [...]” (70), because “I had my own life, my own sad and ragged life forever” (76). Whether this is a kind of isolation or

an opening of the self to the outer world brings us to the notion of movement. Is it a running from alienation from anything that controls or of a self-realization which leaves all the attachments of life outside? Time is a relative phenomenon and how to spend it is a decision to give during the journey. In this respect, moving can be perceived as a rebellion towards time in order to catch it.

Dean, the man full of plans, puts up a struggle so as to give time its intended value, to complete his journey with a feeling of satisfaction. That is why for Sal, “there was always a schedule in Dean’s life” (38). The attempt to plan everything, every minute refers to a tricky point; by having an urge to plan, does Dean become a captive to time, or is he sensitive enough to value it because he can fill what time he has most fully? Since time is the biggest tutor that brings maturity, the second option seems more likely in case of Dean who accepts it as it is. As a result, in order to do so, he needs to go mad:

Southerners do not like madness the least bit, not Dean’s kind. He paid absolutely no attention to them. The madness of Dean had bloomed into a weird flower. I didn’t realize this till he and I and Marylou and Dunkel left the house for a brief spin-the-Hudson, when for the first time we were alone and could talk about anything we wanted. Dean grabbed the wheel, shifted to second, mused a minute, rolling, suddenly seemed to decide something and shot the car full-jet down the road in a fury of decision. (*On the Road* 102)

The concept of time and Dean’s point of view about how to spend it is explained in this passage. Similar to Remi, he attempts to take as many things as he can before leaving this world. Mostly, he steals from time, his archrival, by spending most of his

time to fulfill his desires. He has a unique battle with time; he does not spend it by worrying, but maximizes it by using it to experience as much life as he can.

Further, Dean wants to learn almost anything in this limited-span by observing, seeing with different “eyes” and “digging”:

The time has come for us to decide what we are going to do for the next week. Crucial, crucial. Ahem! He dodged a mule wagon; in it sat an old Negro plodding along. ‘Yes!’ yelled Dean. ‘Yes! Dig him! Now consider his soul – stop awhile and consider.’ And he slowed down the car for all of us to turn and look at the old jazzbo moaning along. ‘Oh yes, dig him sweet; now there’s thoughts in that mind that I would give my last arm to know; to climb in there and find out [...].

(On the Road 102-103)

Dean’s enthusiasm to learn from anything living or non-living is the best proof of his battle with time. He is eager to take a leaf from an old man’s book, to analyze what he infers, to combine it with his own life and to make other people think, as well. Sal evaluates his state of mind as follows: “This was the new and complete Dean, grown to maturity. I said to myself, My God, he’s changed” (103). The moments he has collected give birth to new Deans continually. Dean’s battle with time is self-intoxicating. He says, “[...] ‘Oh, man, we must absolutely find the time- [...] And then we’ll all go off to sweet life, ‘cause now is the time and *we all know time!*’ (103). They need to know the time, to hurry up to “sweet life” waiting for them and conquer every tiny moment with joy. Motion is a form of rebellion against time and in Dean’s point of view, stasis can only be a form of death and stupefaction.

What Sal writes in the following scene can serve as a general statement of Dean's relationship to motion and time:

He rubbed his jaw furiously, he swung the car and passed three trucks, he roared into downtown Testament, looking every direction and seeing everything in an arc of 180 degrees around his eyeballs without moving his head. Bang, he found a parking space in no time, and we were parked. He leaped out of the car. Furiously he hustled into the railroad station; we followed sheepishly. He bought cigarettes. He had become absolutely mad in his movements; he seemed to be doing everything at the same time. It was a shaking of the head, up and down, sideways; jerky, vigorous hands; quick walking, sitting, crossing the legs, uncrossing, getting up [...]. (*On the Road* 103-104)

According to Sal, Dean appoints himself as the brain of the group, giving directions and organizing everyone accordingly to encourage his circle to be as free as he feels he is himself. Not only does he think he has the potential to influence people, but he also thinks he always speaks truthfully. His impact has such a spreading energy that covers Sal, Marylou and Ed who are ready to be directed. They also are willing to follow Dean's directions, as they would like to have similar experiences, so Dean does not waste time with questions but dives straight into action, "There was no purpose in our coming downtown, but he found purposes. He made us all hustle, Marylou for the lunch groceries, me for a paper to dig the weather report, Ed for cigars" (104). He does not need real and valid purposes to go; everyone has a task to do to save time, energy and moments. The citation above reflects Dean's impatience and whirl as a result of his will to live fully and to become complete before dying.

The relationship between the characters of the novel and time consists of an understanding of “spending” time. However, as there is no equality here, people, like Dean, have a tendency to hurry and take the biggest piece they can before disappearing. He knows that he has a powerful rival and that is why he needs protection against ageing. He constructs shields made of eating, drinking, being merry, collecting and demanding new and varied experiences. He has peace of mind merely by flowing through time: “[...] the point being that we know what IT is and we know TIME and we know that everything is really FINE” (189). These key words provide Dean’s way of perceiving life. According to him, everybody is responsible for finding their own “IT”s. Thus, Dean’s entire struggle is shaped around the aim of finding the truest perspective of perceiving life. As Sal writes,

They have worries, they’re counting the miles, they’re thinking about where to sleep tonight, how much money for gas, the weather, how they’ll get there – and all the time they’ll get there anyway, you see. But they need to worry and betray time with urgencies false and otherwise, purely anxious and whiny, their souls really won’t be at peace unless they can latch on to an established and proven worry and having once found it they assume facial expressions to fit and go with it, which is, you see, unhappiness, and all the time it all flies by them and they know it and that too worries them no end. (*On the Road* 190)

Sal, on the other hand, writes as a way of synthesizing experience or turning the vitality of life into a comprehensible form. Sal appears to leave his prejudices, concerns and worries aside and chooses to be *alive* by being a part of Dean’s life, in the end, he has nothing to lose but his writerly muse. After all, “It was three children

of the earth trying to decide something in the night and having all the weight of past centuries ballooning in the dark before them” (119). There were things that one could do something to change and things that should be accepted as they were unconditionally. Without setting apparent goals and aims, they would like to make life livable: “Yes! You and I, Sal, we’d dig the whole world with a car like this because, man, the road must eventually lead to the whole world. Ain’t nowhere else it can go – right?” (209). The term “digging” as Dean expresses his deep enthusiasm for being on the road as the essential purpose his life, since it means reaching the core of life rather than superficially living it. To him, travel is the focus and purpose of his life to achieve his purpose of getting deep down into everything in order to experience joy and gain better understanding. As he says, “Sal, we gotta go and never stop going till we get there.” Sal responds, “Where we going, man?” And Dean replies, “I don’t know but we gotta go” (217). No artificiality took part in his instinct to leave but rather a perception of living and Sal shares this enthusiasm to “dig” the country for and against time.

2.2 DEATH AND TIME IN TERMS OF TWO DIFFERENT ESSENCES OF LIFE

Despite Dean’s enthusiasm for travel, Sal’s thoughts move toward stasis and death after a long period of travel on the road. Sal also cannot stop the “machine” and constantly thinks both positively and negatively about what life may bring. In the following scene, Sal explains that he sees death as the absence of motion:

Naturally, now that I look back on it, this is only death: death will overtake us before heaven. The one thing that we yearn for in our living days, that makes us sigh and groan and undergo sweet nauseas of all kinds, is the remembrance of some lost bliss that was probably experienced on the womb and can only be reproduced (though we hate to admit it) in death. But who wants to die? In the rush of events I kept thinking about this in the back of my mind. I told it to Dean and he instantly recognized it as the mere simple longing for pure death; and because we're all of us never in life again, he, rightly, would have nothing to do with it, and I agreed with him then. (*On the Road* 112)

Sal and his gang foresee this dilemma and agree to spend their lives in motion by fulfilling their desires because, as they think, letting time pass trying to remember lost bliss is a punishment. Yet these characters continually rely on the power of memory and this is the contradiction that makes them continually in hurry to discover new experiences. This way, they believe they will free themselves from having lived an unsatisfying life in the end. Whether this strategy works or not is not their primary concern, since they are preoccupied with the feeling of moment. In spite of the possibility of finding a lack in the end, they are determined to take the risk to explore their material reality and love themselves for having done so. In a way, what they do is create an archive to rely on when the moment comes, since if they have such an archive, they will also have a reason to stop living when the time comes. Dean, Sal's "mad soul," starts by pretending not to take death seriously, but reorganizes his way of thinking according to his meditations on death. Keeping

matters of living and movement in mind, he incites Sal and others to reach his level of euphoria, which Sal also calls madness.

Through Dean, the gang meets with Rollo Greb, a figure who causes great enthusiasm in Dean because he exemplifies the kind of hip, carefree life to which he aspires. He sees Greb as a living example of a full life lived in motion. As Sal explains,

[Rollo's] excitement blew out of his eyes in stabs of fiendish light. He rolled his neck in spastic ecstasy. He lisped, he writhed, he flopped, he moaned, he howled, he fell back in despair. He could hardly get a word out, he was so excited with life. Dean stood before him with head bowed, repeating over and over again, 'Yes...Yes...Yes.' He took me into a corner. That Rollo Greb is the greatest, most wonderful of all. That's what I was trying to tell you – that's what I want to be. I want to be like him. He's never hung-up, he goes every direction, he lets it all out, he knows time, he has nothing to do but rock back and forth. Man, he's the end! You see, if you go like him all the time you'll finally get it.' 'Get what?' 'IT! IT! I'll tell you – now no time, we have no time now.' Dean rushed back to watch Rollo Greb some more. (*On the Road* 115)

Greb models the type that Dean keeps in his mind as a level to reach. Because Dean thinks Rollo is aware of time in a unique way while listening to opera, he became excited with life rather than death. Dean could not resist Rollo's supreme energy and high awareness of the moment because Rollo is the concrete form of what he tries to show his friends. He symbolizes Dean's unique and individual riot against life, and

seeing that there is another person who feels like Dean, makes him quite excited. Rollo can make Sal and others believe and understand Dean in an easier way, as their target is the same: “IT.” Rollo shows that “IT” can actually be found. Thus he functions as a kind of assurance who gives courage to Dean and makes him feel like he is on the right track.

Sal, a young writer looking for influences, takes Dean and their journeys as experiments to find out what kind of feelings there are to be lived. By keeping an eye on Dean, Sal also develops a similar point of view: “My aunt said I was wasting my time hanging around with Dean and his gang. I knew that was wrong, too. Life is life, and kind is kind.” (116) According to him, it was a unique opportunity to understand where life goes and what it is about. On one hand, he struggles to comprehend his muse Dean, to open himself up to discover new things. On the other hand, something disturbs him somewhere inside, which he forces himself to ignore. The process of understanding what kind of a person Dean is makes Sal confuse about Dean, as Dean is not an easy person to understand clearly at first sight. As a result, Sal’s journey on the road is in fact their journey through a friendship, for they discover each other along with many other things.

