NARRATIVES IN THE ANTHROPOCENE ERA

Charles Travis, Vittorio Valentino (Editors)

Preface by Kirill O. Thompson

IL Sileno Edizioni

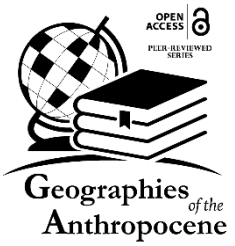
OPEN ACCESS PEER-REVIEWED SERIES
Geographies of the Anthropocene

Narratives in the Anthropocene era

Charles Travis

Vittorio Valentino

Editors



IL Sileno Edizioni

“Narratives in the Anthropocene era”

Charles Travis, Vittorio Valentino (Eds.)

is a collective volume of the Open Access and peer-reviewed series
“Geographies of the Anthropocene”
(Il Sileno Edizioni), ISSN 2611-3171.

www.ilsileno.it

Cover: Photo by Melissa Bradley on Unsplash

International Scientific Publisher “Il Sileno”, VAT 03716380781
Via Piave, 3/A, 87035 - Lago (CS), Italy, e-mail: ilsilenoedizioni@gmail.com

ISBN 979-12-80064-27-1

Vol. 4, No. 2, December 2021

Geographies of the Anthropocene

OPEN ACCESS

PEER-REVIEWED SERIES

ISSN 2611-3171

Geographies of the Anthropocene

Open Access and Peer-Reviewed series

The book series "Geographies of the Anthropocene" edited by Scientific International Publisher "Il Sileno Edizioni" will discuss the new processes of the Anthropocene epoch through the various worldviews of geoscientists and

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Geoethics focuses on how scientists (natural and social), arts and humanities scholars working in tandem can become more aware of their ethical responsibilities to guide society on matters related to public safety in the face of natural hazards, sustainable use of resources, climate change and protection of the environment. Furthermore, the integrated and multiple perspectives of the Environmental Humanities, can help to more fully understand the cultures of, and the cultures which frame the Anthropocene. Indeed, the focus of Geoethics and Environmental Humanities research, that is, the analysis of the way humans think and act for the purpose of advising and suggesting appropriate behaviors where human activities interact with the geosphere, is dialectically linked to the complex concept of Anthropocene.

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4. Animals' Optical Democracy in the fiction of Cormac McCarthy

Geneviève Lobo[1]

Abstract

From the 1960s onward, American cultural perceptions started to evolve greatly. The development of ethology in the 1970's begun to challenge ways of perceiving animals; more broadly, the concern spurred by the destruction of nature encouraged new aesthetic representations of nature. Animal Studies started to develop, opening a new connection between ethology and humanities. Animals occupy a great deal of space in the writings of Cormac McCarthy. The borders between human and animals are blurred, as the reader navigates unilateral violence, the importance of the sensorial world. the quest for survival, or the importance of movement – with characters and texts that seem to be moving just for the sake of moving. Literature can be seen as a possible aesthetical answer to science. The connection between the physical environment and the written text underlines the limits of anthropocentrism in the field of humanities.

Keywords: Animals, Cormac McCarthy, USA, Ecocriticism, Democracy

Introduction

One year ago, the Covid19 pandemic started to turn the 21st century human society upside down. The age of the Anthropocene, with human beings at its head and in control of all things, is at its end. Capitalist society, until then considered as the dominant model of efficiency, has now given proof of its weakness and failures. Aside from the increasing number of deaths, either from Covid or collateral damages, humanity seems to be challenged in its presumed superiority. Human beings have turned out to be once again dependent, vulnerable and craving for alternative ways to be able

