

The Contemporary Novel in the Context of Interdisciplinarity, With Specific Reference to DeLillo's *Zero K* and McCarthy's *The Road*

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Abstract—The interdisciplinary approach greatly enriches contemporary novels, allowing researchers to explore complex issues from a multiplicity of angles and perspectives. Communication and collaboration across different disciplines within novels, which some refer to as “consilience,” have had a noticeable impact on these novels’ literary elements and overall narrative. This paper will examine the impact of the interdisciplinary approach on themes, plot, and characterization on two selected contemporary novels: *Zero K* (2016) by Don DeLillo and *The Road* (2006) by Cormac McCarthy. It aims to provide a new reading of the two novels from an interdisciplinary perspective, demonstrating how a multidisciplinary approach reveals more meanings and aspects that cannot be revealed as effectively when examined from the viewpoint of a stand-alone discipline.

Index Terms—contemporary novel, interdisciplinarity, disciplinarity, Postmodernism

I. INTRODUCTION

As an approach to literary analysis, Interdisciplinarity has gained more prominence recently. The approach centers around creating a dialogue, within a text or among texts, between different disciplines and deepens the multilayered nature of knowledge that disciplinarity alone cannot achieve. Abraham Gomez (2020) states that “interdisciplinarity can likewise be applied to complex subjects that can only be understood by combining the perspectives of two or more fields” (p. 1). What this means is that what the epistemological framework for interdisciplinarity offers is wider, deeper, and more multiple and pluralistic than what stand-alone disciplinarity might offer.

The contemporary novel is fertile ground for discussion of interdisciplinarity because the approach has gained more momentum, particularly under Modernism and Postmodernism, two movements that allow for multiplicity of perspectives and hybridity, and because of the novel’s overall broader and more spacious scope than, say, shorter stories, poems, and even plays. Such a scope allows novelists the space needed to discuss issues more intricately and interconnectedly and link them with more complex areas of knowledge. Ihab Hassan tackles the issue of the plurality of postmodernism, stating that it “itself has become the irritable condition of postmodern discourse, consuming many pages of both critical and uncritical inquiry” (p. 1).

In order to demonstrate how this happens, this paper will analyze two contemporary novels: *Zero K* by Don DeLillo and *The Road* by Cormac McCarthy. The paper tackles how, generally speaking, interdisciplinarity functions within these two Postmodern novels, thus enriching the epistemological context for the ideas raised in the two novels. Moreover, the paper will also analyze its impact on several literary elements in the two novels, such as characters, plot, and themes. The novels chosen in this study are suitable for the interdisciplinary approach because of the complex, interconnected issues they discuss and the profound, thorough questions they raise.

Zero K (2016) is an apocalyptic novel written by the noted American novelist Don DeLillo who engages himself with a host of contemporaneous issues, such as war, the digital age, politics, the future, religion, and terrorism. His novel *Zero K* is an embodiment of complex issues and ideas that serve well to be examined under the umbrella of the interdisciplinary approach because a variety of disciplines integrate and intertwine to create an insightful space for discussion.

The second novel, *The Road* (2006), was written by the American Pulitzer-winning novelist Cormac McCarthy, who has produced a number of post-apocalyptic novels and is known for his intense plots, dense prose, and overall complexity. *The Road* is a science fiction horror novel that is considered dystopian as well as a parody of the Gothic genre; it is also considered an odyssey of a post-apocalyptic America (Ibarrola-Armenariz, 2011), tackling ideas that can best be analyzed by using an interdisciplinary approach.

