

Effect of evolutionary psychology in the novels of Cormac McCarthy

Sandipani Choudhury, Research Scholar

Dr. Swayam Prabha Satpathy, Supervisor

Associate Prof. Dept. of Humanities.

SOA University

Abstract

The startling lack of introspective discoveries in Cormac McCarthy's novels is a point of contention for critics of the author. For example, Jay Ellis observes "the absence of regular psychologizing," while James Bowers asserts that few contemporary writers reject "the Joycean tradition of interiority" as thoroughly as does McCarthy (Bowers 14, Ellis 5). Some reviewers link the novels' moral bleakness and overarching depressing tone to a stylistic absence of character thinking disclosures, a device shared by many American naturalist writers. McCarthy restricts disclosures of inner thoughts, but he does not completely eradicate them. Occasionally, McCarthy's omniscient, detached third-person narrative style gives way to a limited third-person voice that highlights a specific character's point of view. Third-person narration occasionally even transitions into first-person narrative. The thoughts of characters who demonstrate moral awareness and ethical behaviour are typically revealed by this abrupt change into the close third or first-person point of view. As the story switches between the perspectives of immoral characters, it highlights the humanity of those characters, evoking an empathy reaction in readers that enables them to see how human all people are, even the most heinous among them. Therefore, changes in point of view are invariably linked to morality, exposing a character's need for belonging, respect for life, or dedication to justice and compassion. The relationship between narrative viewpoint and morality in McCarthy's books has not yet been thoroughly examined. McCarthy's plays and novels, when read in conversation with one another, dialogically pit arguments for a very mystical divine providence against arguments for the self-destructive nature of humanity, making his worldview famously difficult to pinpoint. In order to show how McCarthy values moral behaviour and attitudes, this study will examine the variety of narrative strategies employed by the author. It will concentrate on the early Appalachian novels, The Border Trilogy, and The Road, whose styles are emblematic of the entire corpus. The imperfect heroism of moral persons like as the father in The Road or John Grady Cole in The Border Trilogy is shown through revelations of their interior ethical battles.

Keywords: Humankind, mystical, compassion, and valuing.

Overview.

The most excellent illustration of McCarthy's portrayal of American history can be found in *Blood Meridian*, his highly regarded masterpiece. The 1985 book is frequently regarded as anti-Western because it rejects the conventional Western narrative technique of characterising human morality as fixed and unchangeable and instead blurs the boundaries between good and evil.

The story of the book centres on a young adolescent known only as "the kid," who joins a group of scalp hunters commanded by John Joel Glanton and becomes obsessed with killing Native Americans near the disputed Texas-Mexico border in the middle of the 20th century. Finding "Injin," Mexican, or any other form of scalps, Glanton's gang is willing to pay a high price to the US Army, which has been dealing with the savagery of the barbarous tribes against them.

Judge Holden, a guy seven feet tall with a near-supernatural knowledge, brutal violence, and immorality, is another notable character that joins the gang. McCarthy's presentation of what lies beyond humankind's regular reckonings is chiefly made possible by the extraordinarily eloquent Holden, because The Judge is a keen observer of all things related to events, nature, and moral awareness.

Holden is a supernatural being in several senses; he might be the totality of human (and beyond) understanding, the devil manifested, or a lost djinn. When all, Holden joined Glanton's gang when they discovered him by himself in the middle of the desert, naked, and without food or drink. Each member of Glanton's gang claimed to have interacted with him before to joining the scalpers.

In that way, the Judge is both distinctly human and a symbol of human history at the same time. Holden's main conviction is that violence and war are part of what it means to be human, which explains his readiness to kill, maim, and rape his way past the Mexican army and the native tribes, regardless of their moral or political beliefs. McCarthy shows in his book how slaughter and violence constituted the foundation of American history. That's the way it has been, how it ought to be, and how it will always be, the Judge said. Despite the fact that conflict has been since the beginning of human history, we yet find ourselves feeling at odds with this method of communication. The strength of human morality stands in opposition to the reality of violence and the necessity of battle for humankind. Given that the Judge, who is supposed to possess all knowledge, supports this kind of violence, it seems likely that its justification is beyond the scope of human comprehension.

Review of the Literature.