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to survive. Environment, long considered as the mere food and fuel reservoir for humans, is now what we have to save and protect in order to carry on. In academia, the sharp divide between "hard" sciences and social sciences and humanities, which were kept in the background, also tends to falter a call for more transdisciplinary dialogue. Indeed, literature is often considered a mere entertainment. Ecocriticism studies the link between fictional text and physical environment. Animal Studies conceptualizes the animal as the central subject of transdisciplinary studies including sociology, literature and ethics. The writings of the American author Cormac McCarthy embody such a dialogue between science and literature. Originally from Rhode Island, the author of ten novels is known for his interest in Chaos theory, and the numerous hours spent at the Santa Fe institute learning about physics and biology, but also directly interacting with scientists. In 2017, he wrote "The Kekulé Problem", a non-fiction piece about the origins and definitions of language:

> The sort of isolation that gave us tall and short and light and dark and other variations in our species was no protection against the advance of language. It crossed mountains and oceans as if they weren't there. Did it meet some need? No. The other five thousand plus mammals among us do fine without it. But useful? Oh yes. We might further point out that when it arrived it had no place to go. The brain was not expecting it and had made no plans for its arrival. It simply invaded those areas of the brain that were the least dedicated. I suggested once in conversation at the Santa Fe Institute that language had acted very much like a parasitic invasion and (…) our president said that the same idea had occurred to him (McCarthy, 2017).

Comparing the spread of language to the spread of a virus obviously recalls the current pandemic. The mention of other animal species as capable of existing on their own without language already gives insight into McCarthy's treatment of non-humans. McCarthy's concrete interest in natural sciences is present in his books. From the early Southern Gothic novel *Outer Dark* (1968), and famous western *The Border Trilogy* (1992-1998), to the latest postapocalyptic novel *The Road* (2006), animals occupy a great deal of space in McCarthy's fiction, and often come to challenge traditional anthropocentric tendencies of humanity.

Outer Dark tells the story of the incestuous relationship between brother and sister Culla et Rinthy Holme. This forbidden intercourse results in the conception of a child. Immediately after his birth, the baby is abandoned in

the woods by Culla and taken away by a tinker. Rhinty spends the novel in search of her lost baby, while the brother wanders indefinitely. Three anonymous riders frequently make irruption within the text to kill and spread fear among characters with no obvious purpose. In this dark portrayal of America, the reader is confronted to the darkest tendencies of humans. The three volumes of *The Border Trilogy – All the Pretty Horses*, *The Crossing*, and *Cities of the Plain* – narrate the back and forth of young riders across the American Mexican border, just before, during, and after WWII and the development of the nuclear. Characters wander with no family attachment, and extreme violence overwhelms the text. Horses are at the heart of the three volumes, and their presence often debunks myths of the old west. On the whole, *The Border Trilogy* focuses on the falling of agricultural society and the loss of the cowboy way of life. The recent post-apocalyptic novel *The Road* portrays the wanderings of an anonymous father and his son through a world from which any and all kind of nature has now vanished, reducing humans to the mere status of isolated survivors, for whom cannibalism is now a common trend. As opposed to the previous writings, *The Road* is not so much about the presence of animals anymore, but about their absence. The themes of loss, violence, past, religion, science, and nature landscapes are central issues in every McCarthy's book.

As stated by Erik Hage in *Cormac McCarthy, a Literary Companion*, McCarthy's peculiar style involves "absolute empirical accuracy", which underlines McCarthy's interest in the natural sciences (Hage, 2010, p. 17). However, one must not reduce McCarthy's prose to mere scientific descriptions integrated to fiction. Indeed, he is also famous for his peculiar use of anachronisms, the scarcity and minimalism of dialogues, or the striking lack of punctuation – McCarthy describes commas as "weird little marks".[2] In order to further understand the place animals occupy within the frame of McCarthy's idiosyncratic prose, it is useful to analyze the concept of Optical Democracy, introduced in *Blood Meridian*, McCarthy's earlier and perhaps more violent western:

> In the neuter austerity of that terrain all phenomena were bequeathed a strange equality and no one thing nor spider no blade of grass could forth claim to precedence. The very clarity of these articles belied their familiarity, for the eye predicates the whole on some feature or part and here was nothing more luminous than another and nothing more enshadowed and in the optical democracy of such landscapes all preference is made whimsical and

[2] See bibliography, Morgan G. Wesley, « A Note on "Weird Little Marks" ».