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The research methodology used in this study is interdisciplinarity, which is seen as an approach to literary analysis that is innovative, multifaceted, and transformative. The way interdisciplinarity integrates knowledge and insights from different disciplines and different disciplinary perspectives speaks to its ability to tackle the intricate issues in what has come to be known for some time now as the postmodern world. Jameson (1992) illustrates how Postmodernism marked an end to Modernism to herald a new stage of society that is a break from what had happened before (p. 53), or a "departure," as Edward Said would say in the preface of his book *Beginnings, Intention, and Method* (1975). This kind of break, or "departure" is also a break from the disciplinary nature of thought. Moreover, it demonstrates the ability to develop different cohesive disciplines of knowledge, in what has been referred to by some theorists as "consilience," which one discipline is incapable of generating. In *Consilience* (1999), Edward O. Wilson emphasizes the importance of linking the sciences and humanities, highlighting how this connection prevents the fragmentation and chaos of knowledge (p. 5). Thus, interdisciplinarity, as a theoretical framework that functions within the activity of consilience, helps to hybridize knowledge within the text and aids in reorganizing information presented by the author.

The study will be analytical. It will approach each selected novel and analyze in some detail the way interdisciplinarity functions within the novel. The study's main aim, however, is to trace the impact of interdisciplinarity on the novel and examine how the interaction of a variety of disciplines, such as physics and philosophy, for example, influences the novel as a text and a genre. Clearly, the paper will give examples from each selected novel and highlight the main aspects of interdisciplinarity as manifested in them.

Overall, not much has been written on the two novels, especially in so far as interdisciplinarity is concerned first because the novels themselves are relatively recent and because the interdisciplinary approach is a recent development as well. Nevertheless, there have been important studies conducted on the novels, as the references in the study and the bibliography will show. In addition, this paper aims to briefly highlight some of those studies that are particularly relevant to our study.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

In his paper titled "Identity and Language in Don DeLillo's *Zero K*", Dong (2019) examines identity and language in *Zero K*. His paper is an analysis of how language and identity are striking elements in the novel, especially since they are framed within the contemporary life of America and, indeed, the world. The author underscores that "DeLillo has the intention to explore and inject an organic relationship between language and identity by means of humanist language" (p. 144).

In another paper titled "What Does It Mean to Be Human? Speculative Ekphrasis and Anthropocene Trauma in Don DeLillo's *Zero K*", Oyvund Vagnes (2020) examines how DeLillo fictionalizes the events in his novel and highlights its ekphrastic "visual work of art" (p. 141) moments. The paper studies the ramifications of the parallel emergence of what is referred to in critical discourse as "the Anthropocene" and "the posthuman subject" (p. 3). It also studies the narrative technique DeLillo uses, which he describes as speculative fiction or science fiction.

In his paper titled "Ethnics of Beings in Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*" (2019), Aylin Alkac examines how McCarthy raises questions about survival and the ethical responsibility of being alive in a world ravaged by an unnamed catastrophic disaster. He states that "Unlike science-fiction dystopias, which present worlds with meticulously detailed political and social institutions in alien yet uncannily familiar settings, in the dystopic setting of *The Road*, the earth is devoid of almost any signs of civilization" (p. 72). The author suggests that the boy's moral ethics of being are different from the father's; consequently, the contextualization of characters reflects how they are morally different in responding to the survival cause.

In Lydia Cooper's "Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* as Apocalyptic Grail Narrative," the article describes how McCarthy's novel diverges from his earlier realistic novels. It analyzes how the novel depicts the apocalyptic horror following an unnamed disaster and explores why the novel is considered an apocalyptic grail narrative. Cooper states that "*The Road* examines pervasive apocalyptic fears in order to explore if and how the human project may be preserved" (p. 219). She compares the novel to other works, such as T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*, and it traces the apocalyptic elements there.

III. THE INTERDISCIPLINARITY APPROACH

Before delving into an analysis of the two novels, it is important to present a brief review of related literature on the concept of interdisciplinarity as a theoretical or critical base. Even though the subject is relatively recent, several critics and theorists have written about it, and research on the subject is wide and complex. Many writers have investigated interdisciplinarity as a means of integrating and progressing ideas and themes within and across texts. The movement toward interdisciplinarity in research has been one of the most prominent trends in recent science, literature, and other disciplines. Klein, for example, draws attention to the new reshaping of knowledge in the 21st century when interdisciplinarity penetrated many fields of knowledge so as to answer complex questions and explore new relations between disciplines (p. 11).

