


# McCarthy's Roots in Tradition and Perception of Nature in *The Road*

## McCarthy'nin Geleneğe Uzanan Kökleri ve *Yol* Romanındaki Doğa Algısı

İbrahim KOÇ 

Department of Foreign Languages,  
Ordu University, Faculty of Arts and  
Science, Ordu, Turkey



This paper is partly taken from İbrahim Koç's PhD thesis "Representations of nature and environment in post-apocalyptic dystopias: an ecocritical reading of Maggie Gee's *The Flood*, Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* and Margaret Atwood's *The Year of the Flood*" submitted in 2021 at İstanbul Aydın University under the guidance of Asst. Prof. Öz ÖKTEM.

Received/Geliş Tarihi: 24.04.2022

Accepted/Kabul Tarihi: 22.09.2023

Publication Date/Yayın Tarihi: 01.12.2023

Corresponding Author/Sorumlu Yazar:  
İbrahim KOÇ  
E-mail: kocram76@hotmail.com

Cite this article as: Koç, İ. (2023). McCarthy's roots in tradition and perception of nature in *The Road*. *Current Perspectives in Social Sciences*, 27(4), 316-322.



Content of this journal is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License.

### ABSTRACT

This paper locates Cormac McCarthy as a modern representative of a particular wing of American literary tradition and discusses the parallels between *The Road* and some important works of this tradition. Long before the transcendentalist views of nature as a sacred place, the first European immigrants to America described wild nature as an unfriendly domain where human beings are both punished for their sins and tested by the Supreme Being. Their perspective fits the descriptions of unfriendly nature in *The Road*. Besides, while the perception of nature in American culture is influenced by this wilderness concept that needs to be tamed and that needs to be civilized with human intervention, it has also been influenced by the romantic definition of nature seen after the onset of industrialism in Europe and America. *The Road* contains traces of both perspectives and moves them one step forward with its response to the modern environmental crisis. In this context, depending on the representations of nature and environment in the entirely devastated setting of the novel, McCarthy appears as the representative of a world where self-sustaining green nature no longer exists, and the environment covered with concrete forests.

**Keywords:** The Road, Cormac McCarthy, ecocriticism, tradition, apocalypse

### ÖZ

Bu makale, Cormac McCarthy'yi Amerikan edebiyat geleneğinin belirli bir kanadının modern bir temsilcisi olarak konumlandırmakta ve *Yol* romanı ile bu geleneğin bazı önemli eserleri arasındaki paralellikleri tartışmaktadır. Doğayı kutsal bir yer olarak gören aşkinci görüşlerden çok önce, Amerika'ya gelen ilk Avrupalı göçmenler vahşi doğayı, insanların hem günahlarından dolayı cezalandırıldıkları hem de Yüce Varlık tarafından sınanıldıkları dostça olmayan bir alan olarak tanımladılar. Bu göçmenlerin bakış açıları, *Yol*'daki düşmanca doğa tanımları ile uyum içindedir. Ayrıca Amerikan kültüründe doğa algısı, evcilleştirilmesi ve insan müdahalesi ile medenileştirilmesi gereken bu vahşi doğa kavramından etkilenirken, Avrupa ve Amerika'da sanayileşmenin başlamasından sonra görülen romantik doğa tanımından da etkilenmiştir. *Yol* romanı her iki bakış açısının da izlerini içerir ve modern çevre krizine verdiği yanıtla bu gelenekleri bir adım ileriye taşır. Bu bağlamda, romanın tamamen harap olmuş ortamındaki doğa ve çevre temsilleri göz önüne alındığında McCarthy, kendi kendini idame ettirebilen yeşil doğanın artık var olmadığı, çevrenin beton ormanlarla kaplı olduğu bir dünyanın temsilcisi olarak karşımıza çıkmaktadır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Yol, Cormac McCarthy, ekoeleştirme, gelenek, kıyamet

