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# Explorations in Ecocriticism: Reading the Select Novels of Cormac McCarthy in the Light of Anthropocentrism and Cartesian Thinking.

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Objective

The objective of this study is to show McCarthy's sense of concern for nature, animals and the environment. He displays a sense of concern for the environment which is treated as the 'other'.

Hypothesis:

Cormac McCarthy has often been hailed as a writer's writer. His writings are difficult to classify as they evoke a complex perspective. To show his concern of nature being treated as the 'other'. His select fiction will be critically studied with reference to Anthropocentrism and Cartesian thinking.

Research Methodology:

The research methodology involves a close reading of McCarthy's novels. It includes analysing them in a critical manner. An inter-textual reading of his novels is needed to shed light on the aspects of his novels. Along with this a close study of Ecocriticism is needed. The research methodology involves a detailed study of the concepts of Anthropocentrism and

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Cartesian thinking. It's necessary to perform a comparative analysis of the select novels of Cormac McCarthy.

Review of Literature:

For the uninitiated reader, Cormac McCarthy constitutes an entire universe waiting to be explored. It's not surprising that he has cited Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick* as his favourite book, for much of his work has the same inexhaustible scope as that weighty tome. A rugged individualist and premiere stylist, McCarthy unflinchingly confronts human nature, particularly the dark, discomfiting regions—often without the ballast of redemption or justification. Early in his career, owing a great debt to William Faulkner (he even had the same editor as that Mississippi writer), he was perceived as a distinctly regionalist writer, couching his compelling, insular go thics in the hills and hollows of Appalachia. In 1985, with *Blood Meridian*, his attention shifted to the vast flatness of the West, a canvas that seemed to provide his muse and inspire larger scope and ambition. His style also crystallized into a heightened language that came off as both timeless and antiquarian, and that seemed to draw on and ultimately sublimate Melville, the Bible, and Ernest Hemingway. Now far from just being a Southern or Western regionalist, he had fashioned his own novelistic world. As Richard B. Woodward asserted, "There isn't anyone remotely like him in contemporary American literature" (*ibid*.). By the early 1990s, as he embarked on the Border Trilogy, McCarthy had come to believe that the novel could, as he put it, "encompass all the various disciplines and interests of humanity" (*ibid.*). During the '80s and '90s, first with *Blood Meridian* and then with the famed Border Trilogy—*All the Pretty Horses*, *The Crossing*, and *Cities of the Plain*—he seemed to realize that ambition. Eminent literary critic Harold Bloom ventured that "[n]o other living novelist ... has given us a book as strong and memorable as *Blood Meridian*," regarding it "an American and a universal tragedy of blood" (pp. 254–

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255). Others saw in his work the knee-trembling resonance of the Old Testament, with landscapes "wide, blazing, and biblical with conflagrations" (Bradfield, "Mystery"). In his weighty parables, he summoned a different vision of the country, "a non-pop culture America" that, while often set in the twentieth century, possessed a primordial and ageless sense of era. McCarthy's characterizations also placed him in the lineage of great books. *Blood Meridian*'s Judge Holden, for example, an enormous, malevolent man of great intellect, eloquent oratory, and terrifyingly violent intent, is as complex, terrible, and fascinating as Melville's Ahab, Shakespeare's Iago, and Joseph Conrad's Kurtz. *The Crossing*'s Billy Parham, on the other hand, is a classic quest hero rendered anew and placed in the borderlands. And Parham's complexity lies in his actions: In book 1, when after much trial he captures a pregnant she-wolf that has been pillaging the livestock, Parham becomes possessed with the idea of setting her free across the border, in the Mexican mountains .Thus he sets out, caring for the injured wolf and towing her along on this improbable journey. The elephant in the room, however, is McCarthy's vividly rendered violence, which often saturates his novels. (Bloom admits to first being put off by *Blood Meridian*, flinching from the "overwhelming carnage" [p. 225].) This is an ever-present element in McCarthy's work, from the grisly green skull of the decomposing, murdered father inhis very first novel, *The Orchard Keeper* (1965), which becomes the book's imagistic whirlpool ("leering and coming up through the lucent rotting water with eyeless sockets"),to the American Southwest and Mexico of *Blood Meridian*, a landscape in which,

as London's *Independent* put it, "human beings chop, defile, massacre, maim, and dismember one another in every conceivable fashion" (Bradfield, "Twilight Cowboy"). In *Child of God* (1973), a cave-dwelling serial killer engaging in acts of necrophilia movesgorily through the narrative, while in *Outer Dark* (1968), a shocking campfire infanticide is rendered in brutal detail.

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Even in the relatively recent *No Country for Old Men*(2005), a merciless and automaton-like assassin named Anton Chigurh drives the plot head long. In response to those who would decry such themes and imagery, McCarthy has said, “There’s no such thing as life without bloodshed” (Woodward, “Venomous Fiction”).Violence and death have, in fact, become his idiom as he engages in a distinct brand of heightened (if savage) realism. Of his predecessors, he has said that he considers greatonly those writers who directly “deal with issues of life and death” (*ibid.*). In his Western novels he presents a different kind of history, an anti-mythology of the often-romanticized American West; his is a visceral history that renders in microscopic detail the bloodshed that “real” historical narratives politely step over. Like Joseph Conrad before him, McCarthy unfurls the great paradox of civilization—i.e., that new frontiers are tamed and “civilized” through barbaric means. McCarthy writes from the perspective of the self-exiled outcast. In this way, he has understood and created fiction on his own terms. Meaning is the province of authority, and McCarthy is not interested in making people obedient to intellect. In fact, the development of his own intellect was taken outside of all institutions except for, maybe, the Catholic Church. McCarthy’s embrace, rejection, and renunciation of Catholicism is one of the more remarkable features of his later work sand will be discussed in the chapters about specific works. While McCarthy’s novels portray an early twentieth-century America in which cowboys, rural settings, and romantic loners figure prominently, there also are substantial engagements with contemporary issues such as the war on drugs and nuclear war. This duality—that is, a willingness to be topical as well as exploring transcendent values such as heroism, truth, religion, and God—is one reason for the intense loyalty and interest of McCarthy’s readership.