Carlo, however, has a completely different way of thinking from Sal regarding the mysticism he associates with motion and self-recovery. The flow of his friends’ lives motivates him to give them a speech as he goes through “a riot of radiant ideas that had come to enlighten his brain” (117). In a lecture from his New York apartment, Carlo lectures to a bemused group:

Now I’m not trying to take your hincty sweets from you, but it seems to me the time has come to decide what you are and what you are

going to do. I want to know what all this sitting around the house all day is intended to mean. What all this talk is and what you propose to do. Dean, why did you leave Camille and pick up Marylou?’ No answer – giggles. ‘Marylou, why are you travelling around the country like this and what are your womanly intentions concerning the shroud?’ Same answer. ‘Ed Dunkel, why did you abandon your new wife in Tucson and what are you doing here sitting on your big fat ass? Where is your home? What is your job?’ ‘Sal – how comes it you have fallen on such sloppy days and what have you done with Lucille?’ ‘The days of wrath are yet to come. The balloon will not sustain you much longer. And not only that, but it is an abstract balloon. You’ll all go flying to the West Coast and come staggering back in search of your stone.’ (*On the Road* 117)

Before Carlo’s speech, they were preoccupied with subjects that could not come to a conclusion. Functioning as a voice of sharp criticism, Carlo may attempt to show his own quest for the “The Voice of the Rock” and be an authority to shake everyone from his or her illusionary conditions (117). Yet Carlo’s character cannot understand that the road is a metaphor for searching that enables the discovery of answers for anyone, his own “IT” may be “The Rock” that he finally hopes to reach, but his “Rock” is not everyone else’s “rock.” Hence, his speech served as an intervention that leads everyone to notice and quest their own “IT.” Carlo was quite sure of himself while giving his impassioned speech, even though he had no idea where things would lead him. He was disturbed by the world of his friends’ travel and their craving for madness. It was necessary for him to stay sane enough, as the world

needed such people to be able to become a better place. For Carlo, the state of stasis can also be didactic and experiencing each state may bring a more comprehensive perspective to the person who is in search of better states. As a result, he has an urge to warn his friends to be aware of their “stones” and metaphorically the word “stone” emphasizes his need to highlight the state of stability. But for Sal and Dean, quitting the road is death, not the road itself. They feel they have to shine bright in their own different ways before leaving this world. With this in mind, Sal and Dean live unaware of rest: searching, wondering, and experiencing. While travelling, the characters have the chance to observe many different lives and seeing them makes things easier for them to understand what they want and do not want from this life. The Indian girl they came across is going to be a perfect example for the situation as: “She’ll never, never leave here and know anything about the outside world. It’s a nation.” (271) What she represents for them was an outside world beyond their experience, since they have the chance to get out of their town to search for more. That is simple for Dean and Sal. From their perspective, what they want from life is achievable and reasonable.

This Indian girl not only represents the working class that has no time to have fun, adventure or self-quest, but her presence also raises a new question about the relationship between Dean and Sal. Sal, before meeting Dean, does not have a strong desire to be on the road, but when he meets him and the others, he finds himself in a completely different world doing completely different things. He also has a small world that offers him a house and stability. Thus, knowing something about the outside world turns into a mission for Sal after meeting Dean. Possibly, Dean becomes his “IT” to enter the world of constant movement. Sal still has his own

rights and wrongs as well, and keeping this friendship last for a long time comes from the ability to maintain two different perspectives at a time. In his article “The Delicate Dynamics of Friendship: A Reconsideration of Kerouac’s *On the Road*,” George Dardess gives place to F. Scott Fitzgerald’s ideas that he mentions in *The Crack-Up*, “[...] the test of a first-rate intelligence is the ability to hold two opposed ideas in the mind at the same time and still retain the ability to function. One should, for example, be able to see that things are hopeless and yet be determined to make them otherwise” (qtd. in Dardess 206). What Fitzgerald states above is an explanation of Dean and Sal’s friendship and journey across the country. Especially Sal, by achieving to maintain different points of view, makes Dean’s complexity a bit more understandable and by being determined to exceed the limits of life, he creates his own possibility to have a self-discovery. Though it may be possible for Sal to start being on the road, with the light of Dean, it turns into a reality that contains a lot of complexities, opposition, hopelessness and adventures. However, instead of avoiding these complexities, they think these complexities and oppositions feed them and help them reach the desired level of “madness”: “[...] because the only people for me are the mad ones, the ones who are mad to live, mad to talk, mad to be saved, desirous of everything at the same time, the ones who never yawn or say a commonplace thing, but burn, burn, burn like fabulous yellow roman candles [...]” (7) Consistency, apparently, is not desired by Kerouac’s characters as they seek for high passions and enthusiasm which make them feel alive.

Kerouac’s novel is an expression of a yearning to understand what it means to be a young, educated, displaced, and ultimately unhappy man in the 1950s United States at the same time the Interstate Highway system was being used for the first

time. The characters in the novel use the road as a vehicle, both literally and metaphorically, for self-discovery and adventure, and predominately, they use the road as a metaphor for understanding their place within time during the life cycle.

Finally, Kerouac's *On the Road* has a tendency to sentimentalize the road metaphor by focusing merely one side of the road journey. As a result, Kerouac's novel can be viewed as the quintessential American road novel because it romanticizes the road as a site of self-discovery. This one-sided perspective results in not only the imitation of the novel in many ways, but also it is questioned, challenged, and shown, in some circumstances to be an illusion. In order to serve the reason of this study, the next chapter on *Revolutionary Road* will present a counterpoint to Kerouac's unique, if not naive vision of self-discovery on the road by presenting other possible reasons and consequences of being on the road.

CHAPTER II

REVOLUTIONARY ROAD: A HIBERNATION OF DREAMS AND A MOTIONLESS CONCEPTION OF FREEDOM

In postwar America, the increase in birthrates for many urban white people also meant a raise in the standard of living for many, which also magnified those same people's way of dreaming. With a growing economy and the creation of new suburban estates, a newly rising middle class life now entailed white-collar work, a decent salary, suburban home ownership, access to better public services and a high-quality education, ostensibly made possible by determination and hard work. At least this is the very selective myth of the middle classes. As the living habits of a newly enlarged middle class changed, flexible living conditions also created a new level of comfort and stability. However, the differences between urban and suburban living triggered a deep desire in some people to escape from the suburban fantasy and on the other hand, made other people feel satisfied and secure enough to live without feeling any necessity to move on, since their only concern was to feel secure and safe in their circumstances of the new lifestyles. In this environment, Richard Yates published *Revolutionary Road* in 1961, which dramatizes and criticizes the suburban family economy of the United States in the 1950s. In Yates' novel, there is a great deal of unhappiness in the paradise of the suburbs. As Yates explains in his interview with Dewitt Henry and Geoffrey Clark, "[D]uring the fifties there was a general lust for conformity all over this country, by no means only in the suburbs—a kind of blind, desperate clinging to safety and security at any price" (From the Archive: An Interview with Richard Yates 208). The offer of the American Dream was presented

again to the same prewar working poor families who had desired social mobility, and who could accept without question the stability offered under the new conditions of peace and prosperity. Simply put, many Americans were ready to settle down. Furthermore, being on the move was no longer an option for many of them, since regular work and income made moving irrelevant. The differences between two ways of living, between comfortable stasis and movement for either adventure or necessity led to a split in perspectives for people who occupied the same suburban places.

Yates' novel offers a new way to read road fiction. Roads are not only routes of travel or escape. They are also the sites of family homes. People whose houses are situated along roads split the metaphor of road: it is no longer a place of adventure and travel. This stationary location is precisely the kind of road that Yates characterizes in *Revolutionary Road*, which becomes the major metaphor for this division in attitudes that also becomes the site of conflict through the novel. On one hand, the road is a place where people reside permanently, such as the people who live on the novel's Revolutionary Road. In this sense, the road is a zone of the home, of financial and familial safety that protects its inhabitants from problems. But also, this road leads nowhere. In fact, it is a cul-de-sac that disables newness and lacks a connection with the outer world. It has a single inlet and outlet that contradicts the road's ostensible function of leading people from one place to another. Thus, a new dimension of the road emerges which presents the possibility for permanent stableness where nothing new is brought into being. It is a closed community with its own traditions and way of living that creates stereotypical middle class children of stereotypical middle class parents.

From this new setting, new questions invade the genre of the road novel. How can one be a successful and respectable father and businessmen in a changing world but in a situated home? What happens as the result of trying to fit into a place that is not actually suitable to your interests? Though finding security through the cul-de-sac suburban environment may satisfy one part of the characters' needs, the environment also signals the lack of progress, since when families visit each other, conversations do not vary beyond the fact that "women consulted with women about recipes and clothes, while men settled down with men to talk of jobs and cars" (Yates 64-5). This dynamic has become so normative that if one wanted to get out of this invisible circle and demand more, the reaction would probably be negative. Consequently, the residents of Revolutionary Road do not develop new perspectives or possibilities of living, since they feel, at least at first, that there is no need to comprehend the world from any different point of view. The subjects of their conversation are categorized according to gender, and their performances are enough to satisfy the neighbors whose names are repeated like a mantra: "the Donaldsons, the Wingates and the Cramers" (Yates 64). Their lives have only one direction: to start a family, to work or to keep a house, and to spend a decent life fulfilling the demands imposed by their class.

On the other hand, as explored elsewhere in this thesis, roads function as a zone of exploration and discovery that bring new adventures, people, information and decisions. They are the sites that can enable travel, and the change of environment becomes the means through which the characters of the novel develop. The decision to be on the move develops into a metaphor for change that enables the individual desires of characters. From this perspective, roads are expressly *not* the

site on which to stay permanently; on the contrary, roads are the essential and initial condition for change and progress. The state of movement is a way of defying static conditions by rejecting and leaving them behind to see what waits on the roads and in different places until when the feeling of liberty is found.

Yates presents these two conflicting views of the road as sites of motion and stasis through April and Frank Wheeler to enable a broader critique of American families, American work, and American desire. The Wheelers, the main characters who charge the metaphor of the road in the novel, are a family of residents on Revolutionary Road, who become dissatisfied with their success and become charged with a desire to leave their current conditions and start over somewhere else. There is a seduction of the road for them that promises things to cover their emptiness, and within the doubled metaphor of the book, the Wheelers embody the first definition of the road, which sets them in search of a different lifestyle. The other families along Revolutionary Road, however, assume the second definition that speaks to stasis, stability and the need for safety. In other words, this metaphor is set upon two different kinds of physical states: rest and motion. In physics, being at rest means the absence of motion, which brings no change. As Isaac Newton wrote in the first law of motion: “an object that is at rest will stay at rest unless an external force acts upon it” (*The Mathematical Principles of Natural Philosophy*): in other words, objects at rest, stay at rest. Further, Newton explains that “an object that is in motion will not change its velocity unless an external force acts upon it” (*The Mathematical Principles of Natural Philosophy*). Particularly, objects in motion stay in motion, but motion is degraded through the “law of inertia” in which neither moving nor stabling objects tend to change their circumstance without an external and unbalanced force.

All objects are basically immune to change unless an exterior force acts upon them. As in Newton, in *Revolutionary Road*, the characters lack an exterior force to change their current situation, to be able to see their world from a different perspective; however, their tendency to protect the current conditions of their lives make them not only unable to make changes, but conflicted in their desires to do so.

For the Wheelers, whose present lifestyle becomes unsatisfying, an impulse for change becomes inevitable. Their suburban discomfort functions as the unbalanced force needed to bring a change to their state of rest. Though the Wheelers get tired of living on Revolutionary Road, they are conflicted and concerned about leaving the place because of the security it offers. In addition, there is no consensus between their individual life goals and desires that would bring them to make a joint decision to leave. There is no feeling of trust between this couple as they realize their goals are incompatible. And they sacrifice themselves to their own daily, static reality rather than find new ways to overcome their feelings of dissatisfaction.

Finally, this chapter will focus on the Wheelers' fantasy of escaping from their environment to Europe to achieve their ideals, and how it remains only as a fantasy since in reality, they are so tightly engaged in their own static world which has made them feel secure, work hard, consume and conform. They dream of flight, but they cannot take off. Independent from their excuses, they are actually not eager enough to achieve their goal to emigrate because they do not believe that they can really do it. Their self-contradictions and their desires present another dimension to the metaphor of the roads: they are revolutionary or reactionary. Yates' novel shows that while roads can be revolutionary, in fact, in many cases, the American Dream reveals the road to be a reactionary, static and ultimately destructive place.