### Introduction

The story of *The Road* is that of an emotional relationship between a father and his son, which many readers and critics regard as one of the most pessimistic and gloomy stories written to date. It tells the journey of two unnamed survivors of an unspecified catastrophe that destroyed the world and killed almost all living nature. In this post-apocalyptic world, everything is covered with ashes, and everywhere littered with burned corpses and rusty motor vehicles. Some time earlier, when the mother committed suicide, like many of the survivors, the man decided to take his son, born after the event, and move to the South, to the seaside, in the hope of finding a friendlier climate and some food. This is how the events begin to unfold in the storyline. Throughout the novel, the author details the touching relationship between the man and the boy and their struggle for survival in the setting created by the remnants of the apocalypse, most likely caused by a natural disaster. Considering the extremely dark

nature of the novel, this paper argues that experiences of the unfortunate heroes of the novel could provide substantial references to the nature perception that was generated by the first European settlers in America who described wilderness as an unfriendly domain where human beings are both punished for their sins and tested by the Supreme Being, and aims to locate McCarthy as a modern representative of the literary tradition modeled with the perspective of this point of view. The main difference of this study from the general ecocritical readings of *The Road* is that the ecological references in the novel are handled in the context of their relationship within this particular literary tradition. This paper establishes the aforementioned relationship by emphasizing the parallels between *The Road* and other literary texts belong to different periods.

### Representations of Nature in *The Road* and American Nature Writing

A critical analysis of *The Road* would suggest that by showing the interconnectedness of life on Earth, it can be seen as a suitable text for an ecocritical reading. *The Road* has been described as “the first great masterpiece of the globally warmed generation”<sup>1</sup> (O’Hagan, 2010) and as “the most important environmental book ever written” (Monbiot, 2007). *The Road* on the one hand offers an uncomplicated sequence of events narrated with plain, almost naked language; on the other hand, it provides an opportunity for multiple interpretations by presenting both a realistic and an allegorical narrative. Despite its pessimistic atmosphere, *The Road* is a text that has the potential to create environmental awareness in its readers. In this context, for example, De Bruyn (2010) discusses the ecological content of *The Road* and by dealing with certain representations of nature, he argues that the devastation of nature is a representation of the loss of “cultural memory” (p. 777). The parallel between disappearing natural life and cultural memory is established especially in the last paragraph of the novel, which is about “brook trout in the streams” (McCarthy, 2006, p. 287). McCarthy wrote about these fish, which were once a living part of nature, “On their backs were vermiculate patterns that were maps of the world in its becoming. Maps and mazes. Of a thing which could not be put back. Not be made right again” (p. 287). McCarthy apparently regards the amount of the loss at a level that exceeds the capacity of human beings to replace, which indicates that the novel bears traces of pessimism and most likely some determinism; however, thanks to the indisputable link it has established between cultural values and vanishing nature, according to De Bruyn (2010), it also shows the importance of “sustainable ecology” (p. 777).

*The Road* is an American novel, in its fullest sense, with its stylistic and thematic features. It is a kind of novel that vaguely fits the standards of T. S. Eliot for good poetry: It is a continuation of the literary tradition that proceeds itself, as well as it is a novel that has caught up well with the soul of time. Eliot (1982) defines this feature as “historical sense” and for him this sense, “compels a man to write not merely with his own generation in his bones, but with a feeling that the whole of the literature of Europe from Homer and within it the whole of the literature of his own country has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order” (p. 37). *The Road* carries the traces of a past that goes back to colonial period Puritan settlers. Humankind in *The Road* gets in trouble as the people in *The Day of Doom: or, A Poetical Description of the Great and Last Judgment* (1662) who do not live in accordance with the Calvinistic Puritan teachings:

Ye sinful wights, and cursed sprights, that work Iniquity,  
Depart together from me for ever to endless Misery; (Wigglesworth, 1867)

As one of the leading novelists who have marked the last quarter century of American literature, Cormac McCarthy is usually characterized as a representative of the conservative pessimistic views about the course of world affairs in today’s world. Novelist Alan Warner (2006) makes a classification as follows:

We can divide the contemporary American novel into two traditions, or two social classes. The Tough Guy tradition comes up from Fenimore Cooper, with a touch of Poe, through Melville, Faulkner and Hemingway. The Savant tradition comes from Hawthorne, especially through Henry James, Edith Wharton and Scott Fitzgerald. You could argue that the latter is liberal, east coast/New York, while the Tough Guys are gothic, reactionary, nihilistic, openly religious, southern or fundamentally rural.