As a novelist, Cormac McCarthy explores different ideas and perspectives. He forges a world of horror and violence in his Southern Gothic masterpiece, *Child of God.* In the *Blood Meridian,*

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*The Border Trilogy* and *No Country for Old Men,* he delves into the mythic West. But his writing takes a different turn in *The Road,* where he depicts a post-apocalyptic world. Traditionally, the research on Cormac McCarthy has focused on his Western myths, his concerns with the frontier, the role of folklore and morality and the position of God in his world. In his work, titled *Trauma and Mythologies of the Old West in the Western Novels of Cormac McCarthy* (2012) Antony Harrison explores the interdependency of myth and trauma to explain the repetitive cycles of loss, failure and defeat that pervade McCarthy's works. Similarly, Lydia R. Cooper in her paper titled *He is a psychopathic Killer, but so what?: Folklore and Morality in Cormac McCarthy's No Country for Old Men* (2013)analyzes the dynamics of traditional Western Folklore and morality. *God, Evil and Truth in Cormac McCarthy's Blood Meridian and The Crossing* (2017) by Stanciu Elena Laris examines the existence of God in Billy Parham's world. Berit Astrom interprets *The Road* as a post-feminist text in *Postfeminist Fatherhood and the Marginalization of the Mother in Cormac McCarthy's The Road* (2014).

Abstract

This study highlights the subtle and complex environmental ethic in Cormac McCarthy's select novels. By delineating the relationships McCarthy's characters have with non-human nature, an ecocritical analysis views their alienation as the result of their separation from nature. At the root of this alienation is an anthropocentric and mechanistic mode of thinking that is dominant in Western philosophy and that this study defines as Cartesian. While McCarthy's environmentalist heroes are persecuted by Cartesian institutions and displaced from the land on which they have defined themselves and made meaning, his Cartesian anti-heroes represent extreme manifestations of Cartesian thinking. McCarthy's

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environmentalism is as much a critique and indictment of Cartesian thinking as it is a portrayal of the value of a life lived in close contact with nonhuman nature.

McCarthy uses human treatment of non-human animals to evidence man's absolute desire to control the natural world and the beasts within the natural world. Animals often figure prominently in Cormac McCarthy’s fiction, taking on mystical significance or even mirroring human nature. At other times, McCarthy portrays astriking intimacy between animals and men. The animals in McCarthy’s novels also represent a link to an older, natural order and a vanishing (or vanished) way of life. The representations are clearly myriad and diverse, but the one thing that can be asserted for certain is that the overarching tendency is to elevate animals to positions of great significance; they inhabit a space that, while often overlapping with the human realm, is distinctive and important. In *All the Pretty Horses* John Grady Cole is virtually defined by his relationship to horses, and there are moments of striking intimacy between him and horses in the novel. Wolves assume a similar place of significance in *The Crossing*. The ranchers discus show the cattle, in their domestication and defenselessness, “puzzle” the wolves, who kill the cattle in a much more savage manner than they do wild quarry, “as if they were offended by some violation of an old order. Billy also experiences moments of intimacy with the pregnant she-wolf that echo John Grady Cole’s relationship to horses, and this happens at the same two levels: in both the dream world and the tangible world. In McCarthy’s borderlands novels there is always the looming awareness that civilizations will rise and civilizations will fall, but what is constant is war, brutality, and death. This is why his books, particularly his works concerning the Southwest and Mexico, are littered with apocalyptic themes and images—until, of course, he delivers the death of *all* civilizations in the post-apocalyptic rendering *The Road* (2006).

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Keywords: Anthropocentrism, Cartesian thinking, Nature, Animals, Ecocriticism, Humans, Environment

What is ecocriticism

Ecocriticism explores the ways in which we imagine and portray the relationship between humans and the environment in all areas of cultural production. It handles the issues of pollution, wilderness, apocalypse, dwelling, animals and the earth. "What then *is* ecocriticism? Simply put, ecocriticism is the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment. Just as feminist criticism examines language and literature from a gender conscious perspective, and Marxist criticism brings an awareness of modes of production and economic class to its reading of texts, ecocriticism takes an earth-centred approach to literary studies." (Glotfelty 1996: xix)

It is generally agreed that modern environmentalism begins with 'A Fable for Tomorrow', in Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (1962). Carson's fairy tale opens with the words, 'There was once a town in the heart of America where all life seemed to live in harmony with its surroundings' and, invoking the ancient tradition of the pastoral, goes on to paint a picture of 'prosperous farms', 'green fields', foxes barking in the hills, silent deer, ferns and wildflowers, 'countless birds' and trout lying in clear,cold streams, all delighted in by those who pass through the town (1999:21). Concentrating on images of natural beauty and emphasising the 'harmony' of humanity and nature that 'once' existed, the fable at first presents us with a picture of essential changelessness, which human activity scarcely disturbs, and which the annual round of seasons only reinforces. However pastoral peace gives way to destruction.

Ecocriticism as a concept first arose in the late 1970s, at meetings of the WLA (the Western Literature Association, a body whose field of interest is the literature of the

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American West). In his introduction to aseries of brief position papers (all entitled 'What is ecocriticism?') Michael P. Branch 'traces the word "ecocriticism" back to William Rueckert's 1978 essay 'Literature and ecology: an experiment inecocriticism'.1 A claim for first usage in literary criticism of the related term 'ecological' is made by prominent US ecocritic Karl Kroeber, whose article '"Home at Grasmere": ecological holiness', appeared in the journal *PMLA,* 89, 1974, pp. 132-41. Both terms ('ecocriticism' and 'ecological') apparently lay dormant in the critical vocabulary (says Branch) until the 1989 WLA conference (in Coeur d'Alene, USA),when Cheryll Glotfelty (at the time a graduate student at Cornell University, subsequently Associate Professor of Literature and the Environment at the University of Nevada, Reno) not only revived the term 'ecocriticism', but urged its adoption to refer to the diffuse critical field that had previously been known as 'the study of nature writing'. Ecocriticism is, then, an avowedly political mode of analysis, as the comparison with feminism and Marxism suggests. Ecocritics generallytie their cultural analyses explicitly to a ‘green’ moral and political agenda. In this respect, ecocriticism is closely related to environmentally oriented developments in philosophy and political theory. Developing the insights of earlier critical movements, ecofeminists, social ecologists and environmental justice advocates seek a synthesis of environmental and social concerns.

