
Representation Of The Non-Human World In Cormac Mccarthy's *The Road*

Rev. Fr. (Dr.) Augustine Owusu-Addo

Catholic University College of Ghana, Fiapre, P.O. Box 363, Sunyani
aoaddo58@aol.com

Atianashie Miracle Atianashie

University of California, Wilmington, DE 19899, U.S.A
Scorpiongh86@gmail.com

Chukwumma Chinaza Adaobi

Catholic University College of Ghana, Fiapre Sunyani, Bono Region, Ghana
chinazaadaobi26@gmail.com

Abstract: The human bonding with the environment is significant and has been represented in the literary writings from days immemorial. Cormac McCarthy is an American writer, whose major works are centred on Appalachian environment. His tenth novel, is a dystopian fiction urges man's careless outlook towards environment. Set in a futuristic environment, the novel, portrays a barbaric and a barren land devoid of animal world. This paper presents the significance of the non-human world as portrayed in *The Road*.

Keywords: deep ecology, dystopia, cormacmccarthy's, the road

Berger makes a threatening statement on wildlife, "in the last two centuries animals have gradually disappeared. Today we live without them" (11). *TR* posits a similar context and being a dystopian fiction, it is suggestive of the increase in brutality. All the other animals except humans in *TR* are either extinct or almost dead. Yet the story employs encounter with non-human animals in a few instances. Moreover, there are reiterations and constant reminders about the non-human world which in spite of their absence gains them significance. The physical absence of the non-humans and the alarming impact it creates through their remains and memories of the inhabitation and practices gives significance. The characters make constant references to animals which one has not seen before.

The damage that humans have done to the entire animal kingdom and then on to the planet are seeded by Thomas Berry who describes it as a 'deep cultural pathology' that developed in Western society and is now spreading across the planet. He says,

In this universal disturbance of the biosphere by human agents, the human being now finds that the harm done to the natural world is returning to threaten the human species itself. The question of the viability of the human species is intimately connected with the viability of the earth. These questions ultimately arise because at the present time the human community has such an exaggerated, even pathological, fixation on its own comfort and convenience that it is willing to exhaust any and all of the earth's resources to satisfy its own cravings (176).

In a new world, where the members of the other species have faced their demise, the son and the father make their journey. The world they witness has no other social evils as well, namely, there is no social division in the names of class, race and no social forms at all. The father and the son cannot be happy with the reformed world because the father is fully aware that man is only a social animal. In McCarthy's wild imagination, after

the cataclysm, the predominantly surviving species could be humans. Fire being a symbol of civilization, has been considered an important invention. It is the predominant mark of civilization in human history and literature has taken fire at many levels at many metaphorical levels. It has been the symbol of life; it is the symbol of knowledge ever since the myth of Prometheus brought to the world, the inspiring knowledge. Both on the landscape and journey towards the south, fire remains a symbol of life and hope. But considering the non-human animal life and the problems that are experienced by the lonely travellers, fire remains a symbol of extinction of species.

The father gives a brimming hope to the son on frequent terms that they are carrying fire. When looked at in different terms, fire is the object of threat; the advent of fire into this human world has brought with us knowledge, culture and later on a distinction that set us apart from the non-human world. Fire was a weapon in a way to chase away the wildly beasts that man was afraid of. Wild beasts and cannibals including wolves, panthers and other felines were a threat to human life. On one hand, they took human lives and consumed other beasts for their survival. The world is not totally devoid of a wild and beastly environment. McCarthy urges the reader to understand the forthcoming dangers in case of a world that survives an environmental or nuclear cataclysm. Human animals evolve and play the role of wild beasts. The threat is that humans become cannibals in the course of such a catastrophe and yield a possibility of forming a divided world of cannibals and potential yet helpless victims to those cannibals. In McCarthy's image, such a non-human world is metaphorically animal free and a hell to survive.

The absence of the animals is also an acute reminder of the way humans have been reliant on the lives of the former. Moreover, man has been extremely frivolous on their dependence on animals in all means. Carol Adam comments that the man in spite of his starvation and the threats one after the other, the man does not dream of the other animals as edible stuff. He puts it as the absence of the edible incarnation of 'absent referent' (1990). In parallel terms, McCarthy quotes the images of the non-human animals that predominate the man's dreams.