In his review, Warner puts McCarthy in the “Tough Guy” tradition, who are as he calls “the true legislators of tortured American souls.” A holistic view of his works indicates that McCarthy uses several signs that mean the civilized world and human values are going toward corruption and destruction gradually. As Kushner (2007) pointed out that McCarthy “sees human life on the planet as temporary, and he’s sensitized to the degree at which we are accelerating this fate through violence and neglect.” His novels are full of bloody stories, sexual heresies, moral corruptions, gruesome and disturbing murders. During an interview he explained this issue by saying, “There’s no such thing as life without bloodshed. I think the notion that the species can be improved in some way, that everyone could live in harmony, is a really dangerous idea” (Woodward, 1992). The anti-enlightenment tone of this view gives clues about the author’s sources, and these will undoubtedly be coherent with the general features of his works; inevitability of death and unlimited and unaccountable violence are predominant themes in these works.

McCarthy is a successor of the dark and metaphysical heritage of Protestant America from Wigglesworth to Melville and Hawthorne and to the great 20th century novelists Faulkner, Steinbeck, and Hemingway. The great pain of the wounds that Reverend Arthur Dimmesdale of *The Scarlet Letter* (1850) made on his own body brought about his end. He was a sinful adulterer according to his own and his community’s belief system. He left his lover and daughter to the mercy of intolerant and oppressive Puritan society. He remained silent when they were having hard times because of the societal pressure, like most of the people do when all nature cries out because of societal thoughtlessness and cruelty against her. In *The Road* the burden of humanity’s sins of being disrespectful to nature is on the man’s

<sup>1</sup> This quotation from Andrew O’ Hagan has appeared on the back cover of the 2010 Picador edition.

shoulders. He would die in sorrows while he was trying to keep his son alive. The father's final scene clearly shows that it is impossible to accomplish his task without a living and well-functioning nature: when mother nature dies, humans do not have much time to live.

Kollin (2011) refers to *The Road*'s relationship with environmental literature and dark, pessimistic view in American literary tradition, and compares the novel to John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939) in terms of being closely related to the issues and debates of its time. She writes, "*The Road* may be considered an apocalyptic version of *The Grapes of Wrath*" that "Both texts chronicle the plight of characters facing environmental and economic disaster in an America whose dreams of possibility and progress called into question" (p. 158). Steinbeck's novel is about the economic and social problems of working-class families after The Great Depression (1929–1939). People who lost their jobs due to closure of businesses had to become agricultural workers. In addition to the social and economic difficulties they faced, the negative effects of the economic structure on the working class and the poor were compounded in an unfavorable natural environment. In this context Kollin argues, "In both novels the characters face what is clearly a natural as well as a human disaster" (pp. 158–159). *The Road* was published a short time before the 2008 financial crisis, which is generally seen as the worst since the Great Depression. Many people lost their houses and jobs which worsen their life conditions. For many U.S. citizens who were accustomed to luxury and excessive consumption, this represented something akin to a personal apocalypse. An increase in the number of people affected, as well as the frequency of extreme weather events due to global warming are among other important issues occupying the global agenda during the same period (2008–2009). In this sense, it can be said that both novels were published during times of crisis, when apocalyptic discourse was widespread due to both economic and environmental disruption.

With the disappearance of both the artificial and natural systems that surround and give specific meanings (roles) to humans, the characters of the novel are faced with the barest state of existence, bereft of any meaning. In this case, political and economic systems, as well as concepts that regulate social relations, such as religion, family, social bonds, and even the meaning of time have to be redefined: "No lists of things to be done. The day providential to itself. The hour. There is no later. This is later. All things of grace and beauty such that one holds them to one's heart have a common provenance in pain. Their birth in grief and ashes" (McCarthy, 2006, p. 54). In such an environment, the father's desperate journey to the South can be seen as an effort to preserve a part of the collapsed order that has lost its function. Yet it is a futile effort. The father does not realize the obvious truth; the main responsibility for the ruined state of the world is precisely the collapsed order he wants to go back to. Like the man and the boy's desperate situation, the prevalence of apocalyptic elements in literature has its basis in ancient religious beliefs about apocalypse or the end of the days which is foreseen as a punishment for collective sins against the commands of a god or other higher power during a lifetime. This belief is integrated into most Western and non-Western cultures. Throughout history, events such as epidemic diseases, great wars, famines, and natural disasters which caused mass fatalities were regarded as divine punishments. Such interpretations of events have also had cultural consequences since they have also become a frequently used theme in secular literature over time. In this context the relevance of *The Road* and *The Grapes of Wrath* established by Kollin (2011) can be seen as a result of a broader cultural movement effective in both periods. Heller (2015) refers to the issue observing that "Ever since the breakout success of Cormac McCarthy's 2006 novel *The Road*, America has been degraded, devastated, and decimated time and time again—at least, on the page." In fact, there has been a considerable rise in the publication of literary post-apocalyptic novels generally, especially in English speaking countries over the last two decades. Hicks (2016) regards this issue in terms of their "treatment of the episteme of modernity" (p. 2). According to Hicks,

[T]hese books reflect a set of historical and epistemological transformations—the globalized economy intensified by the end of the Cold War; the international recognition of the menace of anthropogenic global warming; the attacks of 9/11 and subsequent War on Terror; the growing disavowal within intellectual circles of postmodernity as a category of periodization; and the international resurgence of the concept of "modernity" (p. 2).