In the 1950s and early 1960s America, as a postwar society, one of the people's first concerns was security. Since the world they lived in was an insecure one, they tried to find this feeling inside homes that glorified the concepts of family, home and togetherness as Kate Charlton-Jones argues in her work "Richard Yates's Fictional Treatment of Women." Charlton-Jones points out one of Wini Breines' arguments, "Every major institution in the United States promoted the home, togetherness, and the family. One sign of this was the family focus that proliferated in advertising: family-size carton, family room, family car, family film, family restaurant, family vacation'" (qtd. in Charlton-Jones 497). As is seen, being a family was overvalued, but on the other hand, womanhood was oversimplified due to the decade's ethos of domesticity since women were "trapped by gender stereotypes" (Charlton-Jones 497). Naturally, since togetherness was promoted through a sense of a hierarchy between genders, problems developed between couples, and Charlton-Jones writes that Yates "wanted to address the fundamental anxieties and failings of communication that existed between men and women, anxieties and failing that were, in part, a result of women's dissatisfaction with the conditions of their lives in the 1950s America" (498). Yates points unambiguously to the communication gap that develops as a result of the marital gender hierarchy in the relationship of April and Frank Wheeler.

Frank and April Wheeler were promising, young newlyweds, and the house on Revolutionary Road looked original, fun and charming enough for them to keep their hip urban Greenwich Village attitude while raising a family in the suburbs of Connecticut. While Revolutionary Estates is a new development in their town, they bought an older house. This reveals, in a small way, the Wheelers' sense of their

uniqueness. However, time passes very differently from how they had assumed it would and the nice young Wheelers end up becoming relatively normal in an environment that breeds a kind of normality. Though their attitudes about the neighborhood and about America in general are left-leaning and progressive, their lifestyle and practices are wholly bourgeois.

The starting point of their problems can be traced to their decision to relocate to the suburbs, which is itself a betrayal of their earlier desire to live and work in New York City. While initially trying to adapt to suburban conditions, they become increasingly cynical about their neighbors' lifestyles and desires. Hence, early on, the lovely, young and enthusiastic couple of Revolutionary Road turns out to be a local oddity because of their disdain for suburban clubs, tastes, and relationships. As misfits, Frank and April, share a dissatisfying life in the suburbs in an ostensibly lovely house with their two children. Their greater problems eventually grow from the initial and foundational incompatibility between their desired lives and their actual lives.

Living in 1950s postwar America, the couple has achieved the fantasy of the American Dream. Since their reality does not match their desires, new and different impasses arise regarding the place they live, the things they do for a living, their environment and the way they communicate. As a natural result, the more the Wheelers struggle, the more they sink deeply into the mundane because they cannot achieve the harmony and balance they desire. Since they both are dissatisfied with their reality, with how they actually live and how they would like to live, their relationship becomes increasingly antagonistic. From their perspective, living in Revolutionary Road embodies and enables this experience:

It simply wasn't worth feeling bad about. Intelligent, thinking people could take things like this in their stride, just as they took the larger absurdities of deadly dull jobs in the city and deadly dull homes in the suburbs. Economic circumstance might force you to live in this environment, but the important thing was to keep from being contaminated. The important thing was to remember who you were.

(Revolutionary Road 20)

Living in a place like Revolutionary Road means that they must convert into different kinds of human beings to the point that they effectively become "contaminated" with bourgeois mediocrity even though they especially tried to avoid this contamination. In this passage, the Wheelers feel that it was the wrong decision for them to live in the suburbs, since they do not resemble suburban people in many ways. Because of this, they become overly critical of their neighbors, which is an attempt to justify their feelings and protect them from being the banalities of day-to-day life in the suburbs. Rather than pointing outward, the roads of this novel turn inward, and at first, function as a way to avoid the traps of complacency, banality, and cliché. In fact, this very feeling of complacency in safety may be the initial reason for the couple to develop their desire to escape from the environment, since unvarying suburban life kills their adventurousness and contaminates them with absurdity and the deadly dull. Thus, their cul-de-sac becomes something far from its revolutionary promise it is ironically removed from presenting new possibilities. Yates' ironic title places his characters in a small world that is supposed to be revolutionary but rather turns out to be conventional. The novel becomes critical of the family's sacrifice of their adventurous principles for the benefits of conventional

security and demonstrates how seductive and inescapable the forces of the banal may be.

One of the reasons that the Wheelers become misfits in their environment may be their sense that they have lowered themselves from the urban to the suburban. In his article “Why Does Hollywood Hate the Suburbs?” Lee Siegel explains that, from the position of those outside the suburbs, the citizen of suburbia lacks important life skills. Siegel writes, “The decent, suburban person is regarded as contemptible because he has not learned to reach beyond his talents and pick life's pockets” (Siegel). In this view, the suburbanite is naïve, underdeveloped, even infantile, who sees life merely as a series of modest achievements without dynamic experiences that come from a life on the road. In relation to the novel, April and Frank fail to “pick life’s pockets” because they associate themselves with those whose talents have taken them to a destination instead of a new journey. In their view of themselves, they belong somewhere different and better, somewhere that will inspire and exploit their intellect. The more they stay on Revolutionary Road, the more they become entrenched and the more they feel a growing distance from their aims in life.

Desiring more than the suburban life, Frank and April become more cynical and more critical of it. They see themselves wasting their lives because they have entered a game whose results they don’t want. In this scene, as Frank and April talk to the Campbells about the banality of suburban life that he rejects, he says:

The hell with reality! Let’s have a whole bunch of cute little winding roads and cute little houses painted white and pink and baby blue; let’s all be good consumers and have a lot of togetherness and bring our

children up in a bath of sentimentality – Daddy’s a great man because he makes a living, mummy’s a great woman because she’s stuck by Daddy all these years- and if old reality ever does pop out and say Boo we’ll all get busy and pretend it never happened. (*Revolutionary Road* 65-66)

Unlike their other neighbors, the Wheelers explain to the Campbells their uprising against the roles imposed on individuals when they move to the suburbs. This picture of happiness is a consumer illusion created to cover over the boredom and horror of reality. In time, their criticism does indeed turn to horror because they realize that only mistakes and regrets fill their lives: the mistake of living in suburbs, of marrying at a young age, of having children without passion, and to committing their lives to a goal they do not desire but whose desire was created for them to have.

This feeling of imprisonment by the illusions of the world and the sudden flare-ups of reality develop into specific and material problems. When April discusses her attempted abortion of their first child, she communicates her sense of the delusion of middle-class family values:

That’s how we both got committed to this enormous delusion – because that’s what it is, an enormous, obscene delusion – this idea that people have to resign from real life and ‘settle down’ when they have families. It is the great sentimental lie of the suburbs, and I’ve been making you subscribe to it all this time. I’ve been making you live by it! (*Revolutionary Road* 112)

This passage is a kind of confession of guilt on April's part. Though her own parents did not raise her, she saw her first pregnancy as a kind of trap not only for Frank, but for herself as well. Her conflict between living the socially ordained life of a mother and her desired life of a bohemian adventurer becomes less an issue for them as a couple and more an issue for them as a unit of the American social structure. Her attitude is that the life they live is a lie, but a lie they have resigned themselves to. Here, she feels that she has poked her head out from the delusion and sees that their family history has been built not on what they want, but what they have accepted from what they have been taught to want. What April calls a delusion happens to be the current norms of their time. As Charlton-Jones argues of the 1950s, "Marriage and childrearing, therefore, became a way to control women and re-establish the norms that American society felt matched its growing prosperity and status" (Charlton-Jones 501). April was controlled by her function in family life and its contradictions bring her to the point of dysfunction as a wife and mother.

Like April, Frank's character is more complex and conflicted than it appears to his colleagues and neighbors, and Frank feels that his character is not only unappreciated but not understandable by his self-satisfied suburban neighbors. He says, "I mean it's bad enough having to live among all these damn little suburban types – and I'm including the Campbells in that, let's be honest – it's bad enough having to live among these people, without letting ourselves get hurt by every little half-assed - [...] It seems to me there is a considerable amount of bullshit going on here" (Yates 24). He spends his energy dealing with the fact of living in suburbs and working in an office performing jobs for others that have no functional purpose other than to move papers and solve simple problems. Frank is certain he does not belong

there, but he is also aware that he took the job because not only is it easy, but also because it is the same company that had once fired his father. Working for the company without a sense of duty or obligation is a form of revenge both for his father and against his father. This creates Frank's sense that he is "always so wonderfully definite on the subject of what he does and doesn't deserve." (Yates 27). In his own perception, Frank is a hero who is capable of anything and he has a reputation that he needs to preserve as a consequence of his job. That image at work, like in the suburbs, makes him think that he is superior to his environment since none of these people are like him.

April, like Frank, desires to move out of the suburbs, and enlists Frank in her dream to move with the family to Paris. Yet at the same time, she is fed up with her tiring marriage and the responsibilities of their children. Considering the circumstances of her life, her own abandonment by her parents and her sense of insecurity in the suburban family life she has created, it is nearly impossible for her to live a life solely devoted to others. Yet by failing to make others happy, she feels "trapped" (28) in a small world full of ordinary people who lack her and Frank's sense of their own potential. This dissatisfaction with their lack of achievement leads her to tell Frank that they themselves are the same as the people they have criticized:

[E]verything you said was based on this great premise of ours that we're somehow very special and superior to the whole thing, and I wanted to say 'But we're not! Look at us! We're just like the people you're talking about! We are the people you're talking about!'
(*Revolutionary Road* 110)

This passage is the outcry of April and an effort to accept the truth of their life. She makes Frank face it as well, as it functions as a realization of a delusion. Everything they had believed in collapsed in time when this revolutionary place failed to meet their expectations. They failed to be revolutionary, and they failed to rise to the challenge of the road. At the same time, they found themselves tied to the other part of the road metaphor: the stasis of the suburban plot. She had hoped to find something to hold onto in this dead-end by trusting in the promise of its name. She believes that they were the “nice young Wheelers on Revolutionary Road” (Yates 185), however, their truth ends up by being the “nice young revolutionaries on Wheeler Road” (Yates 185). Her great and shocking realization has been that their sense of superiority and their revolutionary attitude has only been a façade, and instead of possessing great potential, she sees herself and her family as the same as the other boring and anaesthetized inhabitants of Revolutionary Road.

Chris Richardson mentions the idea of lack of revolution in Revolutionary Road in his work “The empty self in *Revolutionary Road* or: How I learned to stop worrying and love the blonde”:

There is no traditional revolution in *Revolutionary Road*, but there is an attempt to extricate revolution from the blind alleys into which it often leads. Yates’ story reveals the need to look inward, as well as outward, as well as outward, at the emptiness of a self that Americans have been conditioned to believe to exist and at the political and historical antecedents that have created this lack. (“The Empty Self in *Revolutionary Road*” 15)

What Richardson puts forward is a different kind of revolution that makes no immediate material changes but that creates an attempt to see things from a different perspective. It fails to be a revolution since the necessary change is not completed, and remains only as an effort that makes things worse than they have been. Since the attempt to change has arisen but does not come to fruition, it becomes reactionary and makes everything even more complicated and negates its promise.

The “Wheelers,” as their name suggest, should be turning, moving, and changing along the roads of life. If they are wheels, then they should be in motion; they should be revolutionary, indeed. But since the road itself does not meet its revolutionary promise, it becomes an empty signifier, in the same way the Wheelers betray the injunction of their name. Brian Rajski deals with the metaphor of the title in his work “Writing systems: Richard Yates, Remington Rand, and the Univac” as follows: “Yates intended his novel’s title to be an overarching metaphor for the termination of American individualism is post war conformity, of which suburbia was merely a synecdoche” (552) and gives place to an interview of Yates in *Ploughshares* in which Yates states, “I meant the title to suggest that the revolutionary road of 1776 had come to something very much like a dead end in the Fifties” (Rajski 552). Nothing revolutionary happens and the metaphor turns upside down to expose the reality it covers: a dead-end. Presenting new, inspiring and dramatic changes remains unfulfilled, as the road does not cover over its fundamental reality and function. The influence of the situation on the family is utterly adverse, as well.