Due to the fact that the interdisciplinary perspective is an element of enrichment based on the notion that the knowledge and input of many disciplines are working together in the same work, writers tend to examine the importance of

interdisciplinarity and the added value it embodies. In his (2013) article “Perspectives on the Importance of Interdisciplinarity,” Adam Oliver highlights the interdisciplinary dialogue and the promises it achieves within a text. He clarifies that the mission to include interdisciplinarity in many fields, such as economics and science, is an important practice in academia. He goes on to explain how people with different perspectives and disciplinary backgrounds are often a mixture that brings something original and new. He also confirms that “attempts to enrich Discipline A with well-established findings from elsewhere ought to be applauded” (p. 375).

Zeroing in on interdisciplinarity as a theoretical framework, Joseph Kocklemans (1983) states that “the written and spoken forms of communication embody a further property of discourse, that of commonality, common values, beliefs, perceptions, concepts, ideas, and questions” (p. 13). In other words, the contemporary novel as a text includes features, values, and ideas that are the outcome of the interplay and integration among several disciplines. The power of interdisciplinarity, one infers from Kocklemans, is that it places themes and plots in a wider and broader context, a context that crosses borders, diversifies angles of vision, and enables the amalgam of thematic crossings and breakthroughs.

As a result of using the interdisciplinary approach, a new type of knowledge emerges, one that is a mixture of a variety of disciplines. In this sense, the novel becomes a catalyst, enabling the “consilience” of knowledge to happen. Welch (2011) asserts that “the interdisciplinary approach to knowledge is a logical evolution of Western thought and an innovative answer to the epistemological project” (p. 1). This kind of approach adds to the epistemology of any work because once the writer chooses to employ the interdisciplinary approach, his or her work becomes richer, profounder, and more allusive.

After examining several studies adopting the interdisciplinary approach and those on interdisciplinarity, the researchers find that we have three orientations: critics who work theoretically with interdisciplinarity, critics who are doing practical research on real-world problems using the interdisciplinary approach, and critics who are working on relevant concepts and methods. In this study the researchers make use of the three orientations.

IV. INTERDISCIPLINARITY IN THE TWO NOVELS

Contemporary literature is responsive to the world around us. The contemporary novel, naturally, is a reflection of the reality of its own time and a kind of instrument for framing and discussing events, people, places, politics, and societal issues. In *The Contemporary British Novel since 2017*, James Acheon illustrates how the complex world after the Second World War gave rise to the contemporary novel, and the research about it includes postmodernism, postcolonialism, and globalization (p. 1). The emergence of new social issues and the acceleration of technological advancements expedited the arrival of an interdisciplinary literature that is able to articulate and interpret problems on a deeper level. Pamela Bickley (2008) illustrates in this context that “fiction has emerged as a vibrant and inventive genre, exploring the diversity of the contemporary world and frequently experimenting with form and language” (p. 6). It engages with what is happening in the time of each novel and generates new thoughts, tools, and forms of understanding by integrating different disciplines and being itself a transformative type of literature.

In order to highlight how interdisciplinarity manifests itself in novels, the researchers offer the example of *Zero K* by Don DeLillo. In a complex novel such as *Zero K*, many disciplines intertwine and coalesce to address crucial issues such as mortality and human fear. This postmodern science fiction novel presents a billionaire whose name is Ross and who cryonically freezes characters in a location known as the Convergence, causing them to be suspended in an endless state of death. This very facility, one immediately concludes, is built on the idea of the integration of science, technology, and religion. The facility as a scientific futuristic project appears in Part 5 of the novel when Ross explains how it functions and uses “clinical specimens” (p. 47), “metempsychosis” (p. 48), and “capsules, vials, syringes, and respirators” (p. 49) to freeze bodies, like that of Artis the first character that is anesthetized and frozen, and revive them later in the future. This scientific approach is questioned ethically by Jeffery, who grows disillusioned and skeptical once he sees the facility, dead bodies, and his mother-in-law in such a gothic place. The religious side appears once the monk has a conversation with Jeffery; the conversation between the monk and Jeffery exemplifies, the intertwining of religion and science, leaving Jeffery to question the monk's presence in such a place.