Jim Morrison, the lead singer of The Doors, is another influential figure in culture who has experimented with the idea of shamanic awareness beyond human comprehension. Morrison had drawn inspiration for the band's name from a passage by English poet William Blake, which goes, "If the doors of perception were cleansed, everything would appear to man as it is, infinite."

Because of Blake's remarks, Aldous Huxley's 1954 autobiographical novel *The Door of Perception* also borrowed its title. Morrison was an avid reader of the English poet. "Because man has closed himself up, till he sees all things thro' narrow chinks of his cavern." That quote implies that the limitless reality of the world is obscured by our everyday human comprehension. Morrison's poetry, like McCarthy's book and Judge Holden's didactic style, aims to restate that truth while drawing on the shamanic lessons of American history.

In "Awake," it is acknowledged that there is more to the universe than meets the mundane grasp of what we take to be true. Morrison suggests that in order to better align ourselves with the epistemologically confirmed nature of the "Ancient Ones," we need "shake [our] dreams from [our] hair." We can fully live according to whatever is beyond humankind's desire when we, as Blake recommends, "cleanse the doors of perception" and acknowledge that there is something more than what we merely think we truly know. Morrison demonstrates in "Power" how he may "become gigantic and reach the farthest things," "change the course of nature," and "place [himself] anywhere in space or time" by following that edict.

Morrison demonstrates his affinity with the teachings of the ancient Native American shamans in some of the most poignant lyrics he wrote for *The Doors*. "The souls of the ghosts of those dead Indians—maybe one or two of 'em—were just running around freaking out, and just leaped into my soul," asserts Morrison in "Dawn's Highway." And they're still in there." This implies that Morrison learned from those Ancients, which is probably why he chose to live by his own moral principles rather than the ones that the Judeo-Christian religion and the educational system taught us.

Morrison most likely gained his understanding of Judge Holden's wisdom in *Blood Meridian* through an extreme lifestyle supported by psychedelic substances and a determination on creating his own hierarchy of beliefs. In this way, Morrison created his own mythological lessons that have motivated a lot of people ever since, transcending the bounds of ordinary human comprehension.

The two great painters used different approaches to the same subject—knowledge. Nevertheless, their ultimate goal was the same: to emphasise how important it is to have beliefs that go beyond conventional human reason. Beyond the capacities or "reckonings" of people, there is something else. But as both Morrison's and McCarthy's "the kid" surely found out, maybe we won't really have to deal with it until the very end. This study explores the role that morality and human nature play in explaining why people are so fixated by (post-)apocalyptic literature. In the context of Literary Darwinism, sometimes referred to as Evolutionary Literary Study, which has evolutionary psychology as its theoretical foundation, it also analyses the morality and human nature in *The Road*. This study analyses *The Road* and the (post-)apocalyptic genre in the context of evolutionary psychology-derived models of human nature and behaviour by embracing a literary Darwinist approach and apocalyptic thought. The third chapter delves into the significance, background, origins, and interpretation of (post-)apocalyptic literature, highlighting its capacity to expose human hopes, fears, and concerns.

It is proven that serious (post-)apocalyptic writers challenge human nature and morality when survival is at stake by capitalising on built (cultural) and universal anxieties in their futuristic worlds. Moreover, it shows how critically evolved aspects of the human mind are necessary for (post-)apocalyptic fiction. The fantastical settings that these kinds of novels portray are works of the human mind, and as such, they should be able to disclose something about the brains who create them, as well as their ethos and motivations. The chapter on Cormac McCarthy's post-apocalyptic novel *The Road* practices the debates on literary Darwinism and post-apocalyptic genre. By employing evolutionary theory of human nature as a fundamental framework to describe the characteristics of McCarthy's world view, it is possible to analyse *The Road* as a construct arising from his specific world view by drawing on theories put out by Joseph Carroll. This chapter not only evaluates how McCarthy aligns or deviates from fundamental ideas about human nature and morality, but it also uncovers the fundamental aspects of human nature that McCarthy possesses, albeit through the lens of his cultural background, personal requirements, and the motivation behind his post-apocalyptic writing. Examined are the audience's reactions to McCarthy's post-apocalyptic world as well as the author's ethos and convictions. Based on the analyses in this thesis, it is concluded that the (post-)apocalyptic genre and McCarthy's *The Road* are profoundly influenced by morality traits, human nature, and universal human fears and needs by drawing a line between culture and nature through the lens of Literary Darwinism, as well as by highlighting the evolutionary psychologist's conception of human nature and the cultural context of the period. Literary Darwinism can be used to analyse any genre or piece of fiction. Even while a work of fiction is a creation of the author's imagination and contains many cultural allusions, all stories have their origins in the human mind and nature, which are products of the coevolution of genes and cultures.

