
An Exploration of `Freedom of Will` in Modern Eschatological Novels

Shigehisa Yoshizu

The novels on which I am going to discuss are Cormac McCarthy's *The Orchard Keeper*, Anthony Burgess's *Tremor of Intent* and Graham Greene's *The Quiet American*.

Cormac McCarthy was born in Rhode Island in 1933 but moved to Knoxville, Tennessee at the age of four. He grew up in a rural area similar to that described in his first Novel, *The Orchard Keeper*. He finished high school in 1950 and attended the University of Tennessee the following year. After one year, he left the University and spent time wandering about the country and working at odd jobs. In 1953 he enlisted in the Air Force for four years. After his discharge he returned to the University of Tennessee and attended there for four years but left without taking a degree. His first novel, *The Orchard Keeper*, met with an unusually fine critical reception. It won him the travel award of the American Academy of Arts and Letters, the William Faulkner Foundation Award for the notable first novel of 1965, and a Rockefeller Foundation grant. ¹

The Orchard Keeper is a unique novel as a Southerner's book.

1. Cormac McCarthy, *The Orchard Keeper*. Ballantine Books, Inc., New York, 1969, P.199

It is structurally complex, and its style is heavily indebted to Faulkner, especially to *The Sound and The Fury*, often sacrificing coherence for a sense of immediacy. Intrusive italic flashbacks insist on the distance necessary to recapture innocence. But the major thematic burden rests with the land itself and with the processes rather than the incidents which flow from it. It is not a book about race relations, the white man's guilty burden, the black man's revenge. Instead the theme concerns change in a rural area, and how the more or less noble savagery of three men, especially of the old man (Arthur Ownby), confronts the more or less brutal civilization of a society in flux. Here is a Southerner's book on a universal topic.

The process of the noble savagery being undermined by the brutal civilization is developed throughout this novel, and the old man suggests this is an omen of a year of calamity, an eschatological year:

"Won't nothin' make, won't nothin' keep. A seventh year is what it is... But it'll be hot and dry... It goes by weather. I look for this to be a bad one. I look for real calamity afore this year is out... there was a lean year and a year of plenty every seven year." ²

This antiquated thought is noteworthy. The ancients, as we see in the dogma of Mazdaism (Zoroastrianism), believed in the cycle of cosmic time at regularly recurring intervals, the infinite repetitions of the same phenomenon: creation-destruction-rebirth. Lactantius Firmianus, the Christian missionary who was influenced by Mazdaism, says,

A series of disaster foreshadow the end of this world. The first disaster is the corruption of the Roman Empire. It is the age when faith is rejected, purity is hated, virtue falls a prey to evil, no law nor order is observed, nobody respects the gray hair

2. McCarthy, *The Orchard Keeper*, P.181

An Exploration of "Freedom of Will" in Modern Eschatological Novels

(the old). Everything tends to destroy the law of God and Nature and throws it into confusion.³

Mountain folks living in the Appalachians east of Knoxville, and even their place, are under the influence of civilization. This foreshadows the lean year, the year of destruction, as the old man suggests. We become aware of their intuitive distrust of strangers, their protective isolation, their solidarity against precariousness, and their desperation whether they happen to be on the near or the far side of the law. McCarthy's marked talents lie in his ability to create mood and atmosphere, from which ultimate doom and destruction are never very distant. For instance, the image of "solidarity against precariousness" is presented in a poetic style at the beginning of the novel.

The Red Mountain: "... oaks and tulip poplars which even here brace themselves against the precarious declination allotted them by the chance drop of a seed."⁴

The Red Branch: "... a dozen jerrybuilt shacks... like great brooding animals rigid with constipation and yet endowed with an air transient and happenstantial as if set there by the recession of floodwaters."⁵

The Green Fly Inn: "To them the inn was animate as any old ship for her crew..., solidarity due largely to its very precariousness."⁶

The image of "antiquity" is noticeable not only in the old man but also in his environment.