April’s self-enlightenment about her rejection of everything she currently has reveals that, in fact, she happens to want the total opposite. April has tried to be an

actress (though she “was never any kind of an actress and never really wanted to be” [Yates 112]), but instead, becomes a mother (though with each child she considers a self-administered abortion), gets married to a man (whom she realizes she never truly connects with) and moves to a place in which she ends up being a stereotypical housewife. In April’s case, there is an explosion of aggregated regrets, mistakes and failures. She feels like in every important part of her life, she made the wrong decisions and moved in the opposite direction. Similar to the character she played with the Laurel Players, these lines are uttered from her lips: “Sometimes I can feel as if I were sparkling all over and I want to go out and do something that’s absolutely crazy and marvelous...” (Yates 8). In these lines, April expresses that she believes she has one more chance to do something great. If she were to make decisions consistent with her desires, she would be happy. But she does not, and she knows it.

April fails to find the cure for being estranged from her own desires, until the day she comes up with the idea: to leave everything behind and move to Paris to have a fresh start as a family. She plans everything in detail, even finds out a job opportunity that would also give Frank a space to think about what he really wants to do with the rest of his life. The plan, at the beginning, seems highly possible and appealing, and April’s enthusiasm about it makes it easy for her to convince Frank, as well. However, the news of a third baby coming makes them reconsider the idea. This is devastating for April because the baby will not allow her to work, which would make Frank unable to have the free time to find what he really, wants from his life. As a solution and as usual, April thinks of getting rid of the baby whom she sees as the only obstacle to their brilliant plan of moving out of Revolutionary Road. As before, the baby is an excuse, a justification, of their natural failure. It becomes

increasingly obvious that they can never manage to leave Revolutionary Road and start a new life in Paris because of the strong seduction of its banal security. They are all aware that this is only an aspiration born naturally from the insoluble problems of their lives to compensate the years they have lost. Realizing that, in fact, they are one of the families that they criticize as being old-fashioned and narrow-minded creates the feeling of hopelessness with or without a new baby's arrival.

Though April desires to start her life over, she does actually not create a plan according to her own needs but rather according to Frank's. When they move to Paris, she wants to find a job not for herself, but to give Frank some space to find himself, so "her persuasive argument is carefully nuanced towards his needs and lack of fulfillment rather than towards her own desire to work and experience a different kind of love" (Charlton-Jones 499). Though she tries to create an immense change, she, once again, thinks in a reactionary way that pushes her further into herself. This is problematic because she cannot personally develop by doing something for others. Because each member of the family is always facing inward in the novel, the family performs the same non-movement of the cul-de-sac and betrays the promise of their name because they live up to the non-revolutionary stasis of their road.

The promise of labor in the novel—middle-class Manhattan-based, office work—is initially as depressing to Frank Wheeler as it is lucrative. His job is simple, involves little actual effort, and yet pays a salary high enough for his family to live well on. But his job doesn't make him happy, and he goes through vicious cycle of succeeding and failing to create happiness for himself and his family. Yates has built the story of Wheelers on their belief that they can and should find happiness both individually and as a family. However, while April and Frank believe that they

deserve happiness, they get lost in the effort to create it and as a result they spiral into further depression, resentment and despair. In addition to the family issues that cause them strife, their dissatisfaction with the way they spend their time at work or in the home becomes paramount to producing the novel's effects.

Frank is a businessman who defines himself as a man who needs to find a position superior to his current one. He likes his job because he has become attached to the place through years, but other than that, he "had the dullest job you could possibly imagine" (Yates 78). He sees working in a place like Knox, a company that produces business machines, as an advantage because "you can sort of turn off your mind every morning at nine and leave it off all day, and nobody knows the difference" (Yates 77). April, after explaining to Frank her plan to move the family to Paris, agrees with Frank on the subject and sees her task as his. April says, "I think it is unrealistic for a man with a fine mind to go on working like a dog year after year at a job he can't stand" (Yates 110), since "it is got nothing to do with definite, measurable talents it is your very essence that is being stifled here. It is what you are that is being denied and denied and denied in this kind of life" (Yates 115). Frank and April agree on the subject of Frank's having time off to find out what he needs to do according to his own talents and potential.

April constructs her plan on the possibility of Frank's being happier and more comfortable without his job and its dulling effects; however, this state of happiness due to leaving his job is nothing but a short-term illusion for him. In fact, he needs his job to protect his position and to feel superior to his neighbors because "instead of producing anything tangible, Frank's job is to perform – his product is his performance. He is careful to walk with a certain demeanor, interact with certain

gusto, clench his teeth at points in conversations to appear strong and masculine” (Richardson 10). Appearance is rather everything for him, as he needs to look attractive, masculine, and strong to believe in his own potential. As Richardson writes, “Frank has not yet done anything noteworthy, he embodies the hero who he soon hopes to become” (12). His endurance to his dull job comes from this very strong appearance it provides him and in this look; he can continue to do nothing at work.

Yet, living in suburbs happens to be an advantage for Frank because it gives him the chance to show off with his job at Knox, since without it he would not be able to either compare himself to others or have the opportunity to have an affair. He has an affair with Maureen Grube, the department secretary, not because he loves her but he sees this affair as a requirement in creating his strong self-image. He tries to “perform” his job and he “educates Maureen about the filing system in the hope of sexually commanding her like a machine” (Rajski 560). She is a tool he uses to look like the hero he imagines himself to be. The reasons for his actions come from the prestige of his job no matter how useless he is in Knox. For this very reason, Frank “cannot leave his workplace persona at the office” (Richardson 11) and performs his workplace identity in every part of his life since “Frank’s *performance* is what constitutes him” (Richardson 11). No matter how dull he thinks his job is, it clearly distinguishes his position in every part of his life that supplies the necessary material to maintain his illusory sense of himself.

On the other hand, April performs as a mother and housewife with dreams of becoming a professional actress. The incompatibility of her reality and dreams puts her in a situation similar to Frank’s condition. She believes that she needs to correct

her error of lifestyle because simply staying in Revolutionary Road equals is a kind of decay. She says, "If the children are to be in charge, then obviously we must do what they think is best, which means staying here until we rot" (Yates 182). Since April's hope for the family through a move to Europe means that she would be supporting the family financially until Frank "finds himself" in the line of work he feels is best for him, this decision makes Frank feel less of a "man" because he doesn't think he is capable of living off his wife as a bohemian in Paris.

Looking at the other families of Revolutionary Road may contribute to an understanding of Revolutionary Road's general image and understanding of some common status such as marriage, family and parenthood. Firstly, the Wheelers' real estate agent Mrs. Givings and her family play a great role that articulates the general perspective of Revolutionary Road people. Mrs. Givings, an embodiment of the manners of the novel's time, represents suburban banality and obsessiveness. She is obsessed with correct behavior, morality and fastidiousness. Initially, the Wheelers seem likeable to her; however in time, Mrs. Givings thinks that she has been mistaken. After April's death, she states that the Wheelers were not their kind of people at all: "they were a bit- a bit whimsical, for my taste. A bit neurotic. I may not have stressed it, but they were often very tiring people to deal with, in many ways. [...] It's just that they were a rather strange young couple. Irresponsible," (Yates 337-338). With her mentally ill son and nearly deaf husband, life in Revolutionary Road is hard for her but she acquiesces to the role of a woman and mother in this place. Her preoccupation with correct behavior may be an intention to disguise her son's erratic behavior in public. Creating a neat image in the eyes of her society clearly is more important than living according to her desires and because her son's

condition damages this image in her eyes, she feels the need to disguise her family's flaws by overacting the sacrificial role of a mother. Trying to maintain this correct image of her family simply makes her finally unable to accept the Wheelers as they are. In her eyes, the Wheelers have failed to maintain the illusion.

Her son, John Givings, on the other hand, is closer to the Wheelers in terms of attitude to life. He is located between his punctilious mother and the Wheelers because he wants to escape from this place as well. However, his mental well-being has been so patterned by both the place and his mother that his desire remains within that trapped him in his own psychosis. His desire to escape matches the Wheelers', to whom he explains that, "it does take a certain amount of guts to see the emptiness, but it takes a whole hell of a lot more to see the hopelessness, that's when there is nothing to do but take off. If you can" (Yates 190). He also believes that the environment that surrounds them is a kind of emptiness and the only way is to leave the place, only "if you can." He is aware that he may not be able to leave and be happy elsewhere which forces him to stay with his calm father and paranoid mother. He has a passive father, who turns off his hearing aid and escapes more easily than anyone, and a mother who spends her life by deciding what is correct and what is wrong. His parents become John's natural trap and the road, again, fails to fulfill its promise of leading to different places. For John as well, the road does not keep its revolutionary promise and John is left alone with his contradictions between the asylum and the suburban home.

Another family on Revolutionary Road, the Campbells, has a significant place in the novel in terms of family bonds and thinking out of bounds. Generally speaking, they have a nice house, family, and children which mean they have

everything they need to stay in Revolutionary Road, as life provides everything and the only thing that they need to do is live this life. However, the situation may be different for Sheppard “Shep” Campbell, after knowing April Wheeler. They have an affair one night and this affair changes Shep so that that he questions the direction of his life. For him, April is attractive and he thinks he even loves her, so their affair is important to him, whereas it means nothing for April at all. She does not like him and does not return to the fantasy of their encounter as he does. For Shep, things are more difficult since April reminds him of the difference between his earlier wild life and his current fixed life. As Yates writes about Shep, “All at once it seemed that the high adventure of pretending to be something he was not had led him into a way of life he didn’t want and couldn’t stand, that in defying his mother he had turned his back on his birthright” (Yates 140). This affair is not merely emotional or sexual for him; rather it is awakening in a way that makes him remember he is not happy at all. Shep does not live the life he has dreamed of and it is April who makes him realize how dissatisfied he is with what Revolutionary Road can present. In other words, April functions as an external force for Shep to make him switch his position from rest to motion. Though April cannot achieve it for her own life, she becomes a light for another person to start questioning the place and life he lives. Independent from Shep’s actions to change his life or to continue living the same, the implicit connection between them made Shep at least think otherwise. However, the biggest problem with residents of Revolutionary Road happens to be their inability to pull themselves out of their own unhappiness. Consequently, the dead-end they live in also becomes a dead-end for their dreams and once again, the road’s voice is silenced by the static of reliable life conditions. None of these characters truly desire to leave their established order and follow a new path to realize their desires.

Shep's failure, like those of the Wheelers, highlights the novel's attention to the trap of the state of rest. The novel specifically attends to the absences, abortions, and failed plans of a couple caught in a static life. Each problem signifies a lack that is directly related to the life choices of the Wheelers. Their desires are more wonderful and substantial than the world they live in *Revolutionary Road*. In their minds, they deserve better and more intellectual neighbors, better jobs that suit their capacity, a better love that is more faithful. Everything lacks the necessary elements to make the Wheelers feel completed hence their desires shrink and they end up being reactionary rather than being revolutionary. Though they desire to be so, they fail to change their situation and are drowned in the safety of their stability. They are seduced by the conformity of their time: a decent salary, a secure neighborhood, a family. In fact, they are seduced precisely by what bothers them, thus their reasons for flight becomes the reason to stay. Those seductions are more powerful than their desires, even for a willing couple as the Wheelers, thus they betray their own desires.

