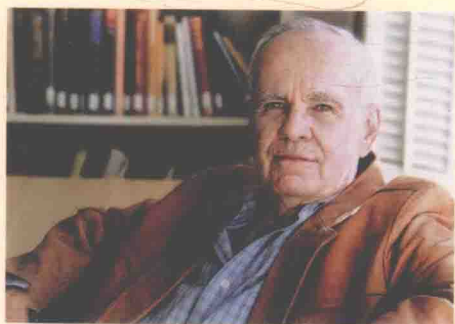


In Search of Poetic Dwelling: Environmental
Ethics in Cormac McCarthy's Western Novels

寻找诗意栖居

——科马克·麦卡锡
西部小说中的环境伦理

谢登攀 著



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前 言

科马克·麦卡锡（1933—）是美国当代小说界的巨擘。自 20 世纪 80 年代以来，他以创作一系列以美墨边境为场景的西部小说赢得了评论界的广泛关注。麦卡锡的小说语言风格独特，主题思想深刻，被誉为海明威和福克纳的当代传人，并在近年来成为诺贝尔文学奖的热门候选人之一。

长期以来，国内外评论界对麦卡锡的研究大多采用社会历史的视角，关注的焦点主要集中于其作品中所呈现出的人与社会、人与人之间的关系，而对其中所展现的人与自然的关系涉及较少。为数不多的一些对其小说中的自然书写以及人与自然关系的研究则是流于表面现象的评述，未能进行深入探讨。而且，这些研究多是碎片化的对麦卡锡个别作品的片面研究，缺少对其最具声誉的西部小说的整体化与系统化关注。

笔者选取了麦卡锡的五部西部小说，采用整体关照和具体分析相结合的方法，对其中所展现的人与自然、动物以及科学技术的关系进行研究，以期从整体上系统考察麦卡锡西部小说中所展现的环境伦理关系。当代环境伦理哲学中生态中心主义思想、生物中心主义思想和动物权利思想对人类中心主义和现代工业科技的批判为本书提供了理论支持，弥补了单一的文学生态批评只关注自然的局限性。

笔者意在阐明，麦卡锡西部小说中所展现出的自然的沦落与动物的悲惨处境显示出了作者对人类中心主义和现代工业科技的鞭挞，以及对生态中心主义思想、生物中心主义思想和动物权利思想的赞同。更为重要的是，笔者认为，国内诸多对其作品的生态解读都认为其作品通过颂扬主人公来体现生态环境意识，这或许是一种误读。麦卡锡

西部小说中的主人公们也是人类中心主义思想的牺牲品。笔者通过对麦卡锡西部小说中人与自然、动物以及科学技术的关系的分析，展示了人类中心主义思想和科技至上思想的根深蒂固。人与自然二元对立，并运用现代科学技术认识、征服、改造自然为人所用的思想已经作为一种意识形态被现代人潜移默化地接收，人类无法彻底摆脱以自我为中心的主体性。这是麦卡锡西部小说中自然、动物与人悲剧的根源。

在结论部分，笔者结合麦卡锡的新作《路》对其西部小说中的环境伦理思想进行了总结。笔者认为，麦卡锡的环境忧思在小说《路》中达到了顶峰。而且，与其西部小说中较隐晦的表达方式不同，麦卡锡在该小说中采用了环境启示录的书写方式警醒世人：现代科学技术无法根除环境危机，反而会加剧环境危机。若人类不能摆脱人类中心主义思想的禁锢，实现从“自我意识”到“生态意识”的转变，最终必然导致人类自身和整个生态环境的毁灭。

著者

2016年2月

Preface

Cormac McCarthy is among the most celebrated contemporary novelists in the United States. Since the 1980s, his western novels which are set in the US-Mexico border regions have received accolades from both the reading public and the critical circles. For the profundity of his themes and his unique language style, McCarthy is dubbed as the genuine heir to Hemingway and Faulkner and he is recently mentioned as a promising candidate for the Nobel Prize in Literature.

