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Description of spiritual period in the novel "The Road" by Cormac McCarthy

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ANNOTATION

This article contends that Cormac McCarthy's most recent book, *The Road* (2006), marked a clear departure from his earlier works of fiction's interests and aesthetics. Apart from the fact that the author, who was born in Rhode Island, is writing a popular sci-fi subgenre like the post-apocalyptic novel for the first time in his long career, the book has a lot of thematic, structural, and stylistic patterns that are very different from those in his earlier works. McCarthy can be seen abandoning the landscapes and vernacular rhythms that had become the foundation of his artistic performance, most likely as a result of some recent events that have profoundly shaken the nation and others that affect his personal life. The purpose of this article is to determine where those elements of discontinuity become most apparent by contrasting *The Road* with some of his earlier works of fiction. The author manages to keep his readers on their toes thanks to the novel's highly accomplished suspense regarding the fate of the two protagonists, despite his deadpan naturalism and rather laconic language use. Those who are accustomed to his writing will also find the story's conclusion to be unusual. However, the second section of the article reveals that, despite all of these departures from his previous aesthetic and philosophical wanderings, there are also a number of elements in *The Road* that speak of his commitment to some myths and values that have contributed to his fame and reputation.

KEYWORDS: "The Road", Cormac McCarthy, spiritual period.

1. Introduction

Despite repeated assertions that Cormac McCarthy's writings belong to the American Southwest literary tradition, some recent criticism (Messent; Rothfork) has shown that truth be told his commitment with the subjects and legends of the district is definitely more mind boggling than it might at first appear. There is no doubt that McCarthy's fictional representations conceal a myriad of enigmatic parables and philosophical depths that raise questions about their status as merely re-renderings of the elements of violence and death that have characterized the genre (Slotkin; Giles). The reader is unsure of where the boundaries of the interpretative task lie because the author swiftly transitions from the aesthetics of naturalistic representation to

a post-structuralist challenge of the narratives on which the culture of the American West has been built. As a result, it should not come as a surprise that a number of academics agree that his novels convey a difficult-to-deal-with sense of estrangement and self-absorption despite referring to specific historical events in the region (Eddins). Conversely, McCarthy's work has always been closely associated with compelling contemporary issues that inevitably influence both his artistic output and our perspective on that reality for some people. "To understand how the works display this influence requires situating McCarthy's novels afresh in the historical contexts," Brewton states. To put it momentarily, it is my aim in the accompanying pages to look at how these two interests are united in his most recent novel, since it is very far-fetched that his new work has stayed unaffected by such key authentic occasions as the 9/11 fear monger assault or the resulting "battles on dread."

The purpose of this article is to determine how new aspects of contemporary America's experience, such as hegemonic ambitions and global apprehension, may have profoundly influenced the fiction of a writer who was previously mostly associated with a specific regional tradition. It would be very misleading to suggest that McCarthy has not altered his role as a revisionist historian and novelist of the American West in some way due to events that have had such a profound impact on the nation as a whole. However, it would be impossible to argue that McCarthy has completely abandoned this role. In *Cities of the Plains*, one of his characters reminds us of the following: The narrative of the world, which is every one of the world we know, doesn't exist beyond the instruments of its execution. Also, those instruments cannot exist outside of their own history. As will before long become obvious, no place does this beneficial interaction among content and structure manifest itself more plainly than in the correspondence and renegotiation of implying that generally happens between an essayist and the land he attempts to address. Allow us to start then by thinking about how this common impact might have changed of late in McCarthy's abstract vocation.

He would reach out to touch the child who was sleeping next to him when he awoke in the cold and dark woods. Beyond the darkness, there were dark nights and grayer days each day. Similar to the onset of a cold glaucoma that obscures the world. With each precious breath, he gently raised and lowered his hand.