Richard Kerridge’s definition in the mainly British *Writing the Environment* (1998) suggests, like Glotfelty’s, a broad cultural ecocriticism:

> The Ecocritic wants to track environmental ideas and representations wherever they appear, to see more clearly a debate which seems to betaking place, often part-concealed, in a great many cultural spaces. Most of all, ecocriticism seeks to evaluate texts and ideas in terms of their coherence and usefulness as responses to environmental crisis.(Kerridge 1998: 5)

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As Ecocritics seek to offer a truly transformative discourse, enabling us to analyze and criticize the world in which we live, attention is increasingly given to the broad range of cultural processes and products in which, the complex negotiations of nature and culture take place. Indeed, the widest definition of the subject of ecocriticism is the study of the relationship of the human and the non-human, throughout human cultural history and entailing critical analysis of the term 'human' itself.

The idea of wilderness, signifying nature in a state uncontaminated by civilisation, is the most potent construction of nature available to New World environmentalism. "Wilderness narratives share the motif of escape and return with the typical pastoral narrative, but the construction of nature they propose and reinforce is fundamentally different" (Garrard 39). If pastoral is the distinctive Old-World construction of nature, suited to long-settled and domesticated landscapes, wilderness fits the settler experience in the New Worlds – particularly the United States, Canada and Australia – with their apparently untamed landscapes and the sharp distinction between the forces of culture and nature.

The study of the relations between animals and humans in the Humanities is split between philosophical consideration of animal rights and cultural analysis of the representation of animals. A remarkably recent phenomenon, it derived impetus primarily from Peter Singer's revolutionary *Animal Liberation* (1975), which examined an issue until then discussed in passing by moral philosophers but seldom fully explored. The boundary between human and animal is arbitrary and, moreover, irrelevant, since we share with animals a capacity for suffering that only 'the hand of tyranny' could ignore.

The relevance of ecocriticism

The present day calls for a harmonious relationship with nature. Unfortunately, man-animal conflict has been on the rise. Likewise, destruction of forests, hunting of wildlife,

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extensive mining activities have put man in a precarious position in relation with the environment. The beauty, sublimity, and wonder of nature have been justly celebrated in all of the religious traditions of the world.

1. Hinduism: Through the worship of trees, animals and nature in general, Hinduism has called for the harmonious coexistence between man and environment.
2. Buddhism: The religion advocates non-violence against animals and nature. Through the depiction of Bodhisattvas, Buddhism portrays the harmonious existence between man and the non-human surroundings
3. Christianity: The depiction of the garden of Eden is rife with the descriptions of natural life. Adam and Eve's consumption of the fruit may be taken as a transgression against the environment, on account of which they are expelled from Eden.

In the present context, the relationship between man and nature is in jeopardy. Ecocriticism seeks to address this issue. We live in a world increasingly lost to pollution, contamination and industry sponsored ecological disaster. Ecocriticism originates in a bio social context of unrestrained and excessive exploitation of nature. Jean Jacques Rousseau argued that the state of nature was the purest and best form of human existence. His was one of the first critiques of the Enlightenment, arguing against the established notions of 'progress'. Rousseau believed that the 'natural' was innocent and that civilization was 'artificial' and corrupt. Ecocriticism also looks closely at the human culture-nature interaction intexts. It assumes that nature and human culture are mutually influential. Texts that explore this mutual influence are supposed to embody an ecological consciousness.

Ecology and Ecocriticism in the select novels of McCarthy

Animals often figure prominently in Cormac McCarthy's fiction, taking on mystical

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significance or even mirroring human nature. At other times, McCarthy portrays a striking intimacy between animals and men. The animals in McCarthy's novels also representa link to an older, natural order and a vanishing (or vanished) way of life. Two of the more prominent examples of McCarthy's rendering of animals show up in *All the Pretty Horses* (1992) and *The Crossing* (1994), but animals are an important motif throughout most of his fiction. The representations are clearly myriad and diverse, but the one thing that can be asserted for certain is that the overarching tendency is to elevate animals to positions of great significance; they inhabit a space that, while often overlapping with the human realm, is distinctive and important.

In fact, since McCarthy takes the slant that human existence is corrupted and fleeting in the overall order of things, one could argue that animals occupy a higher hierarchical status in McCarthy's fictional worldview. In *Cities of the Plain* (1998), they certainly occupy a high moral and ethical ground. As John Grady puts it, a horse "won't do onething while you're watching him and another when you aren't.... A good horse has justice in his heart. I've seen it" (p. 53). It's also quite significant that in *The Road* (2006)—a dying world that is utterly devoid of natural life—the last image is of a "muscular and torsional" brook trout who lived in "deep glens where ... all things were older than manand they hummed of mystery" (p. 287). He suggests a natural world with infinite roots, before humankind.

In *All the Pretty Horses* John Grady Cole is virtually defined by his relationship tohorses, and there are moments of striking intimacy between him and horses in the novel. In one passage, McCarthy depicts John Grady breaking a green colt and sitting astride it as it lay on the ground, its muzzle pressed to his chest and its "hot sweet breath ...flooding up from the dark wells of its nostrils over his face and neck like news from another world" (p. 103). Here we witness not only the intimacy between man and horse,but the mystical—even esoteric—light ("another world") in which McCarthy casts horses. They also show up in that hue in

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John Grady's dreams, where the young manhimself is running with the horses "and they moved all of them in a resonance that waslike a music among them ... that resonance which is the world itself and which cannotbe spoken but only praised" (p. 162).McCarthy also explores a metaphysical kinship between horses and men. An oldman named Luis, a veteran of the Mexican Revolution, tells John Grady and Rawlins,"the souls of horses mirror the souls of men more closely than men suppose ... horsesalso love war" (p. 111). But in a world in which mechanized, modern warfare is encroaching,and in a geographical region where the cowboy lifestyle is headed towardobsolescence,the horses in the Border Trilogy also come to embody an old and vanishing wayof life.