The idea behind evolutionary psychology

The field of evolutionary literary studies is relatively new, having just been established during the last 20 years or so, and its practitioners are still confined to the periphery of the academic literary establishment. The establishment has a poststructuralist focus.

Concepts and rejects the notions of objective scientific knowledge as well as human nature (Carroll, 1995; Carroll, Gottschall, Johnson, & Kruger, 2012, pp. 1–6; Culler, 2011). The idea that evolutionary literary critics accept is that

"consilience," validate the validity of the evolutionary theory, and absorb the conclusions from the social sciences of evolution. They would concur with E. O. Wilson (Carroll, McAdams, & Wilson, in press; Slingerland & Collard, 2012; E. O. Wilson, 1998) that knowledge constitutes an integrated field covering the social sciences, the physical sciences, and the humanities, and that the world is a single causal order. They affirm that sophisticated functional structure in living things has been formed by adaptation, that life has developed by an adaptive process by means of natural selection, and that human mental and cultural activity is limited by the rules that govern all biological activity. They contend that literature is both created by and reflects the form and nature of the adapted mind.

A large portion of the work in evolutionary literary analysis conducted in the 1990s and early 2000s was programmatic and polemical in nature. Academics criticised the cultural constructivist theories that were prevalent in the literary establishment of universities, practiced the fundamentals of the adaptationist programme and made tentative attempts to develop principles of interpretation that may be connected to ideas that are especially evolutionary. Most evolutionary literary study still uses the discursive, speculative exchange of favors, but evolutionary biologists and social scientists have been developing more complete and adequate accounts of specifically human capacities for cooperative group endeavour (Boehm, 1999, 2012, in press; Buckholtz & 2009; Miller, 2000), enhance pattern recognition and stimulate creativity (McCarthy's first novel, *The Orchard Keeper*, introduces the outcasts as members of the disappearing mountain culture of East Tennessee. Young Marion Sylder lives by bootlegging, and in self-defense he kills a man and disposes of the body in an abandoned peach orchard that symbolizes the dying culture. Old Arthur Ownby, who fondly watches over the orchard, finds the body, but he does not report it. He lets it rest in peace for seven years. The old man also believes in his own peace and privacy, and when these are disturbed by a government holding tank erected on a nearby hill, he shoots his X on the tank's side. Both the men live by old mountain codes that, by definition, are outside the law of the intruding modern world. However, the enforcers of the law, who finally arrest and beat Sylder and send the old man to a mental institution, seem degenerate in comparison to them. The novel's theme is also represented in John Wesley Rattner (ironically, the son of the dead man), a boy who hunts and traps, is befriended by the two men, and comes of age in the novel. Even though the old ways are no longer relevant, he chooses to abandon them.

The Orchard Keeper's episodic merging storylines and italicised flashbacks allude to Faulkner's storytelling approaches, and McCarthy's second book, *Outer Dark*, is likewise indebted to the author. The story, which is set in an ambiguously Deep South location at the beginning of the 20th century, centres on the terrible fallout from Culla and Rinthy Holme's sibling incest. After Rinthy gives birth, Culla leaves the baby boy in the woods, where it is discovered and taken by a tinker who is passing by. Culla informs Rinthy that the baby has died, but Rinthy unearths the small grave, catches Culla lying, and follows his instincts to find the tinker. Culla pursues Rinthy in an attempt to retrieve her. They are reminded of Lena Grove and Joe Christmas's roadside rambles in Faulkner's *Light in August* (1932). Rinthy, who travels along dripping mother's milk for more than six months, befriends everyone she meets, whereas Culla encounters nothing but mistrust and strife. The river voyage from Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884) is also recalled in these episodes, especially a crazy scene where a loose ferry is swept down a raging river.