Further dimensions of interdisciplinarity appear when the monk explains his journey to the Convergence, sharing historical facts about ancient Egypt, astrophysics, architecture, the expanse of galaxies, particles of matter, satellites, orbits, and oceans (p. 41). This conversation among the characters enriches the novel thematically, but it also reflects the effect of interdisciplinarity. It helps explore significant ideas, such as economics and politics, by referencing Chelyabinsk, a central city in Russia, and religious themes by mentioning 12th-century Jerusalem (p. 42). The parallel between the Convergence and Jerusalem is especially significant: “This place might not have been intended as the new Jerusalem, but people made long journeys to find a form of higher being here, or at least a scientific process that will keep their body tissue from decomposing” (p. 43). The Monk's job at the Convergence is also significant; he talks to sick people before they get frozen. This religious and spiritual power of the monk adds to the interdisciplinary dimension of the facility.

The interdisciplinary approach, once applied and used in any text, affects the way the author narrates his or her plot and embeds themes. *Zero K* is a novel that encompasses lots of themes that revolve around current issues the world is suffering from. DeLillo sets the first part of the narrative in the deserts of central Asia, inside “the Convergence. “He uses this very setting to raise a very important philosophical idea, which is mortality. Mortality has been a complex, controversial, challenging, and debatable issue for ages. Over time, depending on their ideology or faith, people have

been dealing with the idea of mortality from different points of view, depending on their ideology or faith. To address such a complex idea, DeLillo resorts to different disciplines such as religion, science, and ecology. The idea of cryonic suspension is a scientific, futuristic idea whose aim is to revive the body.

Another important theme is money and the global economy. Ross, as a billionaire, sets his intention on becoming even richer but also having the power to control the future of the world by employing his capital in a project that uses science and technological advances to achieve his target. He declares, "This is the future, this remoteness, this sunken dimension. Solid, but also elusive in a way. A set of coordinates mapped from space. And one of our objectives is to establish a consciousness that blends with the environment" (p. 11). Even Ross's intention is interdisciplinary; he wants to own the end of the world, control its future, gain money, and use technology and science to do so. He uses his sick second wife as a "laboratory rat" to experiment with his new technology. In the new facility, advancing technologies will refresh organs in the future using embryonic stem cells and nanobots. The mortal remains of the body will be revived using nanotechnology. This integration between applied science and applied capitalism widens DeLillo's discussion and allows him to highlight how the world humans live in is controlled technology and those with the most money. Ross is fully confident in the process of the facility, unlike his son Jeffery, who is totally skeptical about it. DeLillo creates Ross as a multilayered character to serve his themes and creates flexibility of discussion by moving among Ross' role as a father, capitalist, ecologist, futuristic and apocalyptic businessman.

At the novel's thematic level, many disciplines such as science, religion, philosophy, psychology, and even ecology function to feed into complex issues that concern humanity, including life after death, mortality, human existence, and family relations. The apocalyptic future in the Convergence is questionable to Ross's son, but it is a lifetime project for the father. Everyday life events are mixed up with the imaginary science fiction of the Convergence. According to Anne Dalke (2006), "Interdisciplinarity brings together the products of focused inquiry to uncover broader patterns, meaningful in themselves, and generations of new directions of disciplinary activities" (p. 11).

The connection between different disciplines endows DeLillo with more tools to generate new meanings of life, death, future, and other issues. Moreover, the interdisciplinary approach in the novel deepens our understanding of the characters' psychology. Ross reveals his true intention to amass wealth from the facility and admits that he wants tons of money (p. 33). Additionally, a sociological perspective allows us to examine characters' behaviors and interactions from multiple angles. Artis's maternal side is evident in her warm conversation with Jeffery (p. 47), while her scientific mindset as an architect shines through when she tries to convince Jeffery of the project's feasibility and expresses her firm belief in her eventual revival. Thematically speaking, the interdisciplinary approach within *Zero K* functions by integrating knowledge, methods, and perspectives from religion, biology, chemistry, and technology to address the questions surrounding morality, death, the dystopian future, time, the coming apocalypse, resurrection, money, family relations, security, and even history. These are prominent themes in the novel discussed with tools from different disciplines.