Wolves assume a similar place of significance in *The Crossing*. The ranchers discusshow the cattle, in their domestication and defenselessness, "puzzle" the wolves, who killthe cattle in a much more savage manner than they do wild quarry, "as if they wereoffended by some violation of an old order. Old protocols" (p. 25). "Like the horses orthe brook trout, they provide a link to an ancient order in McCarthy's books" (Hage 47). They alsoshow up as mystical creatures, such as when Billy consults an old trapper, who warnshim that the wolf is a being "of great order and that it knows what men do not: thatthere is no order in the world save that which death has put there" (p. 45).In *Cities of the Plain*, the reader again experiences John Grady Cole's intimaterelationshipwith horses. In fact, in one exchange, both John Grady and Billy Parham cometo agree that "a horse knows what's in your heart" (p. 84). Of course, the interest in animalsin McCarthy's work is an outcrop of his characterizations—McCarthy often createspeople who are particularly attuned to the natural world and all it contains (muchlike the author himself). Let us not forget that opening image of the boy Billy Parhamin *The Crossing*: "He carried Boyd before him in the bow of the saddle and named tohim the features of the landscape and birds and animals in both Spanish and English" (p.3). Even as the novels take us down deep avenues of philosophical and

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theological exploration, animals often provide a ballast for the characters—a sense of certainty in an uncertain world.

Billy also experiences moments of intimacy with the pregnant she-wolf that echo John Grady Cole's relationship to horses, and this happens at the same two levels: in both the dream world and the tangible world. In a dream, Billy can feel wolves' muzzles and their breath against his face (p. 295). But his literal encounters with the pregnant she-wolf are also depicted in arrestingly intimate terms: "When he touched her skin ran and quivered under his hand.... He talked to her about his life" (p. 89).Ultimately, though, the wolf attains a different brand of significance than horses; the wolf, unlike the wild horses, is not something that can be broken or otherwise mastered, and Billy's attempt to essentially domestic one and bend it to his will ends terribly. When Billy cradles the dead wolf's head in his lap, McCarthy notes that he is reaching out to hold "what cannot be held" (p. 127). In this way, as Wallis R. Sanborn points out, the vanishing wolves in *The Crossing* become "a negative metaphor for man's ceaseless appetite for control over the natural world" (p. 131). Since McCarthy is also frequently preoccupied with existences that are headed toward extinction, it must be noted that the vanishing wolf— as a threat to cattle—has been pushed toward extinction by the ranching enterprise, just as the ranching way of life is also giving way.

"In McCarthy's borderlands novels there is always the looming awareness that civilizations will rise and civilizations will fall, but what is constant is war, brutality, and death (Greenwood 66). This is why his books, particularly his works concerning the Southwest and Mexico, are littered with apocalyptic themes and images—until, of course, he delivers the death of *all* civilizations in the post-apocalyptic rendering *The Road* (2006).

When critics deliberate upon Cormack McCarthy's themes, the first thing typically addressed is the brutality and grimness of his vision; nevertheless, the author's keen sensitivity toward nature and the originality of his natural descriptions rival his penchant for

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rendering the more dreadful aspects of humanity (and sometimes the two motifs even intersect).In a lengthy and insightful essay on McCarthy in a 2005 edition of the *New Yorker* James Wood described how the writer has been "a wonderfully delicate notice of nature "throughout his career. Even in the epic historical bloodbath of *Blood Meridian* (1985) "nature is almost always precisely caught and weighed: in the desert, the stars 'fall all night in bitter arcs,' and the wolves trot 'neat of foot' alongside the horsemen," writes Wood. "[A]nd the lizards, 'their leather chins flat to the cooling rocks,' fend off the world'with thin smiles and eyes like cracked stone plates'" (Wood). McCarthy's work contains what Gail Caldwell has termed "a near-mystical regard for the natural world".

As a child growing up in eastern Tennessee, the author was highly attuned to the surrounding natural landscape and spent much time exploring it. "When I was a kid, I was very interested in the natural world," McCarthy told an interviewer in 2007. "To this day, during casual conversations, little-known facts about the natural world will just crop up" (*ibid.*). Malcolm Jones, Jr., writing in *Newsweek*, noted that "in all his books, McCarthy delights in the natural world" and the "fatalistic harshness of the desert fits his temperament like handmade boots" (Jones, p. 68).Long before he turned to the desert, though, one could trace the bold prominence of the natural world in his books. In his first novel, the eastern Tennessee–located *The Orchard Keeper* (1965), the central figures John Wesley Ratter and Arthur Own by are characterized by their tendency to be "acutely at one with the natural world" (Arnold," 'Go to Sleep'"). The novel explores this connection, as well as the corrupting encounters between the forces of commerce and bureaucracy on the one hand and the natural environment on the other. In the novel the two seem like unruly wills at odds with each other. This idea is put in place in the preface to *The Orchard Keeper*, when workers discover wrought iron gate embedded in an elm tree. One man observes that the gate has in fact "growled all through the tree" (p. 1) (not that the tree—the living thing—has grown up

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around the iron object). Nature is not passive to these intrusions in the novel, though, and is an invasive force itself. When worker shacks are constructed (a harbinger of industry and commerce), green molds immediately grow over the structures: “Some terrible plague seemed to overtake them one by one” (p. 11). The natural ecosystem and the civilizational ecosystem exist simultaneously; as Georg Guillemin indicates, oftentimes “civilization represents but one ecosystem among many” in Cormack McCarthy’s novels (p. 15).

Nature continues to be predominant in McCarthy’s subsequent Southern novels. In *Outer Dark* (1968), one is presented with richly detailed, dark forests and vivid rural landscapes that seem straight out of fable or folklore—representing a psychological dreamscape (human “nature”) that is much like a folk or fairy tale but even darker and much more unrelenting.

Lester Ballard, in *Child of God* (1973), retreats deeper and deeper into nature as heist expunged from society. But nature in *Child of God* is not always a bucolic place, and his movement deeper and deeper into the natural world, until he eventually resides in a cave, parallels his descent into the furthest, murkiest reaches of human nature. And the environment can be unruly and disordered in this novel; a shack that he takes up residence in is overrun by animals and penned in by lush overgrowth. The book overtly makes this connection between human nature and the natural world: “Disorder in the woods, trees down, new paths needed. Given charge Ballard would have made things more orderly in the woods and in men’s souls” (p. 136).In *Suttee* (1979) the life-sustaining natural resource of the Tennessee River is blighted and corrupted to a remarkable degree, with oil, human waste, condoms, and all sorts of detritus—even dead bodies—bubbling up out of the river and bobbing in its watery stretches. Again, though, nature is far from passive or bucolic. Cornelius Suttree’s forays into the mountain wilderness force him to stand on the edge of death’s chasm: In one instance an overhanging cliff collapses onto a young girlfriend; in

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another, his own mystic solo journey into the winter mountains brings him nearly to the point of death.