> amanandarock become endowed with unguessed kinship. (McCarthy, 1985, pp. 258-259).

As stated by David Holloway in *The Late Modernism of Cormac McCarthy*, "Optical Democracy seems to mean first of all looking at a landscape and then writing about a landscape, in such a way that any anthropocentric assumption of human primacy over the natural world is rejected (…)." (Holloway, 2002, p. 153). The vocabulary of optics is indeed omnipresent in these lines. Such emphasis on the importance of "looking at" on the one hand, and the egalitarian turn on the other, embeds McCarthy's literary concept within the context of the contemporary issues raised by animal studies. Indeed, this literary rendition and view of equality carries an essential ethical dimension. The followings arguments will try to show to what extent the place of animals in McCarthy's fiction, in light with the concept of Optical Democracy, might give some clues to understand not only the way fiction can portray, but also frame contemporary world.

1. Animals and The Crisis of Humanity

The first striking element in McCarthy's depictions of animals might be man's fundamental incapacity to control them. In *The Border Trilogy*, numerous examples of such incapacity can be noted. In *The Crossing*, young cowboy Billy Parham finds a pregnant "she-wolf" on the Texan border and assumes she comes from Mexico. He eventually fails just after entering New Mexico, where the wolf gets killed for its skin.

> Doomed enterprises divide lives forever into the then and the now. He'd carried the wolf up into the mountains in the bow of the saddle and buried her in a high pass under a cairn of scree. The little wolves in her belly felt the cold draw all about them and they cried out mutely in the dark and he buried them and piled the rocks over them and led the horse away. He wandered on into the mountains. He whittled a bow from a holly limb, made arrows from cane. He thought to become again the child he never was (McCarthy, 2002, p. 437).

In the present excerpt, the vocabulary of death and darkness, as often in McCarthy's fiction, invades the text. The notion of unavoidable failure is underlined by the adjective "doomed". In addition, the idea of idleness and wandering is present, suggesting that the character has nothing left to do after his "doomed enterprise". Also striking is the narrative voice and

incursion into the point of view of the wolf cubs who "felt the cold in her belly". Furthermore, the division between "past" and "present" suggests that the burial marks a form of trauma in the character's story. Since the wolf is often regarded as the epitome of a wild animal, the failure to domesticate, in this case, could at first sight be understood to be conveying the irreducibility of wildness – a common trope in American pastoral literature. However, Billy setting his "horse free" seems to indicate that domestic animals are not to be completely controlled either. This is the case in *All The Pretty Horses*, where main character John Grady Cole fails at riding a horse that has been supposedly "badly" trained, and eventually gets hurt (McCarthy, *The Border Trilogy*, p. 757). If humanity is portrayed in its weakness and failed attempts at controlling nature, it also seems that traditional distinctions between "wild" and "domestic" for animals are no longer valid, and that no living being "can forth claim to precedence".

To go on with the idea of humanity's fall, the notion of evil is omnipresent in the works of Cormac McCarthy. The climax of *All the Pretty Horses* shows two characters trapped in a Mexican jail after their anonymous companion has been captured for horse theft. They do face extreme violence with no possible escape, and the scene end with a bloody knife fight under the eyes of the prison guards (McCarthy, 2002, pp. 201-205). It seems that no law or justice is there to protect them. Similarly, the walk of father and son in *The Road* is frequently disrupted by cannibalistic attacks from undefined and unidentified groups of survivalists. *Outer Dark* not only depicts incest and child abuse, but also free killing, embodied by the three anonymous and cannibalistic riders who come throughout the text without any apparent narrative function in the main plot. A shortsighted reading of Cormac McCarthy could mislead the readers into interpreting such depiction of "evil" as a way to denounce human's darkest conducts on earth. However, the treatment of evil goes far beyond that cynical portrayal. Erik Hage argues that despite "the brutality and grimness of [McCarthy's] vision, the "originality of his natural descriptions rival his penchant (…)., and "his descriptions sometimes ascribe "natural" beauty to terrible things and "terribleness" to a natural world that is traditionally rendered as beautiful". (Hage, *Op. Cit*., pp. 117-119). As a matter of fact, harshness and violence are also conferred to animals. In *Outer Dark*, Culla Holme crosses a river – for no specific reason – and gets trapped on a boat with a terrified horse that seems to irrupt directly from a nightmare.