Today's promises become heavier than tomorrow's dreams. In that point, the Wheelers' failure to follow their dreams can be associated with the Marxist analysis of the bourgeois revolution and its later betrayal of their own principles in *The Communist Manifesto* and as well as articles for the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung*. The bourgeois, at first, worked together with the proletariat, however over time, as they became the head of the movement, the bourgeois, one of the most revolutionary classes in history, betrayed their own interests and ceased to be the principal agent of historical development. As Marx stated in "The Bourgeoisie and the Counter-Revolution":

From the first it was inclined to betray the people and to compromise with the crowned representatives of the old society, for it already belonged itself to the old society; it did not advance the interests of a new society against an old one, but represented refurbished interests within an obsolete society. It stood at the helm of the revolution not because it had the people behind it but because the people drove it forward; it stood at the head because it merely represented the spleen of an old social era and not the initiatives of a new one. It did not trust its own slogans, used phrases instead of ideas, it was intimidated by the world storm and exploited it for its own ends; it displayed no energy anywhere, but resorted to plagiarism everywhere, it was vulgar because unoriginal, and original in its vulgarity; haggling over its own demands, without initiative, without faith in itself, without faith in the people, without a historic mission, an abominable dotard finding himself condemned to lead and to mislead the first youthful impulses of a virile people so as to make them serve his own senile interests.

(Neue Rheinische Zeitung No.169)

As Marx writes, the bourgeois did not extend their revolutionary promise, but limited it to the security of their own class. Just like the bourgeois as a class, the Wheelers lack not only the necessary faith in their historical mandate, but also the potential to create a new order from an older one. Frank's new promotion in Knox and the news of the third baby do not function as obstacles, in fact, the Wheelers are willing to stay due to the seductions of their life styles and this news plays merely a deceptive role for them "to serve their senile interests."

In the case of the Wheelers, there may be a distinction between Frank and April in terms of being revolutionary. Frank, just like the bourgeois, abandons his desires and become fully bourgeois at the same time that he wants to be a bohemian, a writer or an artist in Paris. The allure of the new promotion at work, the promised business success is more attractive to Frank, and the experience of extramarital intercourse relieves his sense of entrapment in his banal home-life and marriage. He sees the promotion as becoming “new” as Rajski puts the idea: “Easily swayed by Pollock’s rhetoric, Frank embraces the idea that selling the new machine will demonstrate that he is of the [new] kind of man” (567). For Frank, it is easy to abandon their dream of moving to Europe, as he lacks the necessary faith and mission and by doing so, he betrays both his own and April’s revolutionary ideals.

April, on the other hand, like the proletariat, does not abandon her ideals and revolutionary potential. She remains faithful to her desires as even a new baby or promotion fail to seduce her and makes her stay in this place. She needs a living space so that, as Rajski argues,

April never buys into Frank’s campaign, his attempt to wheel and deal. Lacking Frank’s opportunity to identify with corporate modernity, April persists in perceiving her suburban environment as degrading to herself; consequently, she refuses to assist Frank in merging the story of the birth of their third child with that of the birth of the business computer. (“Writing Systems” 569)

As a representative of the faithful working class, she even, without taking any advice, self-administers an abortion which demonstrates the desperation she feels with the current state of her life. She believes that the abortion can liberate them

since then there would be no excuse left for them to leave. Her abortion becomes the ultimate metaphor of the novel. In fact, everything in the Wheelers lives had been aborted long before, and this last abortion of the third baby functions textually as a concretization of deaths that took place in them ages ago. Her effort to remove the obstacles is useless since it is too late for the Wheelers. They demand obstacles. Though she never betrays their mission, she arrives too late to the revolution that this abortion leads only to a sad ending: “April is so adamant about making this last attempt that she is willing to sacrifice everything, including herself, to attain her goal. This leads to the sad climax of the novel” (Richardson 14). Unlike Frank, April has no status to hold or chance to change her life if she continues to stay in Revolutionary Road. This is her only chance and she needs to create her own luck to manage things in life, which separates her stance from Frank’s in their mission to leave.

At this point, the Wheelers become their own “grave diggers” as Marx suggested at the end of *The Communist Manifesto*:

The development of Modern Industry, therefore, cuts from under its feet the very foundation on which the bourgeois produces and appropriates products. What the bourgeois therefore produces, above all, are its own-grave diggers. Its fall and the victory of the proletariat are equally inevitable. (*Communist Manifesto* 21; ch.1)

As the bourgeois set their system on the power of the proletariat, they meant nothing without their working force. With the development of industry, they defused their own future due to lack of mission, vision and trust. As in the Wheelers case, they also fail to see the possible outcomes of their actions and abort everything that

matters in their life and become as empty as possible. April was too late and Frank was too distracted to achieve a real revolution in their lives, and theirs remains merely as a weak attempt as they fail to walk together in this process. If they happened to unite their strength and faith, they would have a chance to get out of “this strange little dream world of the Donaldsons and the Cramers and the Wingates – oh yes, and the Campbells, too” (Yates 111). Just like the bourgeois, Frank is seduced by his current conditions and even if he complains about his neighbors’ inferiority, he continues to be the part of them only because of a new position at work. As a result, Frank has determined to cancel the relocation to France, and April, hoping that she can cancel his decision, attempts to self-abort her unborn child after the first trimester. Her tragic death and finally the collapse of the family clearly expose the destructive impact of being in a state of stasis in *Revolutionary Road*.

As Charlton-Jones writes, Yates depicts,

a world in which men and women do battle, aware that while the society they lived in offered material comfort in the form of suburban communities and suggested conformity through marriage and childrearing, it was not enough. He wanted to address the fundamental anxieties and failings of communication that existed between men and women, anxieties and failings that were, in part, a result of women’s dissatisfaction with the conditions of their lives in 1950s America. (“Richard Yates’s Fictional Treatment of Women” 505)

Charlton-Jones explains Yates’ purpose so clearly that women’s similarity to the experience of the working class becomes clear one more time. Both April and the proletariat need a huge change as a result of the conditions they have and are ready to

sacrifice anything to obtain the ultimate life they think they deserve. Unlike April and the working class, Frank and the bourgeois get lost in the conformity provided without truly considering a world different from their own, and April dies due to her isolation, sadness, and suburban entombment. There is no real revolution in Revolutionary Road; however, the effect of the Wheelers attempt to create one left a wave of shock to the residents of Revolutionary Road and though unusually dramatic and unfortunate, it created a questioning in their minds as possible as it was silent.



CHAPTER III

THE AMBIVALENCE OF THE ROAD: THE ENDURING ENDS OF HOPELESSNESS

Life is only possible through the force of the negative that brings about higher developmental achievements through the destruction of the old. Jon Mills

The contemporary American writer Cormac McCarthy maintains his pessimistic standpoint about the indifference of the natural world in his novel *The Road*, and leads the reader through an unknown world and time. The novel begins in an already-collapsed America, a post-apocalyptic abyss; however, the causes of this global apocalypse are not explained to the reader. Whether the novel is set in the near-future or, a far distant-future or even why this destruction has occurred is left purposefully opaque so that the novel can focus more on human relationships and less on global events. Consequently, the writer's point in omitting material details can be interpreted as an effort to direct his readers to follow the routes and directions of his characters' lives. The novel simply says that *something* happened, and this focus changes the possible questions a reader would normally ask from a dystopian novel. Rather than asking how large political rivalries brought about global catastrophe, the novel leads reader to ask: how, in a ruined world, do the father and the son experience their life on the road? To what degree does their belief in "good guys" and "bad guys" function as a survival mechanism? Can the moral and ethical values of "the good guys" apply in times of need and desperation? McCarthy's presentations of oppositions (such as hope and despair, good and evil, promise and

futility) ultimately reveal a spectrum of values along which the events of the novel unfold. Learning to read this spectrum of values as they are highlighted in the book determines the function of the road as a metaphor in the novel. Further, the road, or more broadly, the environment, determines the space from which this spectrum of values can be interpreted.

McCarthy's protagonists, the father, and his son, spend their lives on the road moving towards the south, since there is no safe space to call home, nowhere to have peace, and no one to trust. The road stages the ambiguity of their journey; it is undefined, full of uncertainty and, oppositions just like their lives. As the father and the son move on, the road stages a series of conflicts that makes it an essential grounding for difficult decisions. The father wants to reach the south because he believes it may be slightly more liveable compared to the total ruin of America. The road, then, exists as a path to survival and represents their hope of finding a better place. However, the road itself is also a home to all kinds of evils such as cannibalism, rape, murder, and slavery. Consequently, the symbol of the road becomes double: it suggests that hope is a path in the land of death that enables the father and the son to both accept the end of their lives and struggle against those ends. *The Road*, as a novel, is then the grounding of a tension between contesting desires: the desire for life and the desire for death, the feelings of love and hate, and the contradictions between fear and courage. In a corrupted world where some people turn into cannibals for the sake of survival, the road is, paradoxically, the only reliable space that cannot be relied upon. For the father, a kind of god in his son's eyes, walking on the road is their only choice to find food or materials that will help them survive. Though the novel does not explain why the father believes that the

south has been less affected by the apocalypse, it is fair to guess that south will be their salvation from the life threatening cold weather and will enable them to live on which is an explicit indicator of their hope. What the road may bring and what awaits them in the south are unknown to the characters, and even this obscurity cannot be their determiner and they choose to move on in spite of the darkness ahead.

Through the ambiguity of the road, McCarthy makes it not only a metaphor for the journey of life, but also a metaphor for America. As is widely understood, the American dream promises material happiness and pleasure (such as easy access to education, multiple opportunities for success, big houses with big gardens and rewards for hard work). However, McCarthy rewrites a new understanding of the dream amidst the most desperate acts of cannibalism, corruption and death. On the roads McCarthy charts out, life has only one basic function and it becomes a game played to survive, a significant alteration that makes *The Road* different from other American road novels. Consequently, the new doubling of the meaning of the road becomes more clear. The road is neither something pure in the service of self-discovery and inspiring adventures like Kerouac's road. Nor does it suggest tempting new destinations or the tedium of an inescapable cul-de-sac like Yates' road. In McCarthy's novel, there is nowhere new to discover and no place necessarily safe to run to, so the road itself can no longer be interpreted as a means of escape from what simply makes one unhappy. It cannot be seen as a kind of friend available in times of need, or a site that can revive a bored life by offering an escape route for one's problems. In this novel, the road is a pathway toward inevitable death. The father and the son keep walking toward their death, which is also the only way for them to stay alive. It is the physical terrain on which a broad range of decisions and opposing

attitudes toward life are dramatized. It is the location of ghastly forms of immorality and sadism that can show the effects of the struggle for bare survival on human social values. The road is now the embodiment of an authority that tests its travelers with nearly insurmountable problems, and in the process, asks to what degree the spirit of generosity, kindness, and incorruptibility can survive.

Providing a clearer and deeper reading of the novel's dichotomies is essential. McCarthy's characters choose to be on the road, constantly on the move, since remaining in the same place would bring an assured and instant death. The father and the son continue a journey made of hiding, fighting, and escaping from predatory others; the fear of being killed all for the sake of extending the time they remain alive. This seemingly hopeless act of walking along toward their death can also be read as an enactment of their hope, as well. Just like the road itself, the concept of hope becomes doubled. It is both a hope to stay alive and a hope that they can break free from their huge struggle to simply live. The multiply doubled metaphors of the road and hope work together to change the way that a reader encounters the ethical perspectives of the father and the son. Most simply, they are alive, but they don't know *why* they are alive, except that they are refusing to die. The novel stands as an allegory of human struggle in the violent, uncertain, and dangerous environment of a ruined world. Now that the conditions of the world have changed, their moral values that grew from that old world will be constantly re-examined, questioned, and threatened.