In fact, humans, nature, and industry often seem locked in some “paradoxical harmony of destruction”—what Guillemin regards as an egalitarian, “non-hierarchical” structure in McCarthy’s work that is established by his aesthetic vision. Guillemin uses the example from *Suttree* of the burning train coursing through the snowy mountains to illustrate this point, an image that suggests a “shared tendency to entropy while integrating it into the dominant theme of natural beauty” (p. 15). As the old railroader remembers it, “That was in nineteen and thirty-one and if I live to be a hungered year old I don’t think I’ll ever see anything as pretty as that train on fire ... lighting up the snow and trees and the night” (*Suttee*, p. 182).

If one looks ahead to *The Crossing*(1994), that “paradoxical harmony of destruction “is evident in the she-wolf episode, which is so often read only for its natural pathos; but the wolf gives as good as it gets, ravaging livestock—destroying the humans’ livelihood in order to sustain its own life (and the life of the unborn pups). Billy’s attempt to save the she-wolf disrupts this destructive “harmony.” (Destruction/harmony: We are often in the world of paradox when discussing Cormack McCarthy.) And this rupture leads to disastrous circumstances: Both the wolf and Billy’s parents, whom he has abandoned to save the wolf, die terribly.

This same terrible beauty appears again and again in the natural landscape of *Blood Meridian*, in which night falls “like a thunderclap,” shooting stars drop “in bitter arcs, “and weeds set to “gnashing” (p. 15). Mountain vistas appear “stark and black and livid like a land of some other order out there whose true geology was not stone but fear” (p.47). Even a potentially beautiful sunset becomes “the red demise of day ... the distant pandemonium of the sun,” an image that resonates the novel’s titular emblem (p. 185).The natural, isolated,

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endemic La Purism of *All the Pretty Horses* (1992), which contains "natural springs and clear streams" and "species of fish not known elsewhere on earth"(p. 97), as well as John Grady's true love and more wild horses than he could ever dream of, also becomes a place of dread and fear.

In *No Country for Old Men* (2005), set in 1980, the ancient tradition of the antelope hunt is intruded upon by the terrible new, new order: drug trafficking. Llewelyn Moss hunts in a landscape of "raw mountains," river breaks, and "baked terracotta terrain" (p. 8), surrounded by rock-carved pictographs "perhaps a thousand years old. Theme who drew them hunters like himself" (p. 11). The sustenance he returns with from that natural landscape is drug money, though, not antelope—and it initiates devastation upon his life.

Anthropocentrism and Cartesian thinking: the conflict with the environment

Renaissance gave birth to rational thinking. It was a welcome change that liberated man from the superstitious dark ages. But it had its own dark side. In the pursuit of learning and rational thinking anthropocentrism took centre stage. Nature, environment and animals took the back seat. Cartesian philosophers like Rene Descartes maintained that animals and the natural environment had no purpose but to serve the human interests. Scientific experiments were performed on animals and they were perceived as objects devoid of soul and incapable of feeling pain. Life was viewed in scientific terms, with an increasing emphasis on the mechanical aspects. The term Anthropogenic was first coined by atmospheric scientists as a name for the geological epoch that the Earth entered with the industrial revolution, around 1800. It is characterized by the unprecedented fact that humanity has come to play a decisive, if still largely incalculable, role in the planet's ecology and geology, that 'Human activities have become so pervasive and profound that they rival the great forces of nature and are pushing the Earth as a whole into planetary *terra incognita*'.

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The original coiners of the term dated the Anthropogenic from the industrial revolution and the invention of the steam engine. Others, however, have argued that extensive agriculture and forest-clearing may already have significantly affected the Earth system and marked a new epoch thousands of years ago.2 The force of the term, however, applies mostly to the 'Great Acceleration 'since 1945 in which human impacts on the entire biosphere have achieved an unprecedented and arguably dangerous intensity. For geoscientists seeking to broadcast the fears inspired by their research, the coinage 'Anthropogenic' is primarily 'a politically savvy way of presenting to non-scientists the sheer magnitude of global biophysical change.'

In ecological philosophy it is generally accepted that Western society is based upon an anthropocentric, patriarchal, hierarchical, and mechanistic paradigm derived from the Judeo-Christian, Greek, Roman, and Enlightenment eras. It is sometimes called Enlightenment thinking because the set of beliefs reached a level of stability during the late eighteenth century. Perhaps the oldest and most fundamental characteristic of Cartesian thinking is anthropocentrism, a worldview that assumes that humans are separate from and superior to nature. From this viewpoint, a world without humans would cease to have a reason to be. The idea that ethical consideration should be extended to nonhuman phenomenon, a basic premise of ecological philosophy, is unimaginable for the anthropocentric mind because only humans have value. McCarthy illustrates many instances where the fulfilment of human needs, both vital and peripheral, come at the expense of the natural environment. Cartesian characters justify the persecution and destruction of marginal human populations and nonhuman nature through the belief that humans are superior to nonhumans, men are superior to women, and whites are superior to non-whites.

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Outer Dark

*Outer Dark* is a parable that addresses the timeless theme of the origin of evil. McCarthy employs violent taboos such as infanticide, incest, and cannibalism to probe human nature and sinfulness. The grotesque subject matter can be off-putting to readers and, in all likelihood, contributed to the author's relative obscurity into the early 1990s. Yet, the unswerving consideration of evil also earned him a loyal following. The environment the characters inhabit in *Outer Dark* is an extreme example of morally depravity. Yet, the novel contains elements of human compassion amid the corruption. *Outer Dark* takes place somewhere in the Appalachian South. The specific locale is indeterminate, as is the historical era. This intentional obscuring of place and time differentiates the book from McCarthy's other novels and establishes the work as a timeless parable. The only clues the reader is given about setting and era are derived from the dialect, colloquialisms, and geography, all of which suggest the mountainous region of Appalachia. The setting is characterized by isolation and tremendous poverty. Like in The Orchard Keeper, McCarthy employs an omniscient third-person narrator and omits quotation marks from characters' speech. From the novel's outset, McCarthy invokes biblical references: prophets abound alongside blind lepers and souls in supplication. Critics have described the setting into which Runty and Cull bring their inbred son as an anti-Eden. The book's title alludes to chapter 25, verse30 from the Book of Matthew, part of the synoptic gospels in the New Testament. The verse reads: ''And cast the worthless servant into the outer darkness there men will weep and gnash their teeth.'' This biblical passage tells the story of a servant who, out of fear, squanders an opportunity to increase his master's wealth. The servant is punished not just because he has done something wrong, but because he has failed to do something right. Thus, he is cast into the ''outer darkness,'' where he is condemned to suffer alone in physical and spiritual torment. McCarthy places *Outer Dark* in an archetypal natural setting—the scenes and

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episodes are dominated by the forests, swamps, and small towns of rural Appalachia. These narrow settings create a fine lens through which the book explores the inherent nature of evil in the cosmos and in the human individual.