3. M. Eliade, *Myth of the Eternal Return*, ("Eien Kaiki no Shinwa," translated by Ichiro Horii), Miraisha, Tokyo, 1963, P.165

4. McCarthy, *The Orchard Keeper*, P.6

5. *Ibid.*, P.6

6. *Ibid.*, P.8

In the relative cool of the timber stands, possum grapes and muscadine flourish with a cynical fecundity, and the floor of the forest... has about it a primordial quality, some steamy carboniferous swamp where ancient saurians lurk in feigned asleep. ⁷

The image of "disorder and corruption" is remarkable in the scene of the town where the boy buys the traps. This scene reminds us of the corruption of the Roman Empire. McCarthy's words are disciplined when they are eliciting moods from natural scenes and violent tensions from human ones, and his book moves and lives, as in the following scene: long paper banners proclaiming for Christ and for sobriety, a card saying "Don't make My Daddy a Drunkard" which falls from the window of the bus and is trampled down by the next bus, the marchers and the onlookers who have no faith in the significance of the march, the death image of the pennants and the signs, the outlandish buildings, "towering columns of brick adorned with fantastic motley," a man "screaming incoherently and brandishing a tattered Bible," the stores where worn-out clothing and "trichinella-ridden" meat are sold. ⁸ All people and things are thrown into confusion and corruption. However, when McCarthy depicts the boy who buys the traps, we get the impression of noble savagery, feel refreshment:

They were hanging down by their chains and looking fierce and ancient among the trace chains and harness, bucksaws and axehelves. . . The man studied the dull metal shapes as if aware for the first time of their existence, seemingly puzzled not over their price but as to how they came to be there in the first place. ⁹

7. McCarthy, *The Orchard Keeper*, P.6

8. *Ibid*, PP.63-64

9. *Ibid.*, P.65

An Exploration of "Freedom of Will" in Modern Eschatological Novels

This process of the noble savagery's resistance to the brutal civilization reaches the climax at the scene of the old man's shooting. He shoots a giant tank erected by some government agency on the mountain top which "stood complacent, huge, seeming older than the very dirt, the rocks, as if it had spawned them of itself and stood surveying the work, clean and coldly gleaming and capable of infinite contempt."¹⁰ The tank is the symbol of brutal civilization and the very dirt which it produces are the corrupted men and things the boy saw in the town. The old man's resistance to the encroachment of civilization is induced by his longing for the peaceful life in his ancient environment and by his fear that the spirit of Kenneth Rattner's corpse will not go to Paradise, originated in his religious belief like the Egyptians! He tends the corpse, periodically dropping in a fresh evergreen to cover the skull. This reminds me of the Egyptian's belief that the human soul needs food even after his death. The Egyptian's effort to keep the corpse perpetually by making an offering to it is proved by their construction of the Pyramids. They imagined that, in the other world, a spirit, after death, kills others to keep its life forever, unless it is offered some food. Their legend of "The Tree of Life" is well known. When we see the famous picture of "Papyrus of Nu," we notice there is a fig tree which gives water to a dead person. The branch of cedar tree with which the old man covers the corpse every Christmas season seems to me the symbol of "The Tree of Life." It is also the symbol of resurrection. The old man has been making this offering for seven years. Now the year of destruction is going to start. He hopes the spirit of the corpse will peacefully go to Heaven and become one with the unborn's spirits that are waiting for the coming of the year of rebirth, the year of plenty. However, the corpse is burnt in the seventh year, at the last moment, by the "brutal civilization."