3.1 CARRYING THE FIRE; GOOD GUYS AND BAD GUYS

In order to clarify the motives of the father and the son to continue their journey, a detailed explanation of two linked metaphors of the novel must be presented: “carrying the fire” and being “good or bad guys.” Throughout the novel, the father has a mission to keep his son enlivened enough to enable him to keep walking and to do so, he creates a metaphor for life: the fire (87). This fire becomes the tool the father that he uses to instill the need for survival in his son. Whenever the son is in doubt or lacks the necessary energy to walk, the father reminds him of the fire that he “carries inside” and the son is conditioned to think accordingly (87). Along the journey, there are times that the boy feels hesitant about their mission of heading to south or simply needs to be convinced again. Hence, the fire is a metaphor for the impulse to live that refreshes the boy’s attitudes. In one of the dialogues between the father and the son, they say: “And nothing bad is going to happen to us [the father says]. That’s right. Because we’re carrying the fire [his son answers]. Yes. Because we’re carrying the fire [the father repeats]” (McCarthy 87). The son tries to keep his courage and belief alive, and when he fails, he mentions the fire before his father does which shows not only that they have said this to each other many times before, but that, by being repeated, it has the effect of a prayer. McCarthy’s prose, which loses the usual cues of dialogue, highlights the strong connection between two.

In yet another scene, the son expects his father to assure him of the fire again: “What’s on the other side? Nothing. There must be something. Maybe there’s a father and his little boy and they’re sitting on the beach. That would be okay. Yes.

That would be okay. And they could be carrying the fire too? They could be. Yes” (McCarthy 231). In this short exchange, the son asks his father about life after death and whether or not they would find people like them who also possess the desire to live through their love for one another. And the son takes comfort through his father’s own optimistic admission, even though he is aware of his father’s growing pessimism on their journey.

And in one of the final moments of the novel, the son takes his last assurance: “I want to be with you. You can’t. Please. You can’t. 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 298). In this moment, the son is looking for something to rely upon, something that can stay with him especially because his father, himself, cannot. In this sense, the fire takes the position of the father as well and becomes something that will be with him all the time.

Though the fire is an image that symbolizes the will to live, it has a more concrete link as well. Since the weather of their world is constantly raining, snowing, grey, and cold, the fire is a necessity for the father and the son to dry their clothes, to cook food and to get warm. As a result, it is emotionally and physically essential. However, lighting a fire constantly puts the characters in danger because it can reveal their location to others conditions. Consequently, since they rarely use fire, the father creates another one in his son’s consciousness to condition him positively, and the fire becomes a metaphor for survival that functions throughout their journey on the road.

Another significant metaphor of the novel stands for the ethical values the father wants his son to develop even though the world of ethics has died. McCarthy emphasizes the differences between the people of his novel through the father's simple cowboy ethics that divides the world into good guys and bad guys. On one hand, the bad guys are defined by the taboo and sadistic acts they do in order to stay alive. The pressure of survival in a post-apocalyptic world creates murder, butchery, rape, cannibalism and slavery as a result for some people who (we assume) had not acted like this before the apocalypse. The father simply calls them the "bad guys" and his son follows his father's lead. According to the novel's values and under the given circumstances, bad people do not hesitate to kill, to capture or eat the people that they come across either because they think that the same thing may happen to them, or obviously they need something to eat. The desire to stay alive, in a broader sense, the effects of the environment, erodes the human values and humanity of the figures in the novel. On the other hand, being "good" is defined as refusing to commit atrocities, which the father and his son try to follow. Though the conditions for the other humans are the same conditions for the father and the son, they refuse to cross this line into the savage and taboo. At times when the father has to hurt someone in order to protect himself and his son, the son demands to know whether they are the good or bad guys. In the following dialogue, the father explains to his son how he sees their position in the world:

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. Okay.
(*The Road* 80-81)

In this passage, the distinction between the father and the son is made clear, despite the lack of graphic narrative markers. The father, as a protector of his son, considers killing anyone who puts his son's life in danger as an ethical imperative. The son, however, is not able to make the same ethical distinctions as his father. Yet the father sees his only purpose to ensure their survival against the forces of savagery in the world. For the son, his father's decisions are not nearly as clear as they are to his father. The father's reassurance that they are the good guys is part of his education and training: that in order to survive, they must not be overtaken by savagery not let the newly savage survivors enslave or kill them.

In particular, the son is agonized by the idea of becoming one of the world's bad guys as demonstrated by the following scene:

He turned and looked. He looked like he'd been crying. Just tell me. We wouldn't ever eat anybody, would we? No. Of course not. Even if we were starving? We're starving now. You said we weren't. I said we weren't dying. I didn't say we weren't starving. But we wouldn't. No. We wouldn't. No matter what. No. No matter what. Because we're they good guys. Yes. And we're carrying the fire. And we're carrying the fire. Yes. Okay. (*The Road* 136)

Here, the son wants more assurances from his father that they won't turn into the same terrifying gangs of slave-owning savages they see marching down the road. By

asking his father what a “good guy” does when he’s starving, his father reminds him that they are actually starving now and still not attacking and eating other people: a good guy starves until he finds food. The father’s assurance is made at a point where they are dying from starvation, but he still insists that even though he is dying, they are still kindling the fire of life. The drive of life and the drive toward death that the novel presents are an important part of Sigmund Freud’s thinking, and it is useful to turn now to Freud’s to show how McCarthy’s novel presents these drives.

3.2 THE DEATH INSTINCT AND ITS OPPOSITE

The existential position of the father and the son, who describe their position as “carrying the fire,” can be read through Sigmund Freud’s concept of the life instinct (Eros) and death drive (Thanatos). Freud argues that these contradictory impulses are a natural part of the life of the mind and McCarthy’s novel employs them, if not intentionally, in the circumstances of an apocalypse. In Freud’s perspective, human beings have a life instinct that leads people to reproduce, to eat, to develop and to continue living. It is responsible for the preservation of life, as well as for the experience of pleasure. Freud argues that sexual instincts are the source of this drive, especially since the sexual drive gives the energy to endure the process of life (*Beyond the Pleasure Principle* 34). On the other hand, this is not the only drive at work in the psyche. The life drive is, eventually, gives rise to the death drive, which he argued is a desire to return to an inanimate state of being which may lead one to self-destruction. In his work *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Freud claims that

“all instincts tend towards the restoration of an earlier state of things” (31) which “must be an old state of things, an initial state from which the living entity has at one time or other departed and to which it is striving to return by the circuitous paths along which its development leads” (32). In other words, the death drive presents the wish to die and become inorganic which brought Freud to write that “the aim of all life is death” (32). If life is lived in order to reach the final goal, dying, and then living is an act spent under the service of death as the final journey. From this point, it can be stated that the two instincts are bound together in such a way that they cannot be considered in isolation from the other. Freud explains the relationship between the instincts as follows:

The instinct (death drive) is diverted towards the external world and comes to light as an instinct of aggressiveness and destructiveness. In this way the instinct itself could be pressed into the service of Eros, in that the organism was destroying some other thing, whether animate or inanimate, instead of destroying its own self. Conversely, any restriction of this aggressiveness directed outwards would be bound to increase the self-destruction, which is in any case proceeding.

(Civilization and Its Discontents 119)

In the novel, the father, as a surrogate god, insurance to his boy, and a kind of ghostly figure, has only one self-appointed task: to keep his son alive. In order to do so, he lives his own life only to serve as a conduit to his son’s survival. In the father’s own words, he wants his son to discover and carry the fire within. Aside from his responsibilities to his son, in my view, his own survival has no function in or for itself. As a man who inhabited the pre-apocalyptic world and whose wife

chose suicide years ago, he has no purely self-interested desire or motivation to continue living. He does not live to keep himself, but his son alive. Metaphorically, we can read him as a kind of ghost: a man who is already dead but still inhabits the realm of the living. In such a case, the father lives without the inwardly-directed life instinct that provides an energy to live, and this lack enables his own path toward self-destruction. He walks toward his own physical death, a death for his body. So for the father, as James Berger stated in his book *After the End: Representations of Post-Apocalypse*; “the End is not the end” (qtd. in Skrimshire 4).

For the father, life is indeed an experience of being dead before the grave. He still walks, eats, and sleeps, only without feeling a desire to do so. In this, he is perhaps more zombie than ghost. Life is a burden for the father because it is nearly impossible for him to adapt to the new world; however, since his child is not aware of the pre-apocalyptic world, the father folds his own survival into his son’s survival. In other words, this world is unliveable for the father who could never adapt to it; hence, his life is a remnant, even a virus, from an irrelevant age. As a result, he has no desire to seek pleasure (as an already dead but still living man) in an already dead world. His own impulses mirror the aggression and destruction of the world. As Freud explains, the death “drive” is really an “instinct” because it does not progress forward, but backward. He writes:

It seems, then, that an instinct is an urge inherent in organic life to restore an earlier state of things which the living entity has been obliged to abandon under the pressure of external disturbing forces; that is, it is a kind of organic elasticity, or, to put it another way, the

expression of the inertia inherent in organic life. (*Beyond the Pleasure Principle* 30)

For Freud, death is a kind of paradox: a forward march to the past. In *The Road*, the father embodies this kind of paradox. McCarthy has created an ecologically devastated setting that serves both as an external disturbing force and as force that motivates the father's actions: the father's own desire becomes to reach the state of inertia. He has no attempt to adapt or defy the apocalypse, he just moves forward instinctually and impulsively while he moves backward to the stage of death *qua* death. Furthermore, through to the end of the novel, even moving becomes a hardship and once the boy asks the bravest thing that his father ever did, the father answers: "Getting up this morning" (McCarthy 291). This line shows that if the father's only source of motivation, the son, did not exist, and then there would not be any reason left for him to even start this journey at all. Moreover, the father discovers that the term "carrying the fire" signifies something not only for the boy, but for himself. For the father to have something to hold onto places his son in the role of life and himself, the father, in the position of death. The father looks alive to his son, as a courageous voice to enlighten his son's path. He is there, but at the same time he is not.

The son, on the contrary, is a figure who represents the forces of life in the novel and who, at the end, carries the potential to become a hero figure for the continuation of life in a world of death. He carries power inside that leads him to continue the journey and his purpose of heading strengthens this power of living. Though the fate of the son is not included in the end of the novel, it is fair to read the concluding scene as an indication of his future. As he says goodbye to his dying

father and meets a new family to join, the mother gets so pleased to see him that she holds him in her arms and says: "I'm so glad to see you" and the scene proceeds: "She said that the breath of God was his breath yet though it pass from man to man through all of time" (McCarthy 306). First, the son wanted to be sure that this new family members are the "good guys," and seeing that they are, he is able to join them optimistically, especially since he has no other options. Although there is no explicit expression about the function of the daughter his new family, it is fair to read that by this conclusion, they represent a new chance for humanity arising from their connection in the future.

The novel's conclusion leaves many questions unanswered. Among many possible readings of the end, there is an optimistic one that stands forward. The future of the world and humanity is seen to depend on the boy's survival. The emergence of a new family provides the narrative with a potential for the rebirth of humanity. Though the boy is prepubescent, he "carries the fire," from his father and embodies the drives of life. For Freud, life is most fully expressed through sex instincts. As he writes,

Sexual instincts are the true life instincts. They operate against the purpose of the other instincts, which leads, by reason of their function, to death; and this fact indicates that there is an opposition between them and the other instincts, an opposition whose importance was long ago recognized by the theory of the neuroses. (*Beyond the Pleasure Principle* 3)

Life instincts obviously serve for the continuation of life, and the survival of the boy requires a reading under the service of life instincts. Additionally, the boy has

acquired the immense energy to live, not even the corruption of the dead world, stops him hanging onto the ethics of a “good” person. Although he expresses doubts in the novel and needs reassurance from his father, the boy learns how to evade the corruption of the world which becomes his primary motivation to live. He is already in the condition of life qua life; he lives and wants to live more.

Freud’s comparison of two instincts may put the difference between the father and his son in a better way: “those which seek to lead what is living to death, and others, the sexual instincts, which are perpetually attempting and achieving a renewal of life” (*Beyond the Pleasure Principle* 40). The father moves toward death, toward a return to a previous state, whereas the son moves toward a restoration of life. Further, the father has to sacrifice himself for his son, for Eros, and, the continuation of life through his own death, since the survival of the son is contingent on the father’s sacrifice. In Freud’s words, “One cell helps to preserve the life of another, and the community of cells can survive even if individual cells have to die” (*Beyond the Pleasure Principle* 44).