The book poses two fundamental questions to readers: Did God make the world more evil than good, and why are people driven to do evil things? To explore these aspects of evil, readers are confronted with two vicious sins in the first few pages of the book: murder and incest. The main narrative involves two adult siblings, Runty Holmes, the sister, and her brother, Ulla. Their story begins as Runty is about to give birth. Culla is the father of Rinthy's child. The son of Runty and Culla is born. Culla tells Runty the child is puny and that he does not expect it to live. While Runty sleeps after the exertions of child birth, Culla takes the infant into the woods with the intention of killing it. Instead, he abandons the child. McCarthy constructs the story as a dual narrative during which the two siblings never meet, although they encounter many of the same characters during the irrespective journeys. Both characters' missions end tragically. The remainder of the story unfolds as a result of Culla's moral equivocation: his refusal to submit to an evil impulse (killing his child of incest) paradoxically brings evil into the story.

While the story of Culla and Runty Holmes can be seen to affirm the interconnected domination of nature and women, it also reinforces the stereotype rejected by third-wave ecofeminists that women are inherently closer to nature than men. Even if Culla and Runty are viewed more symbolically as the personifications of "masculine" and "feminine" worldview, McCarthy's portrayal of Runty represents two distinct and contradictory ecofeminist ideas: while she offers an alternative way of relating to the world than either Culla or the marauders, it is an alternative that appears too weak to overcome the violent power of the "masculine" worldview. Additionally, McCarthy's portrayal of Runty as closer

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to nature is exactly the kind of stereotyping that ecofeminists view as responsible for the unjustified domination of women and nature in a patriarchal Western culture.

Child of God

*Child of God*, published in 1973, continues McCarthy's examination of the nature of evil and human sinfulness as expressed through moral depravity and the grotesque violation of social taboos. The story immerses readers in some of the same unsettling terrain from McCarthy's previous novels in which acts of human degeneracy drive the narrative—thievery, incest, rape, and murder. There is one main difference: the protagonist in *Child of God* devolves into the most debased and corrupt main character in all of McCarthy's works to date. The story is set in a place called Sevier County. The location of the action vacillates between scenes in town and scenes in wild nature, which feature mountains, caves, and abandoned houses.

The picture of Ballard that emerges from the narrative as a whole is of a man who both rejects and has been rejected by contemporary society. As a youth, he was disliked by his peers for his unprovoked violence and aggression. As an adult, ''he'd grown lean and bitter. Some said mad. A malign star kept him'' (Child of God, 41). He scrapes a meagre existence off the land. He peddles stolen property for petty cash. Helives alone in a rotting, abandoned house in the woods. The only person with whom he socializes is the drunken patriarch of a junkyard who lords over his brood of promiscuous, inebriated daughters.

As Lester is cast out of social forms and progresses deeper into nature—from living in a house, to an overgrown shack, to a cave—he becomes more "human," but he also is driven deeper into the dark recesses of "human nature"—that is, the sexual and violent drives that are, in McCarthy's worldview, inherent in the human condition (if often buried). We see this paralleling of nature and the human condition as Lester walks through the winter forest:

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"Disorder in the woods, trees down, new paths needed. Given charge Ballard would have made things more orderly in the woods and in men's souls" (p. 136).And Lester, just another child of God, is not a deviation from the larger human order. The Ecocritical examination of *Child of God,* explores how the characters' perspectives on nature reflect and guide their actions. Lester Ballard's story reveals the effect of the conflict between humans and non-human nature. Ballard is closer to nature, in stark contrast to the citizens of Sevier County. The citizens lead lives that are mechanistic and almost wholly detached from nature. This contrast and the ensuing conflict, alienates Ballard from the rest of humanity. Ballard's loss of being is the result of his inability to connect with either human society and the society's failure to recognize his emotional and intellectual disability. Ballard is shunned despite his efforts to integrate socially and spiritually in the county. Because of the citizens' inability to recognize his emotional and intellectual disability, they drive him not only to retreat to the wilderness but also to commit the horrible acts of murder and necrophilia.

Despite reverting back to a primitive natural state Ballard fails to establish a meaningful relationship with nature and the environment. His violent and deviant actions are also perpetrated against the natural world. He shoots a cow dead for making the river muddy. On another instance, he nearly decapitates a cow by tugging it with a rope and a tractor. It is a reflection of man's insatiable desire to control the natural world. But in his desire to control his non-human environment, Ballard merely alienates himself further. Lester is abandoned by a dog who chooses to face survival alone rather than with Lester. The society is primarily Cartesian in its outlook. It fails to recognize Ballard as an individual with human needs. The final scene where Ballard's body is cut up by medical students strips him of his human identity once and for all.

Blood Meridian

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Set primarily along the Texas-Mexico border in the mid-nineteenth century, Blood *Meridian* is one of McCarthy's most well-known novels. *Blood Meridian* is also McCarthy's most directly historical novel, taking up the tale of the Glant on Gang, a notorious band of mercenary scalp hunters who operated in theSouthwestern United States and Northern Mexico in the period following the Mexican-American War.