> When the horse came at him the third time he flattened himself half crazed against the forward bulkhead and howled at it. The horse

> reared before him black and screaming, the hoofs exploding on the planks. He could smell it. It yawned past him and crashed and screamed again and there was an enormous concussion of water and then nothing. As if all that fury had been swallowed up in the river traceless as fire (McCarthy, 1968, pp. 172-173).

Here, the motif of human loss of control above mentioned is there again. Indeed, a first analysis might suggest that the humans fail to control the true nature of a horse while forcing a fearful animal to cross a howling river tied in a boat. However, the horse is described as not only terrified, but also terrifying. The vocabulary of explosion – flattened (…) against, exploding, enormous concussion – reinforces the horrifying aspect of the horse. In addition, the double occurrence <scream>, unusual in the field of horses, complicates the distinction between human and animal. Moreover, the end of the excerpt brings the idea that evil is not only inherent to the horse, but to the force of the river itself. Here, McCarthy directly gives "'terribleness' to a natural world that is traditionally rendered beautiful" (Hage). Therefore, one can argue that McCarthy challenges the very definition of "nature" itself.

Also essential is the motif of survival and vulnerability that pervades in McCarthy's body of works. The most obvious example appears in *The Road*, where father and son are compared to "two hunted animals trembling". Ancient elements of the American consumer society appear as the only ruins for the eye to see. Green landscape and living creatures are mere illusions of a world that no longer exist. Color is nowhere to be found and darkness is not only a feature, but seem to be the essence of the world itself.

> He walked out in the gray light and stood and he saw for a brief moment the absolute truth of the world. The cold relentless circling of the intestate earth. Darkness implacable. The blind dogs of the sun in their running. The crushing black vacuum of the universe. And somewhere two hunted animals trembling like ground-foxes in their cover. Borrowed time and borrowed world and borrowed eyes with which to sorrow it (McCarthy, 2004, p. 138).

The terms "gray light", "darkness", "black", "blind" reinforce the idea of "vacuum" and nothingness. This extract contrasts and at the same time resonates with the idea of a "luminous" Optical Democracy. The importance of "looking" is still emphasized, but there is nothing left to look at. The last sentence, with the repetition of "borrowed", reinforces the fragility of the

"two hunted animals". Once again, it is essential not to reduce McCarthy's piece of fiction to the sole idea that humanity as come to an end. Rather, the author might describe the end of humanism, as suggested by Adrew Este: "*The Road* depicts the end of humans, but also the end of humanism. […] Nature in the form of wilderness spaces has ceased to exist. Likewise, the human communities have been (almost) wiped out as well. The natural and the human depend upon each other to such extent that the destruction of the one necessarily entails the other's demise" (Este, 2017, p. 7). The constant motif of survival may fuel the idea that beings all depend on each other. It replaces humans within their environment – instead of mere spectators of it. In "Introduction Posthumanism in Literature and Ecocriticism", Serenella Iovino reminds us of the essential tropes of post-humanism.

> Situated by definition in a mobile space of matter and meanings, the posthuman […] moves relentlessly, shifting the boundaries of being and things of ontology, epistemology, and even politics. And these boundaries, especially those between human and nonhuman, are not only shifting but also porous: based on the – biological, cultural, structural – combination of agencies flowing from, through,and alongside the human, the posthuman discloses a dimension in which "we" and "they" are caught together in an ontological dance whose choreography follows patterns of irremediable hybridization and stubborn entanglement. […] Taking a closer look, finally, we can see that the posthuman's house is (…) also operationally open. […] It is a collective house for "nomadic" comings and goings, and most of all for belonging-together and multiple becomings (Iovino, 2016, p. 15).