The existing McCarthy scholarship has been mostly through a sociohistorical approach and focusing on human history and society. These anthropocentric perspectives neglect the centrality of nature and man-nature relationship in McCarthy's works. McCarthy criticism concerning human-nature relationship has been not only scarce but also fragmented and hitherto there has been no systematic ecocritical inquiry into McCarthy's western novels.

This book investigates the environmental ethics in Cormac McCarthy's western novels. Unlike traditional ecocriticism, which is preoccupied with nature writing and nature aesthetics, my investigation mainly focuses on man's relationship with nature, with animals, and with science, the three important ramifications of environmental ethics. Environmental ethics' critique of anthropocentrism in ecocentrism, biocentrism, and animal rights, and the critique of modern industrialization, specifically of modern science and technology, provide the theoretical background for this research.

This book posits that the degradation of nature and the distressful fate of nonhuman animals as exhibited in McCarthy's western novels demonstrate McCarthy's critique of anthropocentrism and modern science and technology, and his endorsement of ecocentrism, biocentrism, and animal rights. Furthermore, I would argue that some Chinese scholars might have misinterpreted McCarthy's characters in terms of their relationship with nature and animals and thus endeavors to correct these misinterpretations by insisting that these characters are also victims of anthropocentrism. Through depicting man's relationship with nature, animals and science in his western novels, McCarthy reveals that anthropocentrism and scientism as ideologies are deeply imbedded in Western perspectives. Human beings are caught in a web of subjectivity from which they cannot escape. All these contribute to the tragedies of nature, animals, and humans in his western novels.

This book concludes that the environmental awareness in McCarthy's western novels culminates in his latest novel *The Road* to an environmental apocalypse. If human beings cannot free themselves from the entrapment of anthropocentrism and transform from egocentric beings to ecocentric beings, an environmental catastrophe would not only be inevitable but also imminent.

Abbreviations

<i>ATPH</i>	<i>All the Pretty Horses</i>
<i>BM</i>	<i>Blood Meridian, or the Evening Redness in the West</i>
<i>COTP</i>	<i>Cities of the Plain</i>
<i>NCFOM</i>	<i>No Country for Old Men</i>
<i>TC</i>	<i>The Crossing</i>
<i>TR</i>	<i>The Road</i>

Acknowledgements

While writing a book may be deemed fundamentally as an individual endeavor, yet the completion of this book has not been an individual effort or accomplishment. It draws guidance, motivation, and support from a number of important people in my life, without whom this would not have been possible. It is an honor and pleasure to acknowledge these remarkable people who have sustained me while writing this book.

First and foremost, I would like to avail myself of this opportunity to extend my heartfelt gratitude to my dear supervisor, Professor Jin Li. Her invaluable guidance and unwavering assistance during my Ph.D. years have been and would always be a great source of inspiration and motivation for me. I feel exceedingly fortunate to have her as my supervisor and mentor. Her exceptional and unflinching professional guidance and mentorship have been indispensable from the inception to the completion of this book. Without her standards of academic excellence and meticulous care, I would have never proceeded this far with my research. None of my successes would have been possible without her steadfast trust and tireless support.

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Introduction

I. A Literary Biography of Cormac McCarthy

Although being a writer of some relative obscurity in China, Cormac McCarthy (1933-) is a household name in the United States. During the past two decades, McCarthy has swiftly risen from obscurity to winning almost all major literary awards for fiction in the United States. Both literary critics and the general public favor this nouveau riche author. He is dubbed as “a writer’s writer” (Madison Bell 2) and noted Yale critic Harold Bloom calls him “the worthy disciple both of Melville and of Faulkner” and deems him among the four most important contemporary novelists, the other three being Philip Roth, Thomas Pynchon, and Don DeLillo^①.

Cormac McCarthy is never a prolific writer. Until now, he has produced altogether 10 novels and 4 dramatic works, despite the fact that his writing career spans over 50 years. His foremost achievement lies in his writing of novels and some critics consider him to be the authentic heir of the American fiction tradition from Melville to Faulkner and Hemingway. Previously being considered primarily as a regional writer, his 10 novels have peculiar local characteristics. They roughly fall into

^① Bloom mentions this in a newspaper article denouncing Stephen King being awarded National Book Foundation’s annual award for “distinguished contribution.” His original words are “Today there are four living American novelists I know of who are still at work and who deserve our praise. Thomas Pynchon is still writing. My friend Philip Roth ... There’s Cormac McCarthy, whose novel *Blood Meridian* is worthy of Herman Melville’s *Moby-Dick*, and Don DeLillo, whose *Underworld* is a great book.” For further information refer to: <Bloom, 9/24/2003, http://www.boston.com/news/globe/editorial_opinion/oped/articles/2003/09/24/dumbing_down_american_readers/>.

three categories: the southern, the western^① and the post-apocalyptic.