He dreams about walking in flowering woods, with birds flying around himself and his son. He remembers watching a falcon diving down the side of a mountain to pick a crane from amongst a group of them, and watching trout swaying and flashing in the current of a river. Once in those early years he'd wakened in a barren wood and listened to flocks of migratory birds overhead in the bitter dark. Their half muted crankings miles above where they circled the earth as senselessly as insects trouping the rim of a bowl. He wished them god speed till they were gone. He never heard them again. (54-55).

The place, the man and the boy traverse are only a memoir of the animal world that existed before. The place is surrounded with litters and the relics, "A boar hide nailed to a barn door. A pile of cat bones in a living room. A plastic deer in a yard. The lingering odour of cows in a barn. A man with a tattoo of a bird on his neck, 'done by someone with an ill-formed notion of their appearance'" (65) It is the father alone who has witnessed animals in his life and he is able to reconnect and associate every moment in his journey, his memories of the animals that he has seen and the habits of animals which he has heard of. The acts of the son often remind him of the animals. Lumbering out from the snow, he sees the boy sleeping in the morning and it appears to him like some animal that hibernates (103); he had trained his son to lie in the woods like a fawn in times of danger (124); And later when the boy tastes the prunes from the lid carefully, the father is reminded of a cat licking its own reflection in a glass (205).

The ascriptions of animals that the father sees in the boy are touching. The boy was supposed to have been born after the apocalypse, a time that left no evidence of animals that hibernate, no sign of cat or fawn and he has no knowledge of the world in order. His ignorance in the world of non-human species and to know of the lives that he missed in the apocalyptic environment is known as they traverse about how a crow's flight. The conversation as it begins is a casual phrase for the father to indicate the distance to be covered. He says, 'two hundred miles...as the crow flies' (166); But to the boy, having never watched a crow fly, it kindles him to pose a volley of questions:

It means going in a straight line... We're not going as the crow flies.

Because crows don't follow roads?

Yes.

They can go wherever they want.

Yes.

Do you think there might be crows somewhere?

I don't know.

But what do you think?

I think it's unlikely.

Could they fly to Mars or someplace?

No. They couldn't.

Because it's too far?

Yes. Even if they wanted to.

Even if they wanted to.

What if they tried and they just got halfway or something and then they?

were too tired. Would they fall back down?

Well. They couldn't really get half way because they'd be in space so they wouldn't be able to fly and besides it would be too cold and they'd freeze to death.

Oh. (166-167)

Wilson coins this inherent affinity that the human beings hold towards other lives as biophilia. He terms it to be, "the innate tendency to focus on life and lifelike processes". (1) It is this affinity that keeps this world moving and associates humans with the rest of this world and it is in this matrix the human mind takes its origin and gets fixed. There is a sole live happenstance seen in the fiction between the human and non-human character. The episode of the barking dog heard miles away remains a witness to the humane concern still lingering in the hearts of human beings, seeds a little hope and reiterates the ecocritical lesson that earth has a capacity of healing or rejuvenating itself. To the boy, the bark of a dog is strange until his father explains it to him. The man is reminded of the days in the past when his mother was alive; the immediate concern of the boy is that the dog should not be killed and he gets assured of the same. However, the bark does not last long and stops with lights and wood smoke in the distance. In *TR*, the habits of non-human animals being identified as a part of the son could be an underlying fact because their world is devoid of animals. The biophilia, thus seen in the boy is a contradictory idea; in a way it is suggestive of the boy being an embodiment of all subconscious memory of the world of animals; ironically it also represents the man's movement towards the machine life and staying away from the natural world.

It is substantial to discriminate the principles of deep ecology from its phase as a political manifesto. On this note, Naess states with self-realization in a way so that individuality is found, not lost through contemplation of life. Apprehension for the environment should never be incompatible to concern for self. By this way, there is



no struggle between the human and the animal worlds. To identify with the tussles of all life forms is crucial, and with self-actualisation as the necessary value, the apprehension for the entire Earth naturally follows. This series of thought shapes upon a mindfulness that the very term *ecology*, as employed by experts as a term for the branch of biology that studies the associations between creatures and their locales, has a societal and governmental root. In a dystopian landscape where humans have taken to cannibalism, the boy and his father ensure no damage to other lives. In a similar way the boy is reminded of a toy penguin that comes flipping its wings- a symbol of the illusive world that the mechanical society has resulted in apocalypse. Later, the boy witnesses in his nightmare, a penguin with its wings wound. When man wants to create a mechanized and industrial, what is beautiful in nature becomes barbaric and the world turns out to be a brutal hell. Men are often mesmerized by the metallic life and forget the bliss of an organic life. The fall results in the separation of man from the rest of the world.

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