10. McCarthy : *The Orchard Keeper*, p.73

McCarthy's description of this scene is very impressive. The old stories of betrayal and fidelity, of disappointment and fulfilment, of all the joy and anguish of life are condensed into this short passage:

When he saw the smoke rolling up from out of the pit he stopped for a moment and he could feel the old fierce pull of blood in power and despair, the pulse-drum of the irrevocable act. And it was done, what soul rose in the ashes forever unknown, out of his hands now. He squatted on one knee in the snow, watching. On his face a suggestion of joy, of anguish - something primitive and half hidden. The pale eyes burned cold and remote in their hollows like pockets of smoldering gas.¹¹

In relation to this old man's idea, we must not overlook the peculiar episodes of a cat. The old man says, "... a body dies and their soul takes up in a cat for a spell. Specially somebody drowned or like that where they don't get buried proper."¹² This idea of a spirit separated from the corpse entering into another is similar to the above-mentioned belief of the Egyptians'. A cat appears in the scene of storm at the beginning of Chapter IV, just after the scene of the burnt corpse. The cat dragging her body for hungry in the storm is sinister, and she frightens Mrs. Rattner. Is it too far-fetched to think that the author is trying to suggest Rattner's soul has entered into the cat and is seeking for food? Or, he might be eliciting that mood from this scene. This cat reappears between the episodes of two captured men: Marion Sylder and the old man. At this time she walks "softly and with slow glace her leathered footpads fell, hind tracking fore with a precision profoundly feline, a silken movement... Belly swaying slightly to, lean but pendulous. Head low and divorced of

11. McCarthy, *The Orchard Keeper*, P.124

12. *Ibid.*, PP.182-183

An Exploration of "Freedom of Will" in Modern Eschatological Novels

all but linear motion, as if fixed along an unseen rail."¹³ There is something indicative of peaceful ascent to Heaven in this cat's behavior. She does not present herself any more, and only her squall sounds. The same mood is applied to the old hound, Scout:

... Grifford was struck by its behavior. It was walking in the wheelruts with an exotic delicacy, like a trained dog on a rope, and holding its head so far back, its nose near perpendicular...¹⁴

The dog is killed by the brutal, "humane" officer Legwater. Thus, the episodes of the two captured men and the two animals waiting peacefully for death or banishment are arranged in sequence to show a close relationship between their actions and their internal state. Each episode is not isolated. Each gives some effect on another.

In the last episode about the young Rattner the dead body is suggested to mingle with the dead's souls in the past and the unborn's. This signifies the ancient people's belief in the perpetual cycle of cosmic time, the infinite repetitions of creation, destruction and rebirth. The dead might revive in future. Anyhow, the years of plenty ended and most people died. The year of destruction, the seventh year, is going to start. The ending is this.

They are gone now. Fled, banished in death or exile, lost, undone. Over the land sun and wind still move to burn and sway the trees, the grasses. No avatar, no scion, no vestige of that people remains. On the lips of the strange race that now dwells there their names are myth, legend, dust.¹⁵

The most remarkable point in this novel is the contrast between two

13. McCarthy, *The Orchard Keeper*, P.172

14. *Ibid.*, P.194

15. *Ibid.*, PP.197-198

groups of men. The old man, the old Rattner, the young Rattner and Marion Sylder are the protectors of old savagery against the encroachment of the brutal civilization. Their way of living is sinister, anachronistic. They are criminals according to the established rule or morality. However, they desperately seek for what is called "freedom of will," or "freedom of choice," as the basic motive of their acts. They commit murder or destroy the public institutions. But they are conscious of being faithful to themselves. They reject to be neutrals who are innocent, humane, free from any responsibility on account of observing the established rules or morals. The "humane" officer and other comrades belong to this group of neutrals. They insist on their fair play and their love not only to individuals but to a country. But they are not faithful to themselves. They don't care what misfortune will befall on people because they are right and guiltless as long as they act according to the established rules and morals. They are released from any responsibility.

The first group of men represented by the old man were killed, banished and deprived of their life-long exploration of "freedom of will." However, we must not overlook their incessant dream of their resurrection and their firm belief in the cycle of cosmic time. This reminds me of Sartre's theory that only after death man can face his Existence: "freedom of will," or "freedom of choice." Next I will discuss this matter in reading other eschatological novels.