Western intellectuals who realized that humanity could not reach the promises of enlightenment and modernity during the period of conflicts, threats and tensions that characterized the 20th century or, in other words, after two world wars and several genocides, enthusiastically welcomed postmodernity which eliminates the necessity to seek any given meaning in anything. In such an atmosphere the narratives about the end of modernity and those about the end of the world inevitably bear some similarities. To explain the relationship of post-apocalyptic novels like *The Road* with the broken dreams, future anxieties and pessimistic mood of the early 21st century, Walsh (2008) relates these current themes in literature with,

the dystopian sensibility which has informed the nation's imaginative consciousness in the aftermath of September 11th, the sorry mess of a war in Iraq which constitutes a grim episode in the history of American exceptionalism, the spectre of global warming and ecological disaster, and the implications of economic globalization and trans-nationalism (p. 48). According to Heller (2015) these novels also allow us to face our fears. He explains this situation by stating, "Post-apocalyptic books are thriving for a simple reason: The world feels more precariously perched on the lip of the abyss than ever, and facing those fears through fiction helps us deal with it. These stories are cathartic as well as cautionary." Finally, Lawrence (2011) refers to the situation of ordinary people in a modern society in a manner reminiscent of the perspective of Kollin (2011) in reflecting that we read more of these stories, "as greater proportions of the global population find themselves battling socially and economically abusive hegemonic systems" (Lawrence, 2011, p. 162). By the onset of the 21st century new concerns and fears about the future of the world were activated and in such an environment the increasing number of fantasies about the end of the world could be seen as reasonable. As one of the first examples of this period, *The Road* can be said to set a precedent for later post-apocalyptic dystopias.

In *The Road*, human race walks toward the end of time, like Pequod's crew trailed behind a lunatic captain who was seeking revenge at all costs. Definition and classification difficulties for *Moby Dick* (1851), which is McCarthy's favorite book (Kushner, 2007), also manifest itself in his works. Indeed, the author might imply the unknown forces in *The Road*, by not telling what brings the end of humanity explicitly.

The influence of Melville's *Moby Dick* on McCarthy's fiction can be seen in some of his other works. For example, it is known that McCarthy wrote a screenplay called *Whales and Men* (undated)<sup>2</sup> in the 1980s. Hage wrote, "The screenplay is a deep, dialogue-driven meditation on the nature of whales, particularly how they communicate, with a locale that shifts from Florida to Ireland, to Sri Lanka" (p. 10). It is known that McCarthy's knowledge of marine life is derived from his own research and his friendships with scientists. In *Moby Dick* Melville also provided a great amount of information about the whales, besides it is a story about everlasting voyage of humanity and its weaknesses.