The story of a father and son's perilous journey to the Gulf Coast across the scorched wasteland of a post-apocalyptic America is told in Cormac McCarthy's latest novel, *The Road* (2006). Because they are convinced that another winter in the north, a decade after a nuclear explosion, will bring them to an end, they follow the melted Interstate roads east and south in the hope of finding a warmer climate near the sea. The son is in a constant state of fear because what is left of the human race has mostly degenerated into bands of wandering, brutalized, and sadistic predators, and the father is incurably ill, most likely as a result of breathing in the smoke and ashes that float everywhere. They drag themselves through the "fruitless, quiet, [and] heathen" scene, pushing a shopping basket, and living on the small supplies of canned food and water they go over in their sad journey. One could even make the case that this is a "reversed story" about the conquest of the American West because, like the early pioneers, these two characters have to deal with an impenetrable land and a wide range of vicious enemies. Hoyle has properly brought up that, "From the absolute first page there can be no question at all that McCarthy is arranging *The Road* in a practice of extraordinary stories of death, sadness, and trust, and of sheer human obstinacy."

However, the reader is likely to be captivated by the perseverance and trust shown by the father and son in the face of a rapidly dying planet and a darkening civilization due to the story's primary focus on their tender relationship, which is described as "each the other world's entire." According to Michael Chabon, the novel's paradoxical ability to "annihilate the world in prose" while simultaneously re-inscribing it into existence is one of its greatest accomplishments. This is due to the mutually nourishing and vital relationship between

father and son, as well as their blind faith in a redemption for that obnoxious world. Indeed, even at crucial points in time when their certainty is going to snap because of the horrendous climate, craving, sickness or dread, they prevail with regards to finding a last asset of flexibility that permits them to recover their mental and moral equilibrium:

What is it, Papa?

Nothing. We're okay. Go to sleep.

We're going to be okay, aren't we Papa?

Yes. We are.

And nothing bad is going to happen to us.

That's right.

Because we're carrying the fire.

Yes. Because we're carrying the fire.

Those of us who are familiar with McCarthy's earlier works of fiction, which can be broadly divided into three distinct trilogies, will be astonished to discover a number of radical departures from the structural, thematic, and stylistic patterns that had dominated his output prior to reading McCarthy's *The Road*. It could be argued that his previous work, *No Country for Old Men* (2005), already had a few original elements that made it more relatable to the world we live in today. However, as will be shown in the following paragraphs, the novel under consideration here exhibits significantly more elements of disruption in relation to Western culture. Clearly, he isn't the primary standard essayist to have wandered into the region of a sci-fi sub-kind, i.e., the dystopian novel, which is in some cases viewed by researchers and commentators as excessively creative and unusual to be treated in a serious way. John Wyndham in England and Walker Percy in the U.S. had previously demonstrated the way that the dystopian novel could be effectively used to manage points and issues that are in no way, shape or form minor to our post-current culture. However, McCarthy's earlier works have been deeply rooted in particular regions of the country, giving them much of their substance and flavor, making the choice of this popular subgenre particularly striking.

2. Literature review

Endless pundits have broadcasted that McCarthy is a "magnificently fragile noticer of nature" (Wood) and that the best among his "books include characters who venture into scenes that are at the same time topographical and clairvoyant, typological and mythic, impartially physical and strongly private" (Frye, "Wild" 116). Whether Cornelius Suttree, a college graduate who has recently broken up with his wife and his wealthy family, spends his days fishing near the slums of Knoxville, Tennessee, or Billy Parham, who has found his parents murdered and their horses stolen near the U.S.-Mexican border and is now chasing the killer into the neighboring country, McCarthy paints beautiful pictures of places that are both precise and invariably colored by the mental twirls. Indeed, even the quick moving and completely upsetting *No Country for Elderly people Men* contains sections in which the scene can be seen to play a definitive capability in the portrayal of the clairvoyant condition and the fate of its hero, Llewlyn Greenery:

"He sat up and wrapped his feet and pulled the boots on and stood and started up the last stretch of canyon to the rim. Where he crested out the country lay dead flat, stretching away to the south and to the east. Red dirt and creosote. Mountains in the far and middle distance. Nothing out there. Heatshimmer. He stuck the pistol

in his belt and looked down at the river one more time and then set out east. Langtry Texas was thirty miles as the crow flies. Maybe less. Ten hours. Twelve. His feet were already hurting. His leg hurt. His chest. His arm. The river dropped away behind him. He hadn't even taken a drink." (*No Country* 36-37)

The Road, on the other hand, treats nature in a very different way because the entire landscape has been "cauterized" by the disaster and there are almost no landmarks to show where the couple is traveling. "Everything as it once had been save faded and weathered"—trees are charred and without limbs, buildings are destroyed and blackened, meadowlands are stark and gray, and rural roads and rivers are covered in a thick layer of ash that makes them appear frozen and deadly.

Despite carrying a "tattered oil company roadmap", the novel does not mention any towns, counties, mountains, valleys, or rivers. We see them ascend a high mountain and traverse a pass to reach the coastal plains. Along the way, they come across a billboard that says, "See Rock City", but it's unclear whether this is a real town or just a sarcastic wink from the author, who suggests that the entire world has been stripped of life and turned into stone. "Color in the world—except for fire and blood—exists mainly in memory or dream," Kennedy explains in his review of the book. Forests and cities have been destroyed by fire and firestorms; as a result, everything is gray and the river water is black. "However not exclusively is the scene in the novel horrendously quiet and still — no plant or creature, with the exception of a canine, appears to have endured the atomic holocaust. The roadsides are "improved" with the cadavers of the people who have capitulated to the repercussions of the debacle:

"The long concrete sweeps of the interstate exchanges like the ruins of a vast funhouse against the distant murk. He carried the revolver in his belt at the front and wore his parka unzipped. The mummied dead everywhere. The flesh cloven along the bones, the ligaments dried to tug and taut as wires. Shriveled and drawn like latter bogfolk, their faces boiled to sheeting, the yellow palings of their teeth. They were discolored to a man like pilgrims of some common order for all their shoes were long since stolen".

Hoyle; according to some reviewers Kennedy), the novel becomes a parable that relies on primal instincts and emotions due to the sparse and restricted use of language—a limited lexicon, terse syntax, laconic exchanges, and the idiosyncratic neglect of punctuation marks: despair and maternal love, suffering and salvation. For instance, Hoyle argues that the book's savage and uncanny beauty comes from the "tender dualism" that exists between these extremes. The bare dramatization of this couple's struggle to reconcile the forces of life and death comes across as pure compact poetic matter because we are accustomed to some of McCarthy's lengthy descriptions and discussions, which occasionally border on sermonizing. Even the characters that seem to be loaded with allegories, like the modern-day biblical prophet Elijah, who has changed into a skeptical straddler in rags and goes by the name Ely, speak in a language that doesn't have a lot of twists and turns:

"The old man shook his head. I'm past all that now. Have been for years. Where men can't live gods fare no better. You'll see. It's better to be alone. So I hope that's not true what you said because to be on the road with the last god would be a terrible thing so I hope it's not true. Things will be better when everybody's gone".

According to Chabon, "a McCarthy novel has no peer" in terms of deadpan naturalism because it "operates at the utmost extremes of the natural world and of human endurance." This is certainly the case with *The Road*, which invokes the very things that it appears to abhor through its deliberately accessible and controlled language. Even though the father constantly loses the ability to tell stories, storytelling is the only way to give their journey some meaning and meaning. They probably would have given up on trying to survive in this

harsh and hostile world long ago if it weren't for the pair's suspicion that they are participating in a grand odyssey in which both good and evil are claiming their souls.