This definition retakes the point of Rosi Braidotti, who dedicates her works to a rethinking of the very definition of what human means. According to this proposal of definition, McCarthy's portrayal of animals can be understood in a post-humanist dynamic.

2. Animals and post-humanities: acknowledging uncertainty

Understanding McCarthy's writing of animals through the lens of post-humanist theories thus, requires closer analysis of the idea of 'hybridization' and the 'choreography' of the 'we' and 'they'. These motives constantly reappear from *Outer Dark* to *The Road*. This paragraph taken from the beginning of *All the Pretty Horses* is an outstanding illustration of a

"combination of agencies" in the "collective house for 'nomadic' comings and goings":

> When the wind was in the north you could hear them, the horses and the breath of the horses and the horses' hooves that were shod in rawhide and the rattle of lances and the constant drag of the travois poles in the sand like the passing of some enormous serpent and the young boys naked on wild horses jaunty as circus riders and hazing wild horses before them and the dogs trotting with their tongues aloll and foot-slaves following half naked and sorely burdened and above all the low chant of their traveling song which the riders sang as they rode, nation and ghost of nation passing in a soft chorale across that mineral waste to darkness bearing lost to all history and all remembrance like a grail the sum of their secular and transitory and violent lives (McCarthy, 2002, p. 5).

Here, young cowboy John Grady Cole leaves the ranch riding his horse "at the hour he'd always choose when the shadows were long and the ancient road was shaped before him in the rose and canted light like a dream of the past." Striking in these lines is McCarthy's typical avoidance of punctuation that transforms a series of propositions into one single unique flow. This long stream of literary riding replaces the common omniscient narrative perspective by an "agency". The pronoun "they" gathers all the livings – and deads – of the text, in a collective "belonging-together". Mentions of "the horses", "breath of horses", and "horses hooves" suggest that horses directly dive in the narrative. It seems that animal agency is at play in this extract, as if the horse itself was vector of history and of the "remembrance" of beings' "secular and transitory and violent lives". In addition, the description of the riders' song and the vocabulary of movement gives the extract an aspect of a choreography. This extract reinforces Serenella Iovino's idea that wilderness should not be read as a "refuge" "out there", but rather "within and across human". She argues in favor a "co-presence" of beings that is largely present in the description of the "soft chorale" (Iovino, 2016, pp. 13-14). The peculiar irruption of animal agency within the fiction of Cormac McCarthy, therefore, reinforces the idea that frontiers between species are "porous".

The displacement of anthropocentrism in McCarthy's prose also leads to a focus on the importance of the unknown, and even the unknowable, regarding non-human animals. It seems that the author wishes to explicit the impossibility of knowing everything by inserting direct questions about the nature of animals.

> The constant currying of the brush and greenwood in the mountains had carried off all trace of the stable and the horse gave off a warm and rooty smell. The horse had dark hooves with heavy hoof walls and the horse had in him enough grullo blood to make a mountain horse by both conformation and inclination and as the boy had grown up where talk of horses was more or less continual he knew that where the blood carries the shape of a hock or the breadth of a face it carries also an inner being of a certain design and no other and the wilder their life became in the mountains the more he felt the horse subtly at war with itself. He didn't think the horse would quit him but he was sure the horse had thought about it (McCarthy, 2002, p. 444).