Since *Suttree* (1979) and *Blood Meridian* (1985) are more frequently compared to *Moby Dick*, we can follow the traces of this novel in *The Road* as well. Both works contain protagonists who show great determination to fulfill a task that they eventually failed and walk to their death: what differs them is the nature of their missions in life; one of them wants to kill; the other wants to keep alive. The only aim of Ahab, who is burning with revenge fever, is to kill the albino whale Moby Dick, who bit off his leg on a previous whaling voyage. He waged war against the unknown forces—fate, from his point of view—that controls the universe. The so-called secret powers here, from an ecological point of view, are in fact nothing more than the normal functioning of the universe that is, the laws of nature. Ahab fights against nature to reveal its secrets. He confronts us as a descendant of Faust from the New World who is ready to sell his soul to the devil for an ultimate end. Like Marlowe's Faustus, Ahab was ready to exchange his life for the secrets of the universe. The man in *The Road* has some similar characteristics: both are ready to try every way to accomplish his task. We can see this during the conversations about the concept of goodness between the man and the boy. The man hesitates to express it clearly, but he does not care much about goodness (in the general sense). For his cause he committed several murders, preferred not to help a dying old man (he did it reluctantly due to his son's complaining), followed the thief who stole their goods and left him naked to death (despite the boy's objections). Considering their situation all these evil actions seem understandable. For the man the boy is at the center of life; he is completely devoted to his son. In this context, both heroes (Captain Ahab and the man) are attached to their missions at the level of obsession. "My job is to take care of you," the man tells the boy. "I was appointed to do that by God. I will kill anyone who touches you" (McCarthy, 2006, p. 77). He seems to believe that "the very existence of his child is proof of a living God, and he will endure untold suffering and sacrifice to spare his child the horrors of the world they inhabit" (Greenwood, 2009, p. 79). Yet the angry lightnings in Ahab's eyes are absent from the man. McCarthy's pessimistic nature, at least, leaves the man in suspicion about his mission; even if there was once a living God, he now abandoned this world, along with order and justice. For normal people, Moby Dick could only be one of the whales in the seas. Killing him would not put an end to the evils on earth. In this sense, their whaling voyage had been a Sisyphean task from the very beginning; their every attempt would have been in vain. Moby Dick would not die, and evil would not disappear. Similarly in the post-apocalyptic world of *The Road*, the absurdity of the vain struggle of the survivors parallels with the inconsistency between the natural environment, in which human beings gain meaning as an integral part of it, and the system at work that underlies the social structure that defines them as individuals.

Struggles for life on earth have led to emergence of different abstract conceptualizations in different periods of history, in the context of revealing philosophical thoughts or belief systems that directly or indirectly dictate certain life practices. In the relationship between the characters and the setting of *The Road* we can clearly see the feeling of weakness and nakedness that human beings experience when they move away from their habitual environment. In the novel, there are numerous descriptions of natural environment that create these feelings on the characters, one of which is: "By day the banished sun circles the earth like a grieving mother with a lamp" (McCarthy, 2006, p. 32). "The banished sun" and "a grieving mother" imagery conjure up connotations of loneliness and desperation, which is what a person will feel when faced with environmental conditions that make it difficult to meet vital necessities, and if they are deprived of external influences to support them. A certain number of daily activities which need to be carried out for survival involve strategies to obtain the products required. In today's world meeting our basic needs requires using a shopping app in our smartphones or a short trip to the supermarket, so it is not easy for us to understand what the characters in *The Road* were going through. However, the experiences of people who migrated and settled in new and untouched regions in the past provide concrete examples of societal values that are forced to change when there is a radical conversion in material conditions. Mass migration has happened to many human societies since ancient times. For these people sustaining life and meeting basic needs could become challenging tasks; because of this, on many occasions, nature was seen as an enemy rather than the source of life. In this respect, considering the death of nature in *The Road*, difficulty the characters experience in undertaking the day to day necessities of survival and their disillusionment with their environment in a distinctly American setting can be taken as an allusion to current environmental problems; besides, it is possible to compare these hostile attitudes to the experiences of the first European settlers in North America who ruled and "civilized" the continent by means of their religious and capitalist ideology from the very beginning.

Another explanation for hostile attitudes toward nature can be understood more clearly by looking at the understanding of nature held by the first European settlers in America based on their religious beliefs that consider the earth as a temporary refuge for humans. The first immigrants in America were highly religious and they defined nature as a "howling wilderness," which was based on a statement from the Bible; "He found him in a desert land, And in the howling waste of a wilderness; He encircled him, He cared for him, He guarded

2 By using the nature of whales McCarthy discusses some philosophical questions in this work. About this screenplay Edwin T. Arnold who has many studies on Faulkner and McCarthy wrote, "Whales come to represent the unknowable in nature, perhaps even the sacred mystery that man senses but cannot comprehend" (*Whales and Men* synopsis qtd in Hage, 2010). Besides this screenplay, by attracting attention to the massacres of whales in the seas, has a strong environmentalist content. The main characters of the screenplay are a marine biologist (Guy Schuler), a wealthy explorer (John Western), his girlfriend (Kelly McAmon) and a freewheeling Irish aristocrat (Peter Gregory). Concerning the environmental issues in the *Whales and Men*, Lilley (2002) argues, "Peter and the crew of his friend's ship, the Farfetched, have their lives 'changed forever' when they watch a group of whales swim to their slaughter—an event that leads them to question their own relationship to the environment and that eventually propels Peter into environmental activism and causes John Western, a wealthy doctor, to give up his practice in the United States and volunteer his services to a war-torn 'third world country'" (p. 155). This work has not been published or produced as a film to date. It is only available in Cormac McCarthy Papers in the Southwestern Writers Collection (also known as The Wittliff Collections) at Texas State University—San Marcos Library <<http://www.thewittliffcollections.txstate.edu/research/a-z/mccarthy.html>>.