*Blood Meridian* is a violent take on the conflict between man and non-human environment. Glanton's gang is anthropocentric, obsessed with the idea of eliminating native Indians. The Cartesian thinking barely registered non-whites as humans capable of thought and emotions. The gang of scalp hunters has been described as superior to the Indians whom they slaughter mercilessly. On the contrary, the Indians are in harmony with nature and environment. Judge Holden is a Satanic character who is the embodiment of anthropocentrism. He is least concerned about the environment around him. He revels in violence. Glanton's gang meets him in the desert, a place where he seems to be at home. The arid landscape parallels the characters' detachment from their environment and is embodied through their violent actions.

When the gang comes across the group carrying quicksilver, they slaughter them. The assault is unprovoked. But they do not stop at that. After killing the men, they push the mules from the cliff. For the members of Glanton's gang the lives of the mules and other human beings is of no worth. John Joel Glanton uses his dog for the purpose of killing. It is an illustration of the anthropocentric man's efforts to control and regulate nature. Man makes use of violence to subjugate nature and the environment. *Blood Meridian* presents to us the striking character of Judge Holden. A man of letters and eloquence, he is the most violent and blood thirsty of the whole gang. He kills and commits acts of violence as he is a typical embodiment of Cartesian thinking. He is not bothered about the paradigms of good and evil just as he is least concerned about the environment. The violence against nature assumes an

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amoral tone in the face of the anthropocentric intellect of Judge Holden. Eventually when Glanton's gang is slaughtered by the native Indians, the Judge is one of the few to escape. On a symbolic plane, it is the conflict between anthropocentrism and nature. But there are no winners.

All the Pretty Horses (Border trilogy)

*All the Pretty Horses* is a modern Western about two young men who, in the face of a dying ranching industry in the contemporary Southwest, decide to abandon their homes and families to seek their fortunes in Mexico. Set in West Texas in the year 1948, the book opens as the main character, sixteen-year-old John Grady Cole, struggles to adapt to changing social circumstances within the context of a disappearing American West. The family ranch has been sold, which leaves him bereft of his future. In the wake of this news, Cole and his best friend, Lacey Rawlins, steal away from their hometown on horseback. Their plan is to ride into Mexico and hire themselves out as ranch hands to one of the still thriving cattle ranches south of the border. Cole and Rawlins have several minor adventures as they make their way through Mexico's border country before they are hired to work on the ranch of a wealthy Mexican landowner. There on the Mexican ranch, Cole displays his prodigious talent for breaking wild horses. His expertise brings him renown. It also attracts the attention of the hacendado's daughter, Alejandra, with whom he falls in love. The rest of the story follows the tragic arc of the dissolution of their love affair, and Cole's subsequent return to Mexico in a final, ill-fated attempt to win back his former lover. *All the Pretty Horses* functions as a melancholy homage to the disappearing cliche of the American cowboy. The landscape is lovingly described. Unlike the anonymous, joyless kid in *Blood Meridian* whose quest is constrained by the need to survive, the main characters in Horses, Cole and Rawlins, are more fully developed. Their decision to run away is not at all menacing, unlike the drivers of

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action in McCarthy's previous books. It is the gentle whim of hope-filled youth in search of a dream.

The novel begins with John Cole looking at a painting of horses. And we also learn that his mother is going to sell the ranch to an oil company. It is a demonstration of man's attempts to control and subjugate nature. The oil company is a manifestation of anthropocentric and Cartesian thinking. The oil company has only the human interests at heart. The novel is a lament of the end of the role of horses. With the development of steam engine and oil explorations the natural way of life is lost. The purpose of horses in the lives of human beings is largely unimportant.

Only Cole attempts to lead a life in harmony with nature and the environment. He tries desperately to follow the old code of life that is fast disappearing. On more than one occasion Cole risks his life to rescue a horse. He sees the horses as allies. In his case, anthropocentrism and Cartesian thinking are absent. But the same thing cannot be said about the Mexican soldiers who capture the trio of Cole, Rawlins and Blevins. They kill Blevins for a trivial matter. In a changing landscape, they embody the anthropocentric individuals who do not care for living things and the environment. Cole works to restore the harmony between man and the environment. But it is well nigh impossible on the part of one individual to restore the balance. Nevertheless, he makes the effort and suffers for the cause.

The Crossing

*The Crossing* is the second volume of McCarthy's self-titled Border Trilogy. The narrative is relayed through the omniscient third-person voice that has, by this point in his writing career, become a hallmark of McCarthy's work. The novel is divided into four sections. Each section follows the action of the protagonist, Billy Parham, as he makes several journeys from his family ranch across the border into Mexico and back again. When

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the story begins, Parham is fifteen years old and living with his parents and brother, Boyd, on the family cattle ranch in a New Mexico border town. Like John Grady Cole, the Texan protagonist from *All the Pretty Horses*, McCarthy casts Parham as a young romantic who is attached to the grandeur of the American West. Like the evolution of Cole, McCarthy attentively develops a depth to Billy's character by describing his love for ranching and the wilderness. This love for the wildernesses poignantly rendered in the attachment Billy nurtures for a female wolf who has become a nuisance on the ranch. The wolf has been killing the family's cattle, and Billy's dad has charged him with trapping and killing it. At this point in American history, wolves had been trapped and hunted out of existence in the American West. The only wolves that remained in North America survived in either Canada or Mexico. After Billy traps the she-wolf, he makes a spontaneous decision to return the live animal to Mexico. This decision sparks the series of events that constitute the rest of the narrative. Over the course of the next seven years, Billy makes three trips out of New Mexico into Mexico. During the first, he tries to repatriate the wolf. During the second, he and his brother Boyd, who is two years younger than Billy, go in search of horses stolen from their father's ranch. The two brothers separate; Billy returns to New Mexico while Boyd remains in Mexico. In his final trip, Billy goes in search of Boyd, who at this point has been living south of the border for several years.

As the narrative progresses, McCarthy uses secondary characters to embellish the story with environmental, historical, and theological themes. These themes often are communicated to Billy by people he meets in his travels. These themes imbue the story with an epic dimension that further differentiates it from *All the Pretty Horses*. In the first of the novel's four sections, Billy traps the wolf and tries to take it back to Mexico, where he thinks it will be free. Billy's love forth she-wolf sharply conflicts with the creed of Western ranchers, who sought to kill every last wolf in America. Though Billy's attempt to return the

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wolf is driven by noble impulses, those impulses have tragic consequences for him and for all of his family.