Interpretation and Conversation

Three vengeful angels, or devils, who prowl the countryside killing humans, are McCarthy's most inventive and iconic creation in *Outer Dark*. Realistically speaking, they are lawless, asocial drifters who have completely lost all empathy and entered the "outer dark." Near the end of the book, Culla encounters this wicked trio of blood brothers, which seems fitting.

Before Culla's eyes, the three hang the tinker and kill the infant, which is now metaphorically scarred like in a Nathaniel Hawthorne tale: one cuts the baby's throat, while the other suckers its blood. *Blood Meridian*, author McCarthy's fifth book, is a historical fiction set in the middle of the nineteenth century in northern Mexico and the American Southwest. The protagonist of the book is an unnamed character who goes by "the kid" (perhaps a reference to Billy the child). At the age of fourteen, he flees his Tennessee home and travels west. He could be telling Huck Finn's story after Huck "lit out for the territory" and abandoned civilization. Following several run-ins with the law, the youngster eventually joins a group of bounty hunters who target Apaches when the Apaches aren't around. They always travel west. The ongoing massacres are carefully reported in the running summary at the beginning of each chapter.

Blood Meridian offers a helpful look back at McCarthy's work in several respects. It revisits the horrors of his previous books, but it appears to connect them to Suttree's social ideas. After all, the scalp hunters represent the vanguard of Western civilisation. They propose a horrible moral ambiguity at the core of civilization, as well as in people's emotions, which allows it to eradicate backward mountaineers and Apaches and to produce slums like McAnally Flats. The disgusting and cruel *Blood Meridian* philosopher Judge Holden contends that violence will always triumph over morality and that morality is unnecessary because God created humans in this way. The child is finally given a death-grip hug by the nude judge in a lavatory behind a whorehouse in Fort Gryphon, Texas. This should serve as a caution to readers to stay away from such philosophers.

McCarthy's novels centre on disparate but connected conversations concerning human nature and behaviour. In this sense, the conflict between the two cultures—the humanities and science—and the means of bridging them in order to achieve consilience, or the unity of knowledge, are shown as examples of cultural representation. It is argued that literary Darwinism has arisen as a third culture as a compromise to close the gap between these two civilizations. After making the case, the next part goes into further detail on evolutionary psychology, which serves as the theoretical foundation for literary Darwinism. The majority of human nature and behaviour are covered by the broad field of evolutionary psychology, so this thesis explains the field's history, objectives, key concepts, and justifications for claims like the following: human nature and behaviour are products of evolution and adaptation, not merely culture. The following section explores how literary Darwinists use the evolutionary psychology model of human nature and behaviour to interpret artistic creations. They debate the meaning of art, its role, and whether it is an adaptation or a byproduct of an adaptation. They also offer their theories on the subject. The literary Darwinist perspective is provided in the end. By highlighting evolutionary processes and using Literary Darwinism and cultural approach to construct a boundary between culture and nature,

Psychology's understanding of human nature and the historical cultural backdrop are examined, along with how morality qualities, human nature, and basic human desires and anxieties influence McCarthy's *The Road* and the (post-)apocalyptic genre. Literary Darwinists view the arts, and storytelling in particular, as a universal human adaptation. The Pulitzer Prize-winning novel *The Road* (2006) by Cormac McCarthy is by all means a dark, gloomy, disturbing, and frightening post-apocalyptic story set in an ashen cold landscape where “nights dark beyond darkness and the days more grey each one than what had gone before” (3).

The sun is hidden behind the thick layers of ash, as if it is “banished” from the world, circling “the earth like a grieving mother with a lamp” (28). This research examines the (post-)apocalyptic genre and *The Road* in the light of models of human nature and human behaviour brought together by evolutionary psychology. Many academics have studied the child and the man's characters since the show's conception in 2006; the majority of them view the youngster as a blank slate and have examined the characters only from a cultural standpoint, regardless of involving McCarthy's worldview, but this chapter examines the characters through the lens of literary Darwinism and evaluates them using both McCarthy's worldview and evolutionary theories of human nature.