This extract from *The Crossing* gives an insight in Billy's questioning about his mountain horse – called Bird. After weeks riding in the landscapes away from the ranch, his horse seems more and more feral and the character, far from trying to go against this change, quietly wonders about the "inner" nature and "inclinations" of his horse. What might be striking in these words is the preciseness of biological knowledge involved in the description. For instance, the term "grullo" demonstrates a precise understanding of horse breed and history from Cormac McCarthy[3]. On the other hand, the idea of a horse wanting to leave his rider questions the very possibility of controlling and knowing animals. Also remarkable is the peculiar treatment of wilderness, which is described as "inner" and in "bec[oming]". This irreducible alterity is also mentioned in *Cities of the Plain*, where two characters evoke a "horse with two brains" (McCarthy, 2002, p. 894). This can be read as an explicit reference to the ethological knowledge that horse is provided with binocular vision and different perception on the right and left-hand. Here, one character argues that horses are "crazy" because they have "an eye for each side". On the other hand, other cowboy states that "if the two sides of the horse aint even speaking to one another you would have some real problems." To better understand this dialogue between science and literature, it is interesting to note that *Cities of the Plain* was published in 1998, at the time where ethologists where merely starting to understand that the two sides of a horse brain could actually communicate, going against the previous idea of each side being "a new

[3] The Term "Grullo" stands for mouse-colored hair on the horse, with peculiar features typical in ancient horse breeds.

side of the horse".[4] This dialogue given by Cormac McCarthy can then be interpreted as an ironical criticism of scientific dogmatism.

Acknowledging uncertainty and the unknowable is therefore a key issue in Cormac McCarthy's work. Science should not be read as the only paradigm through which to see the world. Science is perceived as necessary as it is incomplete. Religion, however largely evoked in McCarthy's fiction, does not seem to offer any key to the unknown either. Discussions about the presence or absence of God permeate McCarthy's fiction, and characters – and readers – wonder frequently about the existence of God, without never finding any answer. The survival journeys of non-human animals and humans in a "dark" world even seem to suggest that religion is a mere human construct with no accurate reality whatsoever. This idea is summarized in the well-known sentence "there is no god and we are his prophets". (*The Road*) In "A Style of Horror: Is Evil Real in Cormac McCarthy's Outer Dark", Christopher R. Nelson explains:

> Animate menace pervades the world. […] By refusing the traditional separation of nature from the moral sphere, the novel again complicates moral judgment. […] The material world is dreadfully unknowable. […]
>
> It is not that human fail to conquer the wild unknown […]. Instead, explanatory paradigms prove insufficient: nature has not been corrupted form an ideal, divine creation, or right order. […] Scientific laws cannot resolve [everything] (…) neither does the text invoke supernatural answers (Nelson, 2012, p. 42) [1].

Contradicting the absolutism of religion and science pushes anthropocentrism aside, and sets the scene for a post-humanist reading of McCarthy's writings. In *The Posthuman*, Rosi Braidotti defines what she calls "the new ecological posthumanism":

> Post-anthropocentrism displaces the notion of species hierarchy and of a single, common standard for "man" as the measure of all things. In the ontological gap thus opened, other species come galloping in: this is easier done that said in the language and methodological conventions of critical theory. Is language not the anthropological tool *par excellence*? (Braidotti, 2013, p. 67).

[4] See Lauren Brubaker et Monique A.R. Udell, "Cognition and learning in horses (Equus caballus): What we know and why we should ask more", Behavioural Processes, Elsevier, 2016, 128.

Here, Braidotti underlines the necessity and at the same time difficulty of dealing with the limits of human discourse through discourse itself. The limits of language evoked by McCarthy in "the Kekulé problem", added to the incompleteness of science and absence of religion, could place McCarthy's dark pieces of fiction within the frame of nihilism. However, McCarthy states that language itself is an autonomous entity. If darkness is at the heart of McCarthy's depiction of animals, it seems that the end of living forms on earth is not the sole issue for him. In *The Road*, where apparently nothing is left to support the characters, hospitality is strangely at play, and so is it the case in *Outer Dark* and *The Border Trilogy*. Therefore, "a nihilistic reading of the narrative (…) would discount the moral center of the novel in the devotion, care and solicitude shared by the father and the son" in *The Road*, and every human and non-human character of McCarthy's fiction (Hillier, 2015, p. 974).