Ross, as a capitalist, integrates the sciences to develop a more comprehensive understanding or to develop innovative solutions to the problems of illness and death. He uses these methods to be a part-owner of the future. The preservation of healthy organs in pods, nanotechnology, and freezing are tools to help him do so. Correspondingly, the way DeLillo narrates his novel varies between the scientific and the fictional. The first part of the novel, which is set in the Convergence, is narrated in a tone of dissection. Thus, the first part is an integration of sciences such as biology and chemistry; the researchers see the pace of narration as that of scientific dissection. The parts of the events, the description of the weird doors, the screens, the corpses, and all the surroundings in the facility are constructed in a way that helps the pace of the events show the science fiction aspect of the novel. Artis admits: "I know that research is being done here, somewhere in this complex, on future models of human vision. Experiments using robots, lab animals, and who knows, people like me" (p. 45).

The complexity of the issues DeLillo discusses requires the space interdisciplinarity creates to let different disciplines interact productively and holistically to tackle these issues from multiple perspectives. According to Klein (2021) in her article "Unity of Knowledge and Transdisciplinarity Contexts of Definition, Theory, and the New Discourse of Problem Solving," broader issues can be addressed by using and understanding knowledge from different disciplines, and by using different vocabulary from multiple disciplines; a unity of knowledge, therefore, can be achieved. Klein also draws attention to the use of different vocabulary from multiple disciplines, which produces new knowledge in the text (p. 11). DeLillo in *Zero K* uses different jargon from different fields of knowledge. The usage of medical words such as "glaucoma," ecological words such as "earthquake" and "climate," and scientific words such as "cryonic suspension", "Convergence," "facility", and "nanotechnology" (p. 35) enhances the purpose of DeLillo's novel to address complex issues such as climate change, ecological problems, human errors, death, and mortality. The jargon of each field of knowledge integrates with other jargons from other fields of knowledge to help the writer craft his discussion of the complex issues around which the events revolve. The comments DeLillo wants to highlight about ecological problems and his concentration of ideas such as time, death, the coming apocalypse, and resurrection need language that is capable of handling such topics. The ethical questions he raises about the authority of money, greed, family disconnection, politics, and others are integrated within the events of the novel and fluctuate between the facility and everyday realms of life.

Interdisciplinarity is reflected in characterization as well. Artis, for example, is not arbitrarily chosen as an archeologist. The very theme of the novel is mortality and how humans may or may not be capable enough to challenge time and extend their lives. As an archeologist herself, Artis is the one who is well-acquainted with human history and prehistory through

the excavation of sites and the analysis of artifacts and other physical remains. Archeology is itself a multidisciplinary field that contains aspects of anthropology, history, geography, and other sciences to reconstruct and understand human behavior, as explained by Jeffery (p. 47). Archeologists use a variety of methods, including excavation, surveying, laboratory analysis, and technology, to uncover the secrets of humans. "Artis knew the rigors of science. She had worked in a number of countries and taught at several universities. She had observed, identified, investigated, and explained many levels of human development" (p. 47).

DeLillo engages himself in a metaphysical inquiry into the field of science fiction to be able to draw his characters in a way that is interdisciplinary too. Ross is a billionaire who got wealthy by "analyzing the profit impact of natural disasters" (p. 14). This man invests his money in the project to use science and technology to freeze ill people through a process called Zero K—the very title of the novel. The protagonist, Ross, is a capitalist who invests his money in the late capitalism era and tries to use innovative, diverse methods to challenge the very concept of death. The novel starts with a very controversial, multilayered comment by Ross: "Everybody wants to own the end of the world" (p. 3). This opening sentence might summarize the intention of Ross and his new establishment. His wife Artis is an archeologist who suffers from multiple sclerosis; she is at the Convergence in order to be frozen and preserved until a medical cure can be found, then she might be restored to life.