him as the pupil of His eye" (Deuteronomy 32:10). God found Jacob in a wild, deserted place occupied only by wild creatures, and by keeping him away from there he rescued him from the dangers of that place, i.e., nature itself. With this it can be understood that the sharp contrast between human and nonhuman nature (the wilderness) confers a great privilege and superiority to humanity. The wilderness became a dangerous and unpleasant entity which needed to be transformed by human hands, and nature would become an artefact that "environs" humans; it is therefore a built landscape and defined by the word "environment."

In *The Road* the man and the boy confront an unfriendly environment that is no longer suitable for sustaining life; similar to that experienced by the Jews escaping from Egypt and the first settlers in America. When the life energy of nature is exhausted, the man witnessed the extinguishing of its spirit and thought that "God had totally abandoned the world." At the beginning of the novel McCarthy establishes the general mood of the story and perhaps gives some clues about the desperate ending. The man wakes up "with the first gray light," looks through the road they will pass along in a while, and then defines the landscape as "barren silent godless" (McCarthy, 2006, p. 4). For the man, there is hardly anything left that can be attributed to sacredness or spirituality that gives meaning to his life, but a weak child around nine years old who is likely to be eaten by cannibals sooner or later. The man looks down the valley with binoculars and describes the scenery as dark and hopeless as a Christian preacher in Colonial America would define what sinners would deserve to see:

Everything paling away into the murk. The soft ash blowing in loose swirls over the blacktop. He studied what he could see. The segments of road down there among the dead trees. Looking for anything of color. Any movement. Any trace of standing smoke. He lowered the glasses and pulled down the cotton mask from his face and wiped his nose on the back of his wrist and then glassed the country again (pp. 4–5).

If being exposed to wild and untamed nature could be seen as a dangerous or inhumanly experience, all kinds of activities that attempt to tame it, such as urbanizing, civilizing, improving landscapes for economic activities, industrializing and colonizing it would emerge as a legitimate right. The first European settlers in America suffered from poor harvests and starvation before they managed to establish a self-supporting system by utilizing the experience of the natives. In this period many colonists got sick and died because of the unhealthy living conditions. One of the first colonial governors, William Bradford, asked this rhetoric question to draw attention to their situation, "What could they see but a hideous and desolate wilderness, full of wild beasts and wild men" (2002, p. 62). America was a wasteland in which death, despair and sorrow were all around. Like the initial status of America, every region in which Western civilization and its social, political and economic systems were not established has been subjected to similar treatment by the colonizers. An important part of the concept of "uncolonized" nature comprised of these elements: "wilderness symbolized the wild, untamed world that needed civilization and religion that needed saving" (Hamilton & Jones, 2013, p. 31). According to this belief any evil, including wild territory, must be conquered in order to complete God's half-finished work.

As human domination over nature increased thanks to rising populations and technological advances, roughly from the 19th century when industrialization began to take effect, wild nature has continued to be seen as a form of punishment sinners would have to face in the afterlife. Further than this, there has been a new tendency to see nature, in the Platonist sense, as symbolic of the absolute entity beyond the visible world, the world of phenomena that cannot be comprehended and measured with rational thought. When compared with seeing wild nature as an evil territory in need of being transformed, characterizing it as a representation of the Supreme Being that is beyond the capacity of reason can be seen as a positive development, and moreover, this point of view has been a temporary source of inspiration for the modern environmental movement that emerged in the 20th century. However, both views, New England Puritanism and romanticism, are problematic when viewed from the perspective of modern environmentalism.

Romantic philosophy raises nostalgic feelings for an unspoiled past that has both integrity and harmony. However, neither a metaphysical integrity that the romantics look for nor the religious viewpoint that sees wild nature as an enemy provides a correct explanation for the discussions on human–nature relationship. From modern environmental movements nature is not a sacred entity outside of human experience, or a prison where sinners pay a price. Nature is indifferent to human purposes; it exists and operates according to its own order. Hurricanes, earthquakes or other destructive natural events are not nature's punishment of humankind; they have always occurred and will continue to occur. No evil can be attributed to the usual flow of nature. However, it is a fact that the possible consequences of human-induced global warming will become a part of our lives and there is certainly little goodness to be seen in them. Evil relates to the human behaviors that are outside of nature's normal functioning.