Conclusion

McCarthy's portrayal of individuals donning “masks and goggles” (24) in one scene and cannibals cursing while wearing “canister masks” and “biohazard suit” in another leads some critics to propose that a nuclear holocaust is the reason for the apocalypse (see, for instance, Abrams' synopsis of the book).

Additionally, Carl Grindley, a critic, incorrectly asserts that the work is "a retelling of the Book of Revelation" and that the Earth is too devastated for a natural tragedy, necessitating a "supernatural cause" (Cooper 218-219). McCarthy does not respond favourably to any of these theories. Based on an interview about *No Country for Old Men*

McCarthy claims that he prefers literary realism to "magical" genres in the movie. "Hard enough to get people to believe what you're trying to tell them without making it impossible," in his opinion

According to Jonathan Gottschall, the use of realistic narration in *The Road* is one of McCarthy's main literary differences from his other books. The goal of realistic novels is to create the illusion of reality through the use of plausible, daily forms of experience and realistic depictions of everyday happenings and "complex characters with mixed motives" (Abrams 228). A realistic novel renders the main events of the plot through the dialogue between people and their perspectives and values. With regard to McCarthy's other books, this is not the case. According to Greenwood, McCarthy employs an omniscient narrative style in his other works that prioritises "mythic plots and features classical ideals" (15). The characters lack a voice to allow the spectator to see their true feelings. Additionally, it is unclear what the characters' underlying motivations and ideals are, and their psychology is not revealed in the few exchanges. McCarthy prevents his viewers from concentrating on the character and developing a humorous sense of sympathy for her by intentionally making her as repulsive and ambiguous as he can. He wants his readers to understand the ageless problems these individuals face—problems like morality, human nature, and the nature of evidence—that have confronted humanity since the dawn of time.

Citations:

Abrams, M. H. & Harpham, Geoffrey Galt. *An Etymology of Literary Terms*. 9th ed.

Wadsworth, Boston, 2009. Copy.

Philip Appleman. "Darwin: Regarding Mind-Changing"

Darwin, *A Norton Critical Edition*, Third Ed. Philip Appleman, ed. W. W. Norton, New York, 2001: 3–20. Manuel Aguirre. Digital.

Manchester University Press published *The Closed Space: Horror Literature and Western Symbolism* in 1990.

Digital. *Oxford English Dictionary*, "Apocalypse." 2.

Second edition. 1989. Margaret Atwood, Print.

New York: Doubleday, 2003; Oryx and Crake. digital.

Begley, Sharon. *Newsweek*, "The Science Wars."

April 4, 1997.

Brent Bellamy. "Why write post-apocalyptic literature?" as well as "why now?": A Comprehensive List of American Post-Apocalyptic Fiction Sources." Digital, n.p.

Walter Benjamin. "Central Park." Translation. Lloyd, Spencer, and Mark Harrington. 34 (1985) *New German Critique* 32

—

58. Digital. Cormac McCarthy, Harold Bloom, ed. New York: Infobase Publishing, 2009. digital.

Michael Bond. "Joe Penhall: Humanity after the End of the World." *New Scientist* ..., January 13, 2010.

Boyd, Brian. "Evolution and Art: The Avan-Garde as Test Case." *Literature, Film, and Evolution: A Reader*

.. Eds. Brian Boyd along with others. Columbia UP, New York, 2010: 433–454. Print.—

.. Meet Charles, Jane.

Literature and Philosophy 22.1; *Literature, Evolution, and Human Nature*

(1998): 1–30. Copy. ---.On the Inception of Tales: Development, Perception, and Fiction

.. Cambridge, Massachusetts: HarvardUP Belknap, 2009. Joseph Carroll, Jonathan Gottschall, and Digital.---, eds.Literature, Cinema, and Evolution.

Columbia University Press, New York, 2010.

Bowler, Peter J. Evolution, Third Edition, Print

U of California P, Berkeley, CA, 2003. digital.

David Brin. "A Happy Libertarianism: The Case for Essentces, Orcs, and Civilization."

David Brin [online]. <http://www.davidbrin.com/libertarian1.html>. 22 March 2013. Questions I Am Frequently Asked: <http://davidbrin.blogspot.de/2013/03/>