In the novel, Jeffery represents the old-fashioned disciplinary mindset that Ross repeatedly tries to awaken and warn against. Ross advises Jeffery, saying, "You have to get beyond your experience, beyond your limitations" (p. 35). Despite witnessing the project's realization, Jeffery remains skeptical. Even after seeing the project erected, Jeffery still disbelieves in the whole project. He tells his father, "I guess I would have believed it. But I am here, and it's all around me, and I have trouble believing it" (p. 35). This kind of limitation represents the disciplinary mind, which is inadequate to absorb what's going on around the world. The interdisciplinary approach enables DeLillo to narrate the novel in a unique manner, providing him with various tools to develop his characters in distinct and multifaceted ways.

After discussing the impact of the interdisciplinary approach on the plot, themes, and characterization, its impact on the narrative itself will be highlighted. DeLillo sets the first part of the novel in the desert of central Asia in a facility called "the Convergence." He uses this setting to explore a very important and recurrent idea, which is mortality. Mortality is a complex idea that DeLillo presents in this novel in a new, innovative way—a way that is a mix between science, religion, and everyday life. Ross describes his project as "faith-based technology. That's what it is. Another god" (p. 9). He describes his project to his son, trying to convince him of the validity and efficiency of his project. He declares that the project is an integration of different scientific fields. He says, "There's a meaning in mathematics. There's a meaning in biology. There's a meaning in physiology" (p. 9). The concept of mortality, it is to be inferred, is complex and cannot be adequately addressed by a single discipline. Here it should be highlighted that another function of the interdisciplinary approach in generating meaning.

This approach fills in the gaps in our understanding of the concept of mortality. For example, biology explores the nature of the human body and the decay of organs. Mathematics relates to economics and the benefits of building such a facility, allowing Ross to control not only the end of the world but also people's lives and destinies. Meanwhile, physiology examines the functions of cells and organs, which are central to Ross's project. This is precisely the function of the interdisciplinary approach that this study aims to highlight: integrating different fields of knowledge to achieve a broader understanding of a complex idea or question. Ross, while trying to convince his son about the project, states:

Think about this, what is here and who is here. Think about the end of all the petty misery you've been hoarding for years. Think beyond personal experience. Leave it back there. What's happening in this community is not just a creation of medical science. There are social theories involved, and biologists, and futurists, and geneticists, and climatologists, and neuroscientists, and psychologist, and ethicist, if that's the right word. (p. 33)

In the science fiction genre, the inclusion of precise scientific or medical details enhances the credibility and accuracy of the narrative. For example, Ross encourages his son to believe in his project by presenting scientific evidence. He says, "Think of the age of the earth, the geological eras, and oceans appearing and disappearing. Think of the age of the galaxy, the age of the universe. All those billions of years. And us, you and me" (p. 33). Additionally, the scientific description of black and white people on the big screens is interwoven with ecological descriptions of tornadoes (p. 36), effectively likening human catastrophes, such as death, to natural disasters.

Like DeLillo's *Zero K*, Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* (2006) is an interdisciplinary contemporary novel. The novel is the journey of a father and his son across a post-apocalyptic American landscape after an unspecified catastrophe that has struck the world. Throughout the course of the novel, the boy and his father are surrounded by unbearable, severe conditions and obstacles such as cannibals, bad weather, devastation, and rotted corpses. In this novel, McCarthy integrated a variety of ideas: ecology, the spectrum of humanity, the future, the past, civilizational decline, pollution, climate change, and many others (p. 17). All these notions are presented through symbolism and an allegorical journey the father and his son taking to reach the coast, thinking that it might be their shelter and resort to find themselves amidst worse conditions.