In almost all periods of history humans have ascribe meanings to nature's operating systems. Modern ecology has proved that unrealistic views of nature appeared as a result of falling into anthropocentric ways of thinking. The alternative of this human-centered approach, ecocentrism, one of the major notions in ecological philosophy, is the belief that human and nonhuman natures have equal value and importance. Defining humanity as a separate entity, separate from all other living beings or as the masters of the world, caused the emergence of an understanding in which human nature is morally prioritized. In this case, one may begin to perceive nature as a competitor or an enemy. When humans believe that nature means them harm with its unsympathetic and overwhelming forces, as it is in the "howling wilderness" concept, that is, when they do not accept what fate—the laws of nature—determines, then they should pay a heavy price. Similarly, we have seen that regarding these unsympathetic and overwhelming forces as a representation of a Supreme Being has not been helpful in protecting nature. Although there have been many practitioners in art and literature describing the sublime beauty of wild nature, the other point of view seems more opportune for the executives of mass production, the offspring of the ideology of taming nature through colonizing it. In other words, although Western culture values romantic art, it seems that the majority of human beings in North America preferred to follow the path of their Puritan ancestors. In this way they have chosen to position themselves as the other party to a great war with nature. As Hubert Reeves once said, "We are at war with nature. If we win, we are lost." (Reeves in Lalonde, 2009) Regarding the same issue, Schumacher (1975) wrote, "Modern man does not experience himself as a part of nature but as an outside force destined to dominate and conquer it. He even talks of a battle with nature, forgetting that, if he

won the battle, he would find himself on the losing side.” (p. 14). The losing party of a war between humans and nature has always been and will always be humans. In this war, humankind is the loser even if it wins. The point here is to not get into that war in the first place.

## Conclusion

An ecocritical reading of *The Road* reveals the novel’s direct and indirect association with a certain wing of American culture. However, as discussed in the last part of this article, it also moves this tradition one step further with its response to the environmental crisis, one of the most important problems of the modern age. Nature ensures the continuation of life by constantly renewing itself. The laws of nature allow for the existence of humans, but this existence is not a necessity for well-being of nature. The author of *The Road* seems quite aware of this situation, and he fictionalizes an expiration date for life on Earth. Therefore, the end of the novel is quite different from the endings of popular Hollywood movies in which a superhero suddenly appears and saves American people and the rest of the world. Despite the apparently pessimistic tone of the novel, certain reviews consider the existence of the family that takes the boy with them after the father’s death as “a light of hope” for the future. This view transforms *The Road* into an American epic in which the good always wins over the evil, but this paper defines it as a tragedy—a universal tragedy of humankind that needs to invoke catharsis in the readers and to warn them of similar situations. On one condition, a parallel can be drawn between the man and the boy’s desperate journey toward their destiny and the sinners, who have not obeyed the orders and prohibitions communicated to them: this time they pay the price for the crimes humanity has committed against nature. It is the consequence of material conditions, not a divine punishment. Additionally, a reading of evil as a natural entity involves contradictions according to the environmentalist perspective. There is no evil in mother nature; evil is not natural as some real or fictional American characters think so. It exists only because there are people who prefer doing evil; it is a conscious decision and with the same mechanism—free will, they are able to choose not to perform the same behavior; it would be a contradiction if a belief system considers evil to be a natural flow of events.

From this point of view the state of humanity in *The Road* can be perceived as the price to be paid for attributing unreal meanings to nature and burdening it with exploitation above its carrying capacity. According to the causality principle that connects natural phenomena, everything that happened in the past will cause what will happen in the future. For that reason, the devastated world in *The Road* and the miserable situation of humanity should be a result of what has been done in the past. Once the social structure has collapsed, it seems that belief systems are also abandoned. Even though the man, who still maintained the habits of the pre-apocalyptic lifestyle, speaks with God at every opportunity, after his death the boy chooses to talk to his father instead of God. This shows that the boy will not maintain the habits of the old world. With this and similar examples the novel shows the relationship between social structure and religions. When vital needs are met, it is seen that people can hold on to life for a while, but these feelings—the will to survive, faith and determination—are not enough to provide favorable conditions for life on Earth. Human life depends on a healthy and well-functioning natural environment. In this context *The Road* provides useful tools for raising environmental awareness: it proves that there will be no human life without nature.