*The Crossing* describes the relationship that develops between man and a she-wolf. Billy Parham takes it upon himself to rescue the she-wolf and release it safely. Throughout history, the wolf has been looked upon as a predator. In *The Crossing* as well, the wolf has been preying on the cattle. But Billy does not resort to hunting it. Instead, he traps it without causing it any harm. He realises the she-wolf as a living being. This is in complete opposition to Cartesian thinking which propounded that non-human beings and the environment are present only to serve the human needs.

The borderlands is the place where man and nature come into conflict. Billy crosses the border and ventures into Mexico. Throughout the *Border Trilogy,* Mexico has been depicted as a land, hostile and indifferent. The likes of John Cole and Billy Parham embody life in close association with nature. They are the quintessential cowboys with horses as their allies. Unlike the people across the border, they do not resort to mindless violence against humans and the environment.

Cities of the Plain

*Cities of the Plain*, the final novel of the Border Trilogy, brings together the protagonists of the first two novels, John Grady Cole and Billy Parham. Chronologically, the story opens roughly four years after the end of *All the Pretty Horses*. In *Cities of the Plain*, Parham and Cole are working together on the Cross Fours ranch, which is run and owned by Mac McGovern, a kind man who values the skills of Parham and especially Cole. At this point Cole is twenty and Parham is twenty-eight. The central conflict of the novel is Cole's love affair with an epileptic Mexican prostitute, Magdalena. The love affair is, like all of McCarthy's fictional relationships between men and women, doomed. Cole does not mean to

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fall in love with Magdalena, but he does. He visits Magdalena several times, and Cole learns that her life is controlled by a menacing pimp, named Eduardo. The tension between Cole and Eduardo is heightened when Cole learns that Eduardo is also in love with Magdalena. When Cole tells Parham that he has fallen in love, Parham becomes furious with Cole. He blames himself, because he took Cole to the Mexican brothel where Magdalena works. Parham also is despairing because he and Cole both know that if Eduardo learns of Cole's feelings, he will kill him. Parham tries to save Cole from tragedy, but he is unable to dissuade his friend from pursuing Magdalena. In the culminating action—which is the most dramatic in the novel—Cole dies in a knife fight with Eduardo. His death is not immediate. Parham finds him as he is slowly bleeding to death. Tragically innocent to the very end, Cole sought to save Magdalena from her wretched existence. His pastoral vision dies unrealized with him. After Cole's death, the novel jumps ahead several decades to the year 2002, where an aged Billy Parham is starring as an extra in a movie. *Cities of the Plain* builds on the harmonious narrative between man and the environment.

Billy Parham and John Cole continue to live in close association with the environment. Along with horses, in this final novel in the *Border Trilogy* the protagonists form a harmonious relationship with dogs. It extends the idea that man cannot live in isolation from his environment. But there are others across the border who follow the opposite way of life. This leads to conflict and it results in the loss of lives.

The Road

In this work, McCarthy demonstrates how precisely he has honed his stylistic trademarks of a simple narrative and sparse prose. The setting is bleak and post apocalyptic. The story features strong biblical overtones within the context of what many critics have claimed to be McCarthy's most compelling and complex relationship between two fictional

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characters, a middle-age father and his young son. *The Road's* central conflict is that an unnamed disaster—in all probability a nuclear holocaust—has created a nuclear winter on earth. The story is set in America where all traces of modern society have stopped functioning. There is no electricity; there is no gasoline; there are no factories or stores or automobiles. Anarchy reigns in this desolate ashcovered world where the sun has been blotted from the sky. The main characters are nameless. The boy calls his father ‘‘Papa. ‘In his thoughts, the father refers to his son as ‘‘the boy.’’ Together, the two slowly plod south in search of warmer weather on the southern coast because the father is convinced that they will not survive the encroaching winter. They push their meagre belongings, which includes a well-worn and oft-consulted map, in a creaky shopping cart down the middle of barren roads coated with debris. The ensuing cold and lack of sunlight has killed everything except a small number of people. To survive, some people have resorted to cannibalism. Thus, a new social order has evolved, one segmented into the ‘‘good guys,’’ who try to survive by scavenging, and the ‘‘bad guys,’’ who kill humans for meat. This new social order creates for a harrowing journey through the wastes of America. The father knows the risks they will face by pursuing this journey, but he feels they have no choice.

Armed with a pistol and two bullets, the father is determined to protect his son from the gruesome realities of this brave new world. They face many obstacles together, and their search for hope in a world where there is none to be had is both heart rending and inspiring. The story is told through a combination of omniscient third-person narration and the father's first-person perspective. McCarthy also uses flashback scenes to fill in some of the story's detail in the form of the father's dream sequences. From one of these sequences, readers learn that the son was born shortly after the global catastrophe occurred. Several years after her son's birth, the mother committed suicide. Her decision to end her life was driven by the psychological and physical exhaustion of struggling to survive in the post apocalyptic reality.

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The story suggests that the mother's decision to kill herself was one made in the name of love, not cowardice. She died to improve her son's and husband's odds of survival. She is physically and emotionally distraught when her husband is preparing for their departure and knows her weakness will make the trio vulnerable to attack from the bad guys. She also knows that after eight years of survivalist living, her husband has only two bullets left in his pistol. The family lives in constant fear of being captured, raped, killed, and eaten. The two remaining bullets are a last resort. The father can use them to kill the boy and then himself. Within this context of total social and environmental collapse, McCarthy explores the nature and origin of the human impulse to survive in the face of hopelessness. The father's thoughts convey a torturousand desperate internal monologue with and about God. The man Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* can be read as part of the burgeoning field of climate fiction. *The Road* examines the way that environmental anxiety manifests in this text not only through the vision of a future earth that has been devastated, but, as the argument is presented, at a more symbolic and allegorical level through the metaphoric place of vision, sight, and blindness.

Interrogating the metaphor of vision is central to considering this text as climate fiction because it positions the human as the chosen witness to the end of the world. This article examines the anthropocentrism at the heart of McCarthy's text, and reflects on the place of the human in broader debates about anthropogenic climate change.

Conclusion

The works of Cormac McCarthy highlight the delicate relationship between man and the non-human environment. The relationship is of a fragile kind. The reading of his select novels in the light of Anthropocentrism and Cartesian thinking highlight the human alienation from the environment. In other words, in the pursuit of rational thinking and technological development, man has severed his relationship with nature.

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