3. Discussion

The novel's abrupt and ambiguous conclusion, which can only be seen as a triumph for the father whose primary goal has been to keep his child alive and bring him to safety, is perhaps the most startling example of discontinuity in *The Road*. It is my duty to look after you. God had me perform that task. Anyone who touches you will be killed by me. Do you comprehend?" 80). In order to favor the man and the boy who, thanks to their confidence and endurance, manage to survive death by fire and ice, constant starvation, and the threat of marching thugs who ambush people on the road to store them alive as provisions, several reviewers have noted that McCarthy alters the odds that are typically found in his fiction. The majority of McCarthy's earlier works also featured this kind of confrontation between good and evil; however, in all of those instances, the latter side emerged victorious—often through the bloodiest slaughter. According to Ron Charles, who writes in *The Washington Post*, "the encounter that illuminates the final moments of the novel will infuriate McCarthy die-hards who relish his existential bleakness, but the scene confirms earlier allusions that suggest the roots of this end-of-the-world story reach far beyond the nuclear age to the apocalypse of Christian faith," the scene in question "confirms earlier allusions that suggest the roots of this end-of-the-world story. Since killing the boy would have negated not only his father's faith and purpose, but also the possibility of a moral compass in that fallen world, I do not believe any reader can feel betrayed by the novel's positive conclusion. Because he recognizes that he is the only one capable of feelings of pity and commiseration in a world that otherwise rapidly drifts toward barbarism, the father frequently perceives his child as a God-like figure. It is no big surprise, consequently, that the hero's fear ought to increment dramatically when he sees his child's life at serious risk:

"He stood listening. The boy didn't stir. He sat beside him and stroked his pale and tangled hair. Golden chalice, good to house a god. Please don't tell me how the story ends. When he looked out again at the darkness beyond the bridge it was snowing".

One could presumably concoct a few different components of progression in *The Street* that would get straightforwardly from McCarthy's interest with the unbelievable and the legendary, from one perspective, and from his characters' semi Beckettian powerlessness to impart past a limited and dull list of catchphrases and expressions, on the other. As has been called attention to before on, contributor to the issue with language in this clever outcomes from the way that the disaster has left the world around particularly absent any and all any material referents. Nonetheless, there is a further inspiration for the restricted extent of the verbal trades between characters: Words are thought to be inadequate for expressing the truth about reality, as in Western fiction and film (cf. 51 Tompkins). At the point when life itself is continually in question, whatever one can say regarding the conditions appears to be completely paltry. Notice, for example, the cut discourse among father and child after they have seen the frightening scene of certain starvelings in a basement where they are kept alive by the traveling savages as meat supplies:

We wouldn't ever eat anybody, would we?

No. Of course not.

Even if we are starving?

We're starving now.

You said we werent.

I said we werent dying. I didnt say we werent starving.

But we wouldnt.

No. We wouldnt.

No matter what.

No. No matter what.

Because we're the good guys.

Yes.

And we're carrying the fire.

And we're carrying the fire. Yes.

Okay. (136)

These Quicksilver conversations reveal not only the dependence of the two main characters on one another, but also their inability, under the stress of the events, to articulate even their most fundamental feelings and thoughts. Consequently, some critics have stated that "the boy is a designated but unsubstantiated messiah due to the scarcity of thought in the novel's mystical infrastructure." It makes us wish that that old murmuring secret had a verse" (Kennedy). However, these two characters, like many of his earlier anti-heroes, don't waste time talking about things that aren't important to keeping their lives and mental health intact. In this regard, McCarthy appears to have not abandoned his original writing objective of addressing the section of the collective unconscious that places a strong emphasis on the bare necessities of life and death.

Nevertheless, if one were to select the aspects of this novel that most clearly distinguish it from McCarthy's previous works of fiction, the most likely choices would be the almost complete absence of female characters and the prevalence of violence. The Road is presented as the culmination of the author's lengthy career in mythologizing some of the most important characteristics of the American West in these two particular thematic lines. For instance, his treatment of violence and pain in this work is unquestionably just as direct and naturalistic as it was in *Blood Meridian* and *No Country for Old Men*, two of his earlier works. "The point is McCarthy has studied the imagery of American violence and put his best efforts to evoking its horrors at home in his spare and disturbing prose," Mordue correctly notes about the book. McCarthy's writing has a certain granite-like quality that enables him to present the most repulsive images and experiences in a manner that is fairly detached and hard-edged. However, paradoxically, his depictions of human violence and degeneration are particularly effective due to their precision and calculated conciseness, which combines insights into our fragile mental poise with elements of the grotesque. As brought up before, one such second comes up in *The Street* when the dad and child step into a basement where they hope to have the option to search the last couple of edibles that this destroyed world irregularly bears the cost of them:

He ducked his head and then flicked the lighter and swung the flame out over the darkness like an offering. Coldness and damp. An ungodly stench. The boy clutched at his coat. He could see part of a stone wall. Clay floor. An old mattress darkly stained. He crouched and stepped down again and held out the light. Huddled against the back wall were naked people, male and female, all trying to hide, shielding their faces with their

hands. On the mattress lay a man with his legs gone to the hip and the stumps of them blackened and burnt. The smell was hideous.

Jesus, he whispered.

As is to be expected, this is primarily a male-dominated world where women are either treated as cattle to produce children that can be used as food or kept as slaves by their male leaders. The Road, like the majority of McCarthy's earlier works, depicts a male-dominated microcosm in which women are generally subservient to their male counterparts and only allowed to play very minor roles. "McCarthy has a tendency to omit half the human race from serious scrutiny," Wood stated. It is clear from the beginning of the book that the ten-year-old boy occasionally misses his mother. However, neither he nor his father ever mention her in their conversations, and if anything, she is just a ghost of someone who never displayed the self-assurance and character strength required to survive in this bloody and gruesome world. Just before she ends it all, she attempts to clear up for her significant other her explanations behind at last choosing to take "demise as another sweetheart":

No, I'm speaking the truth. Sooner or later they will catch us and they will kill us. They will rape me. They'll rape him. They are going to rape us and kill us and eat us and you won't face it. You'd rather wait for it to happen. But I can't. I can't. She sat there smoking the slender length of dried grapevine as if it were some rare cheroot. [...] We used to talk about death, she said. We don't any more. Why is that?

I don't know.

It's because it's here. There's nothing left to talk about.

While it is true that the nuclear explosion left her with more serious injuries—she has even lost her sight—and that she does not appear to have the survival skills of her husband, one cannot help but feel that her final handicap is a weakness in character and faith that makes her an outcast in that brutal setting. However, she may be correct when she tells her husband: I can't assist you. They say that ladies long for risk to those in their consideration and men of risk to themselves. Yet, I don't dream by any means" (59). According to Tompkins, the Western genre is actually characterized by the hero's inability to communicate and build community because he always thinks of egotistical ways to impose his desires to control the landscapes and other people, particularly women (61-65). Because the nuclear holocaust has already eradicated most evidence of its presence, McCarthy does not even need to exert much mental effort in *The Road* to move the female character out of center stage. As a result, he backs up McGilchrist's claim that "women are that against which male identity is defined in traditional western; This goes even further in McCarthy's western and post-apocalyptic narratives, where women gradually disappear completely from the text. Or on the other hand perhaps not, since the end result of the story surprises us again with the presence of a proxy mother for the kid:

"The woman when she saw him put her arms around him and held him. Oh, she said, I am glad to see you. She would talk to him sometimes about God. He tried to talk to God but the best thing was to talk to his father and he did talk to him and he didn't forget. The woman said that was all right. She said that the breath of God was his breath yet though it pass from man to man through all of time".

4. Conclusion

The Road by Cormac McCarthy is an interesting case study because it departs from some of the thematic and stylistic patterns associated with the American West in his previous works while maintaining some of his main plot points. As a result of the particular socio-historical conditions in his country and some significant

personal experiences, this article examines some of the novel's innovative features, including the fact that he fathered a child after turning seventy. Therefore, his treatment of landscapes, human relationships, and language itself is largely refashioned in this work, as my analysis ought to have made clear. Presumably, the closure of *The Street* is probably going to surprise his most reliable perusers. The American West is still very much present in his art, and one could even read it as the culmination of his legacy of re-mythologizing the American West. However, it would be difficult to say whether this novel signals a definitive turning point in his literary career.

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