**Ethics Committee Approval:** Ethics committee approval was not obtained since no data from any living creature was used in the research.

**Peer-review:** Externally peer-reviewed.

**Declaration of Interests:** The author has no conflicts of interest to declare.

**Funding:** The author declared that this study has received no financial support.

**Etik Komite Onayı:** Araştırmada herhangi bir canlıya ait veri kullanılmadığı için etik raporu alınmamıştır.

**Hakem Değerlendirmesi:** Dış bağımsız.

**Çıkar Çatışması:** Yazar çıkar çatışması bildirmemiştir.

**Finansal Destek:** Yazar bu çalışma için finansal destek almadığını beyan etmiştir.

## References

- Bradford, W. (2002). *Of Plymouth plantation, 1620–1647*. Alfred A. Knopf.
- Bruyn, B. D. (2010). Borrowed time, borrowed world and borrowed eyes: Care, ruin and vision in McCarthy’s. *English Studies*, 91(7), 776–789. [CrossRef]
- CormacMcCarthy.com. (2014). Compiled interviews. The official web site of the Cormac McCarthy society. Retrieved from <https://www.cormacmccarth.com/topic/compiled-interviews/>
- Deuteronomy 32:10. *Holy Bible*. New American Standard Bible.
- Eliot, T. S. (1982). Tradition and individual talent. *Perspecta*, 19, 36–42. [CrossRef]
- Greenwood, W. P. (2009). *Reading Cormac McCarthy*. Greenwood Press.
- Hamilton, G., & Jones, B. (2013). *Encyclopedia of the environment in American literature*. McFarland Company Inc.
- Heller, J. (2015). *Does post-apocalyptic literature have a (non-dystopian) future?* National Public Radio, Inc. Retrieved from [https://www.npr.org/2015/05/02/402852849/does-post-apocalyptic-literature-have-a-non-dystopian-future?utm\\_medium=RSS&utm\\_campaign=books](https://www.npr.org/2015/05/02/402852849/does-post-apocalyptic-literature-have-a-non-dystopian-future?utm_medium=RSS&utm_campaign=books)
- Hicks, H. J. (2016). *The post-apocalyptic novel in the twenty-first century: Modernity beyond salvage*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Kollin, S. (2011). Barren, silent godless: Ecodisaster and Post-abundant Landscape in *the Road*. In S. Spurgeon (Ed.), *Cormac McCarthy all the pretty horses/ no country for old men/ the road* (pp. 157–171). Continuum International Publishing Group.

- Kushner, D. (2007). Cormac McCarthy's apocalypse [Interview]. *Rolling Stone*. Retrieved from <http://www.davidkushner.com/article/cormac-mccarthys-apocalypse/>
- Lalonde, M. (2009). Quebec's Einstein speaks of saving the planet, and a small forest near Chateauguay [Newspaper article]. *Montreal Gazette*. Retrieved from <http://montrealgazette.com/news/local-news/quebecs-einstein-speaks-of-saving-the-planet-and-a-small-forest-near-chateauguay>
- Lawrence, C. (2011). "Because we carry the fire": An eco-marxist reading of cannibalism in Cormac McCarthy's *The road*. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, 1(13), 162–167.
- Lilley, J. D. (2002). Of whales and men: The dynamics of Cormac McCarthy's environmental imagination. In S. Rosendale (Ed.), *Greening of literary scholarship: Literature, theory, and the environment* (pp. 149–164). University of Iowa Press.
- McCarthy, C. (2006). *The road*. Vintage Book Company.
- Monbiot, G. (2007). Civilisation ends with a shutdown of human concern. Are we there already? Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2007/oct/30/comment.books>
- Schumacher, E. F. (1975). *Small is beautiful economics as if people mattered*. Perennial Library.
- Walsh, C. (2008). The post-southern sense of place in *the road*. *Cormac McCarthy Journal*, 6, 48–54.
- Warner, A. (2006). *The road to hell*. The Guardian International Edition. Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2006/nov/04/featuresreviews.guardianreview4>
- Wigglesworth, M. (1867). *The day of doom: Or, a poetical description of the great and last judgment*. American News Company.
- Woodward, R. (1992). Cormac McCarthy's venomous fiction. *New York Times online*. Retrieved from <http://www.nytimes.com/books/98/05/17/specials/mccarthy-venom.html>