3. Animals and the ethics of moving forward

In order to better understand the idea of language as a dynamic and partly autonomous identity, it is relevant to evoke animism and dreams, two recurring elements in McCarthy's prose.

> In his sleep he could hear the horses stepping among the rocks and he could hear them drink from the shallow pools in the dark where the rocks lay smooth and rectilinear as the stones of ancient ruins and the water from their muzzles dripped and rang like water dripping in a well and in his sleep he dreamt of horses and the horses in his dream moved gravely among the tilted stones like horses come upon an antique site where some ordering of the world had failed and if anything had been written on the stones the weathers had taken it away again and the horses were wary and moved with great circumspection carrying in their blood as they did the recollection of this and other places where horses once had been and would be again. Finally what he saw in his dream was that the order in the horse's heart was more durable for it was written in a place where no rain could erase it (McCarthy, 2002, pp. 283-284).

In this excerpt from *All the Pretty Horses*, animal agency is again at play. Once again, biology and history are linked with the idea of horses "carrying in their blood as they did the recollection of this". The notion of history comes reinforced by the terms "ancient ruins", "antique site" "where horses

once had been". Remarkable is the use of sensory vocabulary – "he could hear" – that intermingles the motif of the dream with reality. Also interesting is the fact that the first appearance of horses seems to refer to the actual environment of the character, as if real animals were concretely irrupting his dream. In addition, the stylistic repetition "he dreamt of horses" and "the horses in his dream" further complicates the distinction between dream and reality. Dreaming animals recalls the Indian tradition of animism, where the presence of animals in dreams was believed to deliver a message from remote realities.[5] Indeed, the idea that "there is no god" allows to avoid any religious interpretation of animism, to rather focus on the notion of reality. The intersection between reality and dreams fits McCarthy's view that "subconscious is older than language", as stated by Steven Frye: "The narrative thus blends the tactile realm of action, work and daily living with the human instances of desire, hope, and the ever-present reality of dreams, which as McCarthy renders them demand equal claim upon the real" (Frye, 2009, p. 138). Moreover, the idea of "the order in the horse's heart" being "written in a place where no rain [can] erase it" as opposed to "some ordering of the world" who "has failed", raises attention of the living, rather than the universal. "Beyond the insufficiency of large-scale paradigms of human knowledge and control such as religion, science, or civilization, the novel unsettles the use of immanent grounds to decide what things mean" (Nelson, 2012, p. 46).

No "large-scale paradigms" are there to help understand the world, and "absolute truth of the world" (McCarthy, 2004, *The Road*, p. 138) is not fully accessible to humans. Yet, it appears that aspiring to truth, without even finding it, is relevant. No universal moral is there to rule McCarthy's world, but small scale "care, devotion, and solicitude" are central to every piece of his fiction. Animals and human welfare are essential at every point of McCarthy's narratives. In *The Road,* the boy hears a dog and keeps worried about its safety. He begs his father not to hurt him.

> The dog that he remembers followed us for two days. I tried to coax it to come but it would not. I made a noose of wire to catch it. There were three cartridges in the pistol. None to spare. She walked away down the road. The boy looked after her and then he looked at

[5] « *Le rêveur établit une relation personnelle avec un être lointain spatialement ou ontologiquement. Ces êtres, que le rêveur connait toujours, peuvent entrer dans un dialogue avec lui ou délivrer un message. Le sens des rêves est similaire à leur contenu explicite* », Barbara Tedlock, « Rêves et visions chez les Amérindiens, produire un ours », *Anthropologie et Sociétés*, Vol. 18., n. 2, 1994, 18.

> me and then he looked at the dog and he began to cry and to beg for the dog's life and I promised I would not hurt the dog. A trellis of a dog with the hide stretched over it. The next day it was gone. That is the dog he remembers. He doesn't remember any little boys (McCarthy, 2004, p. 91).