In his essay, “There is no God and We are his Prophets” Stephen Scrimshire argues that the father’s embrace of his own death gives his son a reason to live because “time has already run out and is yet, for the boy, opening out inexorably: nothing has really finished” (Scrimshire 5). “Nothing has really finished” is a good metaphor for the life instinct. Scrimshire also argues that the boy’s function in *The Road*, is to resist closure: “For ultimately, in *The Road*, the desire for closure, or an end, is not met; all that is met is a deepening of its mystery: like the living, recited and continuing memory of a past that will never return, and yet refuses to disappear” (13). The boy functions as a refusal of destiny and as a will to renew the life, a

healing of an ill world. There may be no return to “good old days”; however, there is a “good guy” with a chance to create better days.

The son’s productive role in *The Road*, is powerfully addressed in the line, “That the boy was all that stood between him and death” (McCarthy 29). The father is a tormented figure, since the continuation of his own life is a burden for him. There is no end to his movement along the road and no potential inertia; hence, if the father were to continue living, then he could not go back to an earlier state, the location of his own desire. The father is no fighter for either his own life or other’s, but only for the life of his son, as the best thing he could do, especially since his wife killed herself even after surviving the apocalypse. Living for the mother and father, especially, is merely “an extension of the agony of existence” (Skrimshire 11). What is more, consciously or not, both the father and his son perform the functions of inertia and life in their relations with the desperate and dying. The father has no future, so he thinks helping people in need is useless and unnecessary, even if he is a “good guy.” Generosity is an act he refuses to do willingly. However, the boy is more giving and wants the other, non-threatening strangers they meet, to keep living. He wants to provide food or clothes for them as willingly as possible, even, despite the fact that he needs them as well. The father refuses to offer help to strangers, but the son reacts in a way that shows his disapproval: “Yes. But in the stories we’re helping people and we don’t help people” (McCarthy 287). His father’s response remains that he has only one task: “My job is to take care of you. I was appointed to do that by God” (McCarthy 80). However, in a broader sense, it is not the father but the son whose drive toward life makes him a Christ-like figure in his urge to help the sick and needy.

The son's function as an embodiment of Eros, leads to another conclusion that he may be a savior of civilization. In *Civilization and Its Discontents*, Freud writes that "civilization is a process in the service of Eros, whose purpose is to combine single human individuals, and after that families, then races, peoples and nations, into one great unity, the unity of humankind" (122). If the son represents Eros in a post-apocalyptic world, then he may also represent a return of civilization. His journey with his father signifies what Freud "the struggle between Eros and Death, between the instinct of life and the instinct of destruction, as it works itself out in the human species" (122). Civilization is made from the combination and struggle of these two drives, and in *The Road*, the representatives of these struggles are the father and his son. Freud's distinction between these drives matters for McCarthy's novel, because this theory strengthens the ambiguous end of the novel and directs it to a more optimistic possibility.

3.3 AN ANALYSIS OF THE PATERNAL ROLES: HOW DO THE MOTHER AND FATHER FUNCTION IN THE NOVEL?

In the previous section, I have analyzed the relationship between the father and the son in the novel in terms of the life and death instincts as Freud defines them. Their journey on the road begins *in medias res*, however, because both father and the son continue to recall their wife and mother at different moments on their journey. As a novel of a dead world, *The Road*, presents a different set of common attitudes and moral values about parenthood, and can be seen to present a new perspective on

the subject. To start with, the mother commits suicide in a state of delirium and rage before their journey on the road even starts. She walks out into the night before even waiting for the morning as her husband had wished; however, though it may seem as an impulsive act, her decision to choose death over the journey had been made long before. In fact, the mother believes that she “should have done it a long time ago” (McCarthy 57) and besides, she believes it would have been best to take her son with her: “I’d take him with me if it weren’t you. You know I would. It’s the right thing to do” (McCarthy 58). The mother is overwhelmed by the potential dangers of the corrupted world, and rape, murder, and cannibalism make her lose any hope for even starting the journey. Since she thinks her husband has no power to protect the family against the others, waiting for bad things to happen makes her so crazy that her only hope becomes “eternal nothingness” (McCarthy 59). Because she accepts that she is already dead in all senses, she cannot see herself as a road walker: “We’re not survivors. We’re the walking dead in a horror film” (McCarthy 57). In the novel, the mother has no motivation to survive, not even for the benefit of her son, so her only motivation is to return to a previous state, a state which would make her a representative of the death drive. However, an analysis of the inversion of the maternity will be more useful to advance as the expected roles convert into something else.

Mothers are traditionally expected to take care of their children as their first priority, so even in the post-apocalyptic world of McCarthy, the mother would protect her son against the predatory others. But this is not how the novel operates. Instead, paternal values are more self-sacrificing than maternal ones, which instead, are dramatized as selfish and self-centered. Every action, value or self-devotion

become meaningless for the mother, since her “heart was ripped out of” her the night her son was born (58-59). She has never felt a sense of motherhood, because as a post-apocalyptic mother, she has no desire to live or raise her son. It is more appropriate to see her as someone who has given birth to her son, but has renounced the name of the mother. To underscore this point, she is not once referred to as “mother” in the novel and only once as “mom” when the son, freezing in the snow, says that he “wishes he was with mom” (56). On the other hand, the father had tried to discourage the mother from choosing death; however, he had no persuasive power with his wife. It is his wife’s choice of suicide over confronting the brutality of the world that gives the father the impulse to live for the survival of his son.

One possible explanation for the mother’s choice of death can be read in terms of an idea that Freud advances in *Civilization and Its Discontents*. According to Freud: “What is bad is often not at all what is injurious or dangerous to the ego; on the contrary, it may be something which is desirable and enjoyable to the ego” (124). Thus, the evaluation of death may seem to be something desirable for the mother, certainly more desirable than her expectations of being raped, killed, and eaten. By choosing suicide by a sharp piece of obsidian, the mother has completely escaped the journey of the road. In the same passage as above, Freud writes:

Since a person’s own feelings would not have led him along this path, he must have had a motive for submitting to this extraneous influence. Such a motive is easily discovered in his helplessness and his dependence on other people, and it can best be designated as fear of loss of love. If he loses the love of another person upon whom he is

dependent, he also ceases to be protected from a variety of dangers.

(Civilization and Its Discontents 124)

This has several consequences for a reading of the figure of the wife in the novel. First, the mother has the motive to die because she feels helpless (in the face of savage others) and dependent (on her husband to survive). She needs to depend on someone stronger than herself in order to be protected from the “bad guys.” However, she realizes that there is no power to protect her from the savagery out in the world and this vicious circle fills her with helplessness all over again. But, the reading of Freud needs to be changed in order to adapt the theory to the situation of the mother. In fact, the mother does not fear losing the love of another person; furthermore, she does not really fear anything in her state of numbness except the potential violence on the road. The mother fears losing the ones she loves to savage violence, and the tension of this anxious wait bewilders and deranges her. She laments that they have only two bullets in the gun instead of three (58). Instead of waiting for the “bad guys” to find her family and herself, she chooses to be the agent of her own death while leaving two bullets in the gun for her husband and son.

The threat of the “bad guys” in the novel is quite serious and occupies a big place which creates need to explain their function in the novel. Walking on the road in a dangerous environment and in an unknown time is not an activity for good, naïve and struggling people. It is the natural setting of the newly uncivilized and post human who are out hunting for other people to eat or enslave. As the father and the son discuss: “What if some good guys came? Well, I don’t think we’re likely to meet any good guys on the road. We’re on the road. I know” (McCarthy 160). As the father explains to his son, the bad guys choose to be bad to survive, and when they

are not hunting, they terrify others in order to keep them away. They are figures of corruption, lawlessness and depravity by eating, capturing and killing people.

The existence of good people, like the father and the son, try to avoid hurting other people, even though they have to fight to survive, and as a result, “good guys” generally do not trust others and shoot or set traps to keep others away. The “good guys,” simply by existing, show that there is a way to survive without eating or capturing other people, though it is not as expedient. What is more, even there is no way of survival by avoiding crimes of killing or eating people, being good requires that the taboo against cannibalism remain as the outer boundary of civilized action. On the contrary, the “bad guys” have gone beyond civilization and the Eros that makes it possible. They decrease the chance of survival by disregarding human values and ethics completely. The road is a site of danger because of the presence of the “bad guys.”

The scene in which the father and the son come across a group of slaves held in a basement and used as a source of food is sufficient enough to show the difference between what the father has explained to his son about the good and bad:

Huddled against the wall were naked people, male and female, all trying to hide, shielding their faces with their hands. On the mattress lay a man with his legs gone to the hip and the stumps of them blackened and burnt. The smell was hideous. (*The Road* 116)

This is a monumental horror scene in which human beings are slowly butchered, their wounds cauterized, and then cooked by men and women who have completely lost their sense of civilized ethics. There is no way to know how long they have been

locked in the cellar, and no way to know how they got there. By omitting these details, McCarthy exposes the absolute depravity of the world that the father and son navigate.

These are the people that the father constantly warns his son about, despite the son's belief that there must be some "good guys" like them left in the world. Throughout the journey, the son keeps asking whether there are the good guys or not and wants to hear the answer that he believes: yes. The reason for the boy to keep asking the same question repeatedly is that he and his father harm to some of the people that they come across on the road by refusing to help them. However, the difference between them and the bad guys is that the father threatens or steals from others with the purpose of protecting his son's life. The father and the son do not harm other because they are hungry or because they lack necessities. This is the kind of ethical attitude McCarthy presents in the novel: necessity does not have to kill the goodness and kindness inside them.

In her article "Between Dystopia and Utopia: The Post-Apocalyptic Discourse of Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*," Inger-Anne Søvting writes that the novel raises many important ethical questions: "What does it mean to be good? Can you kill and still be good? Does the end justify the means, or is the deed morally autonomous?" (710). Søvting replies to these questions by evaluating the degree of causing harm caused in the name of protection, like the father does. She writes, "They do not eat people and they do not kill, except in self-defence. Even in the face of these direst of circumstances, they have retained their conscience and moral sense and have not been reduced to bestiality" (710). Performing beyond the limits of ethical behavior only after facing difficulty is the initial and most important indicator

that the father and the son carry what the novel values as goodness in their heart. On the other hand, the father goes through a great many difficulties that have made him stubborn and single-minded, since he cannot be blinded by sentimentality. In another scenario, if he were to be alone, he may have decided to harm others to protect his own life, but this is not the case in the novel. All in all, in this nameless new world, the boy is the one and only reason that makes him act in a way that conforms to the old world, even though that world is dead.

Regarding this issue, the son's generosity towards the people that he meets for the first time in his life, can be evaluated as antithetical to his survival. The son, more than the father, carries a great sensitivity and empathy that encourages him to do good without considering the possible negative consequences of his charity. From the son's point of view, he has to remain good no matter what happens to the world, which is what he insists upon by "carrying the fire." This has an enormous impact on him, since nobody but he and his father have the fire inside, so they are responsible for carrying this fire everywhere that they go. This kind of ethical imperative makes these characters seem as if they are religiously chosen. Sjøfting advances the metaphorical role of the fire and links it to morality as well:

And it could well be that the father is right and that this is how we are meant to see these two remarkable characters; as people chosen by God to carry the light in through the darkness, to preserve humanity within themselves as examples, and that this is the reason why they seem somehow predestined to avoid moral degeneration. ("Between Dystopia and Utopia" 711)

The son has a natural mechanism to question every action or idea that they do and commit himself to his mission fully. When the father finds a heaven under the ground, a heaven of food and other utensils that they need for a long time, the son demands an explanation about whether using these materials are appropriate before touching them: “But they didn’t get to use it. No. They didn’t. They died. Yes. Is it okay for us to take it? Yes. It is. They would want us to. Just like we would want them to. They were the good guys? Yes. They were. Like us. Like us. Yes. So it’s okay. Yes. It’s okay.” (McCarthy 148). Though the owner of the place is dead, the son questions the legitimacy of the situation before acting and this is the sign of the importance of the fire that the father has kindled in his son.