McCarthy uses a variety of disciplines, such as ecology and religion, to warn us against the dangers of catastrophic problems, such as climate change. Botany plays a significant role in this novel, as the father and son continuously study various plants, including morels (p. 39), rhododendrons, and pears (p. 40). They discuss these plants in detail to determine their edibility. Geography is also prominently featured; the use of maps (p. 42) and the discussion of various deteriorated

geographical locations highlight the decay of flora and fauna, the barren areas, and the eradication of many areas on Earth following the unnamed catastrophe. Therefore, this geographical focus underscores the widespread devastation caused by the unnamed catastrophe and illustrates the changed landscape through which the characters travel. Environmental science is also present in the novel. The depiction of a post-apocalyptic world with decayed flora and fauna emphasizes the impact of environmental degradation. The novel explores themes of ecological collapse and the fragility of the natural world. For example, when the father and his son pass by their former home, they encounter devastation, decayed trees, and desolate barren fields (p. 27). Ironically, they find the bones of a small animal, "possibly a cat" (p. 26). The decay and transformation of living things are so extreme that the bones are unrecognizable. *The Road* also has a sociological commentary when it examines the breakdown of social structures and the collapse of civilization. The interactions between the few remaining people, like the father and his son, the struggle for resources, and the loss of social norms provide a commentary on human behavior and social organization in extreme conditions.

The underlying religious commentary and ideas are implicitly stated in the novel. Once the father and the boy see "the bad guys" (p. 103), who are criminals and commit many sins such as rape and murder, they feel anxious and worried. The father shoots in the forehead the one who attacks his son as a kind of self-defense and leaves wondering if they are actually "good guys" (p. 103). This cycle of good and evil is a Christian-based idea. Are humans good or sinful by nature? The father carries a pistol to protect his son and defend himself (p. 5). The integration between the natural disasters around them and the unforgiving circumstances they encounter with their nature as humans shows the role of interdisciplinarity and how it helps to further the discussion and deepen the complex symbolic ideas in the novel.

The post-apocalypse genre of the novel is a subgenre of science fiction that heralds the end of the world. Within such a complex genre, interdisciplinarity functions to integrate knowledge and help tackle the struggle to survive in the future. Hill et al. (2018) examined post-apocalyptic literature and its importance as a survival tool, saying that "the post-apocalyptic novel demonstrates literature's ability to communicate messages about humanity and the human experience" (p. 1). During the course of the novel, McCarthy discusses mankind's struggle to survive and their attempt to reach safety. The journey taken by the father and his son is an allegory of humans' attempts to find shelter, food, and safety. During this journey, they witness some environmental traces of disasters such as bad weather, climate change, and the extinction of species. All these threaten the existence of humankind on Earth. The interdisciplinary approach in the novel is an integrative tool that allows the narration to view the natural disasters from multiple perspectives: ecological, biological, sustainable, economic, political, religious, and even anthropological.

Another important point related to the impact of the interdisciplinary approach in *The Road* is posthumanism in the novel. Posthumanism is an important theoretical framework. In her article "The Era of Posthumanism: Guest Editor's Introduction," Nina N. Sosna (2022) illustrates how the human factor has changed; she highlights how the shift in the position of the human element influences many aspects such as politics, society, and philosophy (p. 180). Throughout the course of the novel, McCarthy lets the worlds of humans, nonhumans, and even technology intersect. Consequently, the question of what role humans play in determining the fate of the Earth is apparently raised. The undetected disaster that caused the extinction of animals, humans, plants, and other species, is clearly man-made. The connectedness of humans with plants, animals, inanimate objects, and the environment is also interdisciplinary. The anthropocentric question of the centrality of humans on Earth is also a very crucial and complex one. McCarthy in the novel correlates ecology, biochemistry, and other sciences to show how humans are responsible for the disasters around us and gives a futuristic vision about what might face the Earth later if human errors continue to prevail. The representation of the devastation of the social, economic, and political structures of civilization in the novel is a result of the disaster caused by humans. Even the beauty of nature fades during the description of barren fields and the rarity of any natural elements such as trees or plants. The father and his son push their shopping cart, searching for food and water to survive. Human consumerism, which is gigantic, greedy, and extravagant, is minimized to a small shopping cart. Not only are civilization and nature ruined, but human greed for consumerism and ownership.