McCarthy's southern novels, which include *The Orchard Keeper* (1965), *Outer Dark* (1968), *The Child of God* (1973), and *Suttree* (1979), are associated with his life experience in the southern state Tennessee. Born into an affluent family of Catholic Irish descent in Rode Island in 1933, McCarthy's original name was Charles instead of Cormac. As Cormac is the Gaelic version of Charles and the name of the Irish-Gaelic king of Blarney Castle, he later changed his name to Cormac. In 1937, the family moved to Tennessee where Cormac attended Catholic high school and later the University of Tennessee majoring in liberal arts. He dropped out of university after a year and spent four years in the US air force from 1953 to 1957. According to a later interview by Richard B. Woodward, it was during his years in the military that he became a voracious reader in philosophy and fiction. In 1957, upon his discharge from the military service, he returned to Knoxville and enrolled again in the University of Tennessee, majoring in engineering this time. While in university, Cormac McCarthy published two short pieces of fiction, "A Wake for Susan" (1959) and "A Drowning Incident" (1960), in a student literary journal, which enabled him to win the Ingram-Merrill Creative Writing Award twice. The initial success in writing might have helped young McCarthy make the decision of becoming a professional writer. In 1959, he withdrew from the university again and this time for good.

McCarthy's *The Orchard Keeper* was published in 1965 by Random House and edited by Albert Erskine, William Faulkner's former editor who also edited Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*. The novel is set in an unnamed small town, possibly Knoxville, in Tennessee during the 1930s. The protagonist is 14-year-old John Wesley Rattner. The plot features his

① The setting of McCarthy's western novels is in the southwestern regions of the US such as Texas and New Mexico, as well as the adjacent areas in Mexico. Some critics prefer to call these novels southwestern novels instead of western novels.

relationship with hermit Arthur Ownby and bootlegger Marion Sylder. Sylder killed Rattner's father by accident years ago, a fact to which both Rattner and Sylder are oblivious. *The Orchard Keeper* was not a commercial success but earned McCarthy the first-novel award by William Faulkner Foundation and a traveling fellowship from the American Academy of Arts and Letters. McCarthy then travelled to Europe briefly and came back to Tennessee in the late 1960s.

From 1965 to 1979, he finished *Outer Dark* (1968), *The Child of God* (1973) and *Suttree* (1979). These three novels, along with *The Orchard Keeper*, are all set in the southern state Tennessee and help establish his reputation as a southern gothic novelist. The time and setting of *Outer Dark* are unrevealed but can be assumed to be also in Southern US. The novel tells of Rinthy, a girl who is pregnant with her brother's baby. Culla, the brother, leaves the newborn in the woods to die and lies to his sister that the baby died of natural causes. Rinthy sets out to find the baby after detecting her brother's lie. *Child of God* is set in the mountainous regions of Tennessee. It tells the story of a deviant and dispossessed man named Lester Ballard and his attempt to stay outside of the society. *Suttree* is set in Knoxville and narrates the life story of Cornelius Suttree, a prodigal son who leaves his wealthy family to indulge himself in alcohol and violence in this southern small town. It is apparent that McCarthy's southern novels, which feature murder, violence, incest, sodomy and necrophilia, remind readers of Faulkner and O'Connor. Although highly commended by a number of critics, McCarthy still remained an obscure regional writer at the time. It is not until the publication of his western novels that he rises from obscurity to a national celebrity.