The night before the father dies from his wounds, the son and father have their last conversation about a little boy the son has seen which emphasizes their definition of goodness:

Do you remember that little boy, Papa? Yes. I remember him. 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 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 had. It will again.
(McCarthy 300)

After the conversation, the father and the son sleep together and the father passes away. In this way, in the last dialogue that they have, the son gets his last warrant and his belief in goodness, in the fire, is consolidated one more time to continue for the rest of his life. Now that his father is dead, he begins to build a burial mound for

his father when the family discovers him. He takes the risk of going with the family in the hope of seeing the future.

Once the father had thought of killing both himself and his son to end the agony of living; however, he saw that he was not capable of doing it. As Søvting writes, “By not killing him he sets his son free; the boy is no longer his father’s custodian, he is his own keeper and his own destiny. He is an orphan and as such it could be said that his ties to the past have been severed and that his direction is the future” (Søvting 712). Thus, the father’s death has opened a new window to the son to be an ethical individual in an unethical world without having the protection of his father. It is time for the boy to apply the lessons he has learned on the road to continue the fight of survival and build his own future.

Through the death of the father and the discovery of the son by a new family of “good guys,” *The Road*, presents a kind of happy ending to a journey of survival after an apocalypse. The reader experiences the father, as Kevin Kearney writes in his article “Cormac McCarthy’s *The Road* and the Frontier of the Human”, as a man “trapped” in his fantasies of the past and refuses to “see the light,” and the son “outshined him mainly because he is pure in thought” (168). Along their journey, though the son has a stronger light, but he needed his father’s guidance, advice and stories to learn how to survive in the corruption, debauchery, greed, and destruction of the new World. In the end, by resisting corruption, he lives a life worth living. At the end, the son is able to walk the road without having his father physically guide him:

You said you wouldn’t ever leave me. I know. I’m sorry. You have my whole heart. You always did. You’re the best guy. You always

were. If I'm not here you can still talk to me. You can talk to me and I'll talk to you. You'll see. Will I Hear you? Yes. You will. You have to make it like talk that you imagine. And you'll hear me. You have to practice. Just don't give up. Okay? Okay. (*The Road* 298-299)

Since the father is made up of a thought, an idea, that is carried inside as a fire. Though his father is gone, the boy is able to talk to his father as a source of knowledge about a life worthy of living. Now, the father leaves his body and becomes a signifier. While his form has changed, his functions stay the same and are reshaped in the eyes of his son. From that perspective, Jacques Lacan's reading of Freud's death drive in his book *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, represents that the father is the "will to destruction, will to make a fresh start" and what is more, he is "a will to create from zero, a will to begin again" (212). The father's death will make his son hold on to life and turns the father from being the death drive to being the life instinct that can be called as a hopeful burn out to give a fresh start to both to the father and his son.

McCarthy uses the roads of a post-apocalyptic America as a source of deviation, destruction, and hopelessness contrary to the romanticized use of the road metaphor that signals new adventures full of life's joy. When paired with other road novels, *The Road* presents a different understanding of roads that are not always a place to seek out new life and adventures. In fact, they may be the main site of unhappiness, danger, sleepless nights, and the fear of death. Furthermore, the novel is a sign that the roads of America might be the end of life instinct due to the excessive consumption, consumerism and greed that turns life into an anxious circle of need

and acquisition. The novel's response is to start all over again, just like the father suggests to his son: "Let's start over" and the son replies "Okay" (McCarthy 285).



CONCLUSION

American road novels as a genre emerged in the mid-twentieth century as a literary presentation of a new experience of American living made possible by the construction of interstate highways, the availability of affordable cars, and a class of leisured or desperate people. Both nationally and, in time, internationally, the metaphor of the American road became a potent symbol of many real-life desires for exploration that found resonance in both writers and readers alike. As a result, there is a wide variety of expression within this genre with a wide variety of road works shaped according to the conventions and technologies of their time. In fact, road fictions function not only generically, but also as spaces that apply specific tropes and figures. Ronald Primeau gives place to Mikhail Bakhtin's well-known definition of *genre* in Primeau's book *Romance of the Road*, and this definition can extend this line of thinking: *genre* is a "[field] for future expression enabling authors and readers to create by absorption and modification of literary conventions. The genre collects and stores these predictable conventions for later use in what Bakhtin calls [genre memory]" (Primeau 2). Primeau explains Bakhtin's concept of "genre memory" as a field that enlarges the possibility of producing more works on a specific topic through the figuring and reconfiguring of specific conventions. In the end, this "genre memory" functions as a collection of modified creations and serves for the continuation of the genre. As long as the genre continues, new perspectives will be born as an inevitable consequence of this production. Thus, what Bakhtin states is a kind of proof of the existence of possible different readings of the road metaphor.

Specifically, in America, roads are perceived as a way of living, an instant exit door from conventional spaces through “an artistic rendering of life on the highway” (Primeau 1). As Rowland Sherrill claims “since the mid-1950s, an astonishing number of Americans have found themselves literally or imaginatively [on the road] in their country and have apparently felt compelled upon their returns to write about these various journeys through America” (1). One form of the road novel is an expression of liberation in movement; a form of a quest novel, and a celebration of living. This form is probably the most commercially successful and popularly well known. However, as I have demonstrated in this thesis, since there are a variety of road narratives, there is not only one form, experience, or reading of this metaphor. A critical analysis of these novels shows that each text ascribes a different meaning to the road and uses the road as a metaphor in a different way. Among the three, only one book, Jack Kerouac’s *On the Road*, employs the road as a site of discovery and adventure. It evokes a reading of the roads as they are commonly romanticised, especially in terms of motion, speed, travel and adventure. In Sal Paradise and his friends’ case, the road is a door to escape from the feeling of being trapped in a particular place when terra incognita waits for them to discover and explore different feelings with different people. They have an aimless aim to wander around the country and discover their own way of experiencing life. They dedicate themselves to the mysteries of the road with passion so that roads become their home to live this life. Kerouac makes his characters experience the endless opportunities of roads without pursuing other responsibilities in life such as having a family, being a decent parent, or working. There is nothing that they have to do, since they and the roads shape their lives spontaneously and mysteriously. The metaphor is shaped by

these ordinary ideas that focus on how one lives instead of why one lives. It is their way of rebellion against unquestioned social norms.

However, it is a mistake to see *On the Road* as the only form of the American road novel, since it is one example from among several contradictory or reimagined forms. As stated in the chapters above, the aim of this study has been to show the complexities and varieties of the road as a metaphor in American fiction to challenge existing definitions through readings of novels with different or divergent presentations of the road. Because as long as the authors of this wide genre continue producing different road fictions that goes beyond boyish adventures, different understandings of the genre will gain greater weight.

A reading of the road as a multiple, complicated and dynamic metaphor is essential to open new and different directions for the road novel. Traveling is an individual process in its essence and it does not necessarily have to be made to find oneself, to embark on a quest, to have adventures or to discover new elements of life. The reasons for travel can be varied and the narration of this process can illustrate both positive and negative experiences of road life. Thus, Yates and McCarthy draw different paths into and from this genre by providing possible alternative readings to the device of the road. These novels' existence is the most powerful evidence of the potential to change perspectives to look at road novels and suggest new and alternative paths. The road can be chaotic rather than a space of evolution or rebirth since the experience is individual even though the journey is made alone or with many people. Each of these travellers eventually has a different process on the road regarding to their perceptions or needs. Hence, the road metaphor can turn into a

battle of survival or a dead-end of inextricable struggles as in the cases of *The Road* and *Revolutionary Road*.

Unlike Kerouac's *On the Road*, Richard Yates, in *Revolutionary Road*, narrates a different road story and creates a totally different perception of road novels with his hysterically unhappy and hopeless couple, the Wheelers. Reading this text as a road novel reveals that there is a possibility of roads being a blind alley that promises nothing new, adventurous or revolutionary. There is no quest for a better self or for new discoveries in Yates' novel. Rather, the improvement of daily life is placed within the hope to be on the road, or to be somewhere else. The desires and dreams are left incomplete in this story; the Wheeler's stagnation is magnified by Frank's desire to remain planted in their Connecticut home. In this text, the road hides no new experiences along with new people or a new goal to aspire to. The Wheelers lose their desire to be in motion and lose everything they have by staying at rest. There is nothing that can be done to undo or prevent the unfortunate story of the couple since they could not end up on the hopeful side of the road. On the contrary, for them, the road expresses the nonfulfillment of their desires. What Yates achieves in his novel by choosing to narrate a road story different from more common ones is a kind of rebellion against the existing genre. He gives a completely new direction for road novels. It is indeed a success to present a completely different figure of an established form and have it accepted. The narration is a confrontation of the unpleasant reality and heaviness of dreams that lead to nothing "revolutionary."

In the novel, the car, one of the strongest elements of the road metaphor, does not even serve for the state of being ready to leave any moment. Since normally, the car is a kind of insurance to be off the road any time, as one can leave any moment

and be freer than ever within it. In the Wheelers' life, the car is used only to drive to and from work and using it in a different way is not even considered as one of the options of using it. It merely completes the businessman image of Frank and makes him look more attractive. Consequently, the Wheelers set an extreme example to the existing road genre as reactionary as possible. Yates gives a new pulse to the criticism of the road metaphor and puts an uncommon way of perceiving the truth of life and strength of desires. He leaves his reader face to face with the dark side of the road in which the road does not promise anything new.

Finally, Cormac McCarthy, as is analysed through this study, presents yet another reading of the road metaphor, which pushes off from both Kerouac and Yates' presentations. In *The Road*, McCarthy extends the road novel into the form of the dystopian novel, a post-apocalyptic story of a father and his son's journey. However, apart from the conditions of McCarthy's world, it is fundamentally a road story that changes the focus again to a different aim. The journey of father and son is not an aimless journey, not a search for adventure, and not a desire of discovery of the unknown. Rather, it is a journey for the survival of the father and his son. In their world, roads mean a game that is played in the edge of a fine line between life and death. They evade the dangers of being killed, eaten, or raped. They will not be able to survive if they stay where they are and their only choice is to keep going, even without knowing if their journey will be rewarded or not. They head south in the hope of finding a place which is more liveable, but life on the road is so cruel that it does not allow its travellers to maintain their hope. The father and his son felt so estranged in their world and reality that even though they try to "carry the fire," it becomes too hard to endure the conditions. This alienation does not turn them into

different human beings, they remain as good people as they were; however, the conditions push them so hard that their quest deglamorizes the road experience rather than romanticising it. In *The Road*, the metaphor is neither an adventure nor a dead end but simply a possibility of survival.

The main purpose behind this project has been to compare different types of road novels and show how they perform different artistic and rhetorical functions in the late 20th century in American literature. By doing so, one point is particularly important which increases the value of the project: to suggest a contemporary, new and unfamiliar alternative to read the road novels in the aim of changing the stereotyped and clichéd perspectives of the road metaphor. In this respect, the project aims to contribute to the body of existing scholarship by expanding the territory of the road novel, by suggesting a new point of view for reading road novels and by showing the different metaphors employed by American novelists in their presentation of American roads.

To serve this particular purpose of the project, these three different road books have been selected carefully and accordingly to provide evidence to the possibility of different readings of the metaphor. As a conclusion, it can be clearly seen that any work from any author can promise something new though they are located in the same genre which creates a necessity to read literary works from as many different perspectives as possible. American roads will continue to be discussed and utilized by authors and this variety will provide different forms of road fiction that can break the uniformity and bring freshness to the criticism of the road metaphor.

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