In this extract, father and son realize that there are not alone on the road. Interestingly, this insight in the father's thoughts begins with the words "the dog he remembers", suggesting that even the existence of the dog might be questioned. In addition, the presence of a dog in a family seems to make stronger impression to the boy than the existence of a family at all. Generally, the boy keeps worried about ethics and safety throughout the book. So is it the case in *The Border Trilogy*, where cowboys constantly wonder about their horses' welfare. The occurrence "he talked to the horse" constantly reappears throughout the trilogy – without any mention of the content of the characters' talk. No "large-scale" moral is there to guide humans' conducts, but the search for the "right" choice is essential. *The Road* ends with the death of the father, and the encounter of the boy with a family. In a wary discussion with the man, the boy asks "Are you one of the good guys?" and "Are you carrying the fire?" (McCarthy, 2004, pp. 302-303). The metaphor of "carrying the fire" indicates a need to look for good actions, even in a world of nothingness.

For McCarthy, any usual trope seems unactual and even meaning itself is challenged. Yet, ethics and research are fundamental motifs. This idea inserts McCarthy's post-humanist animals into the contemporary frame of the ethics of care. This transdisciplinary movement focuses on empathy, the importance of vulnerability and the interdependence of every beings. It should not be understood as a set social model, but rather, an "open" place "for belonging-together and multiple becomings" (*Op. Cit*. Braidotti). Indeed, these new alternatives meet the need of the ecological urgency, that is also to be found in McCarthy's novels. In the paper "*Introduction. Théories et pratiques du Care*", Clément Barniaudy and Angela Biancofiore state that interdependency does apply to all the beings and "phenomena", idea that is present in McCarthy's Optical Democracy. Similarly, they argue that survival on earth is necessarily conditioned to the conscience of fragility and weakness, as McCarthy underlines that "no one thing nor spider no blade of grass could forth claim to precedence". Generally, the ethics of care advocate the importance of paying attention. Barniaudy and Biancofiore insist on importance of literature as a practice of care, as it allows humans to envision their "familiarity" and "unguessed kinship". (Barniaudy & Biancofiore, 2020, p. 2).

In order to close this analysis of animals' Optical Democracy in McCarthy's fiction in light of the current pandemic, and more generally of global climate collapse, the idea of motion will be retained as a major element of survival. Indeed, the passages quoted above proved the inaccuracy of almost any fixed and past paradigms. Science can no longer be read as the answer to all things, nor can religion. Evil is not proper to animal realm, nor good to humanity, but the reverse also proves inaccurate. Human consumerist society vanishes without any efficient model to replace it. Language itself cannot be the key to knowledge, as its autonomy constantly escapes human control. Indeed, empathy, care, and aesthetics constantly cry out in McCarthy's texts, and questions seem more important than impossible answers. In "Okay means okay"; Paul. D. Knox analyses the repetition and multiplicity of meanings of the term "okay" in *The Road*. He concludes his analysis with the words: "McCarthy leaves the reader with one insight on how to survive: survival requires finding a way to make sense of the world and of retaining the hope that community is possible. If we can do that, we might just be okay» (Knox, 2012, p. 99). Therefore, it seems that research is more important than results, and that motion is essential. Indeed, the countless trips of both humans and animals, from *Outer Dark* to *The Border Trilogy*, indicates that destination does not matter. Horses, feral dogs, mountain lions, wolves and humans seem to be moving just for the sake of moving, as does McCarthy's prose.

> He touched his horse with his heels and rode on. He rode with the sun coppering his face and the red wind blowing out of the west across the evening land and the small desert birds flew chittering among the dry bracken and horse and rider and horse passed on and their long shadows passed in tandem like the shadow of a single being. Passed and paled into the darkening land, the world to come. (McCarthy, 2002, p. 306).

Formatting and funding sources

This research did not receive any specific grant from funding agencies in the public, commercial, or nor-profit sectors.

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(Serenella Iovino, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill)

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