In 1976, McCarthy left Knoxville, Tennessee to El Paso, Texas and so his creative focus shifted from the southern to the southwestern border. His western novels include *Blood Meridian, or the Evening Redness in the West* (1985), *All the Pretty Horses* (1992), *The Crossing* (1994), *Cities of*

the Plain (1998), and *No Country for Old Men* (2005). His western novels deviate significantly from the tradition of popular western novels represented by Louis L'Amour, Larry McMurtry and Zane Grey. Although McCarthy's western novels embrace some conventional elements of the popular western novels, they could be called revisionist westerns since they function to invert the frontier myth and Manifest Destiny which popular western novels are based upon.

McCarthy's first western novel *Blood Meridian*, published by Random House in 1985, is a novel permeated with extreme violence. The novel, based partially on real historical events, mainly narrates a teenager's experience with a group of scalp hunters marauding and massacring in the borderlands between the US and Mexico in mid 1850s. Upon its publication, *Blood Meridian* only generated lukewarm critical and commercial reception. It is only after the publication of *All the Pretty Horses* that the critical circles "rediscovered" the significance of the novel and lauded the novel to the skies. Harold Bloom favors McCarthy's *Blood Meridian*, calling it "the ultimate western, not to be surpassed."^① *Time* magazine included the novel in its "TIME 100 Best English-language Novels from 1923 to 2005." In 2006, *Blood Meridian* ranked the second, next to Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, when *The New York Times* conducted a poll among writers and critics regarding the most important works in American fiction from the previous 25 years. Despite the fact that *Blood Meridian* has not won any major literary prizes, it is considered by many critics, especially by Harold Bloom, as McCarthy's all time masterpiece.

Contrasting with *Blood Meridian*'s bumpy road to recognition, upon the publication of *All the Pretty Horses* in 1992, it immediately became a

① Harold Bloom is a critical figure in the "rediscovering" and promoting McCarthy's *Blood Meridian*. He writes that: "I venture that no other living American novelist, not even Pynchon, has given us a book as strong and memorable as *Blood Meridian*, much as I appreciate Don DeLillo's *Underworld*; Philip Roth's *Zuckerman Bound*, *Sabbath's Theater*, and *American Pastoral*; and Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow* and *Mason & Dixon*." See Harold Bloom, "Introduction," in *Cormac McCarthy. Modern Critical Views*. Ed. Harold Bloom. New York: Infobase Publishing, 2009: 1.

landslide victory in both critical and commercial fields. Unlike the bleakness in his previous novels, this story of two cowboys running away to adventure in the border regions, with a little spice of romantic encounter with a beautiful girl, seems to suit the tastes of the general reading public as well as the fastidious critics. *All the Pretty Horses* brings his author both the National Book Award and the National Book Critics Circle Award. By then, McCarthy has become a nationally famous man of letters.

Following the success of *All the Pretty Horses*, McCarthy published the other two novels *The Crossing* (1994) and *Cities of the Plain* (1998). The three novels are connected in plot as John Cole Grady, the protagonist in *All the Pretty Horses*, joins with Billy Parham, the hero in *The Crossing*, in the third novel *Cities of the Plain*. Everyman's Library published the three novels together in 1999 as *The Border Trilogy*. The latter two novels of the trilogy, especially the third one, are not so positively reviewed by critics as the first one but are well received by the reading public and are regarded as important western novels by McCarthy.

The year 2005 saw the publication of *No Country for Old Men*, another western novel by McCarthy. The novel also set its background in the US-Mexico border regions but addresses contemporary issues of drug dealings and other crimes. The novel received a significant amount but mixed reviews from literary critics, with some calling it a masterpiece while other critics deeming it not so good as his previous western novels.^① Yet, *No Country for Old Men* might not be a critical success but it is indeed a commercial success. The novel was adapted into a movie of the same name directed by the Coen Brothers in 2007 and won four Oscar Awards, including the Best Picture. The power of the Hollywood industry makes *No Country for Old Men* the most well-known novel by McCarthy

^① Critical reviews appeared in important literary media including *The New York Times Book Review* gave rather negative reviews of the novel upon its publication. Harold Bloom, in an interview in 2009 also expressed his dissatisfaction with the novel, stating that it lacked the quality of McCarthy's best works. <<http://www.avclub.com/articles/harold-bloom-on-blood-meridian.29214/>>.