In *The Road*, the catastrophic events that have devastated the world are depicted with such intensity that "no sign of life" (p. 21) remains. They find "everything as it once had been saved, faded, and weathered" (p. 8). The aftermath of what appear to be natural disasters, including earthquakes, suggests human culpability, as seen on page 28. The father and son journey through this desolate landscape, constantly in search of shelter and sustenance. McCarthy underscores the ecological devastation through the portrayal of the erratic and harsh weather, highlighting its severity and impact on the environment. This fluctuating climate exacerbates their struggle for survival, painting a bleak picture of a world in ruins.

An important aspect of the interdisciplinary approach is the ability to raise and explore complex questions. In *The Road*, McCarthy delves into profound existential inquiries about life and death. For instance, he poses the question, "How else would death call you?" (p. 21). This question reflects the omnipresence of death in the lifeless environment surrounding the boy and his father, where every element seems to herald their demise. McCarthy further complicates these existential questions with questions like, "How does the never differ from what was never?" (p. 32). Such a profound question transcends the scope of any single discipline, inviting insights from philosophy, theology, and even science to understand the nature of existence and non-existence. Throughout the novel, McCarthy attempts to grapple with these questions through a spiritual lens. He presents the boy as "the last host of Christendom" (p. 16), suggesting a religious and symbolic significance to their journey. The father's reflection – "He knew only that the child was his warrant. He said, "If he is not

the word of God, God never spoke” (p. 5) – underscores the boy's embodiment of hope and divinity in a world devoid of life. This spiritual dimension adds layers of meaning to the existential questions McCarthy raises, indicating that the search for answers is not confined to one domain but spans multiple disciplines.

Even the seemingly simple questions posed by the son to his father are imbued with complexity and require deep contemplation. The boy, in his nascent understanding of the world, frequently asks his father about the nature of their surroundings, as illustrated by his question, “What is it, Papa?” (p. 33). These inquiries often leave the father silent or hesitant to respond, reflecting the weight of the answers and the uncertainty of their situation. The father's primary focus is on protecting his son, symbolized by the pistol he carries, and ensuring they find food and shelter. However, through the course of the novel, McCarthy subtly provides answers to these profound questions by weaving in elements from various disciplines such as religion, ecology, and psychology. This interdisciplinary approach enriches the narrative and offers a multifaceted exploration of human behavior and existence. Ecologically, McCarthy presents a world ravaged by environmental disasters, with fluctuating and severe weather conditions that complicate their survival. This portrayal raises questions about humanity's impact on the environment and the consequences of ecological neglect. Psychologically, the father's protective instincts and the boy's curiosity reflect the fundamental human drive for survival and understanding, even in the face of overwhelming adversity. The boy's questions and the father's responses (or lack thereof) highlight the emotional and mental toll of their journey. By integrating knowledge from these diverse fields, McCarthy not only addresses the existential questions posed by the characters but also invites readers to ponder the broader implications of human behavior, survival, and the search for meaning in a post-apocalyptic world.

V. CONCLUSION

The researchers hope they have shown that the interdisciplinary approach is an eye-opener to understanding a novel. It provides enhanced tools to tackle complex issues and answer complex questions pertaining to the contemporary novel. Interdisciplinarity links ideas and integrates different types of knowledge from different fields to create a wider space for discussion. More importantly, it links problems, issues, perspectives, and questions to corresponding ideas in different fields of knowledge. As a complex text, the contemporary novel discusses ideas of depth that require more than one discipline to understand. The universal patterns of different disciplines correspond to understanding an idea such as climate change, furthering its discussion, widening its horizons of thought, and enabling the writer to open new channels of discussion.

The interconnectedness of fields of knowledge in the modern world entails that all realms work together. This means that any topic tackled within a literary text is pushed beyond its disciplinarity into other disciplines in order to be understood and tackled more profoundly. This is exactly what happens in *Zero K* and *The Road* when characters are created, themes are furthered, and the plot takes a wider space to discuss issues that are complex and go beyond the boundaries of one discipline. In both novels, the interdisciplinary approach is employed to enrich discussion and deepen the understanding of meaning. The contemporary novel as a text that tackles current issues needs such an approach to be able to break loose from the confinement of disciplinarity.

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