Anthony Burgess was born in Manchester, England, in 1917. After studying music and languages in Manchester (during this period he wrote a symphony), he joined the Army in October, 1940, and served for six years. Mr. Burgess did not take seriously to writing until his late thirties. His main ambition was to be known as a composer, and he has produced and had performed works of widely differing types. In 1954, he accepted a post as Education Officer in the Federation of Malaya, where he remained until the coming of independence in 1957.

An Exploration of "Freedom of Will" in Modern Eschatological Novels

Returning to England, Mr. Burgess took up writing as a fulltime career. Among his works are sixteen published novels (including his three Malayan novels, recently published here under the collected title, *The Long Day Wanes*), an introduction to linguistics, and *Re Joyce*, an explication of the aims and techniques of the author of *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake*.¹⁶

Tremor of Intent, on one level, gives us some grim, occasionally very funny escapist spyology. But it has a deeper and more serious purpose as its subtitle shows: Eschatological Spy Novel.

First we must pay attention to the two literary men's words on the front-page.

But between the day and night
The choice is free to all, and light
Falls equally on black and white.

W. H. Auden

The worst that can be said of most
of our malefactors, from statesmen to
thieves, is that they are not men
enough to be damned.

T. S. Eliot ¹⁷

Auden's assumption on "freedom of choice" and Eliot's suggestion on the evil of the neutrals are the key words running through this novel. Hillier, the hero of this novel, believes in "freedom of will." This concept reminds me of the central theme of Sartre's Existentialism. Sartre's "liberum arbitrium" or "freedom of will" or "freedom of choice" is based upon his

16. Anthony Burgess, *Tremor of Intent*, Ballantine Books, New York, 1966, P. 223

17. *Ibid.*, P. 7

theory that man's original nature aspires to become God or does not believe in God. He insists that by this rejection of God man becomes truly free and acts according to his original nature. Man must create the meaning of his existence out of his own life and make a rule for his life. Therefore, Sartre's "self-ego" is free from any established rule. It is not until man becomes free from such rules that he honestly lives his life and has an infinite responsibility not only for his own conduct but also for other people. This means that he must interpret those moral rules according to his belief and responsibility, instead of admitting them blindly. Man's circumstance or rule is morally unworthy unless he treats it with his honest and personal attitude. This attitude based upon "freedom of choice" does not always lead to the "good" act in view of the established morality. A dishonest man takes a superhuman being as his guide or commits himself to the Ten Commandments which transcend himself. Such a man becomes inhuman towards himself and other people by giving up his "freedom of will." He is an impostor. A man who is consciously faithful to himself sometimes acts like a devil in view of the established morality. But Sartre admits it as goodness.

Now we understand the true meaning of Eliot's words: "The worst that can be said of most of our malefactors, from statesmen to thieves, is that they are not men enough to be damned." Hillier says that the real evil are the neutrals.

"Evil," said Hillier between his teeth, "resides in the neutrals, in the uncovenanted powers. Here it all comes, then - what you really want."¹⁸

"We need new terms. God and NotGod. Salvation and damnation of equal dignity, the two sides of the coin of ultimate reality.

18. Burgess, *Tremor of Intent*, P.201

An Exploration of "Freedom of Will" in Modern Eschatological Novels

As for the evil, they have to be liquidated. . . . If we're going to save the world, we shall have to use unorthodox doctrines as well as unorthodox methods. Don't you think we'd all rather see devil-worship than bland neutrality?"¹⁹

Theodorescu, a main character in *Tremor of Intent*, is one of the neutrals who serve not the Devil, but their own self-interest and treat other people simply as function.

I want to discuss the important theme of Graham Greene's novel, *The Quiet American*, to make clear the above mentioned Sartre's and Hillier's theory. There is something in common between Burgess and Greene. For instance, the former uses the latter's allegory of the soul seeking redemption. Greene's *The Quiet American* is about the Vietnam War which occurred before America joined. However, Greene chose an American, Pyle, as the main character in this novel. The reason may be that Greene foresaw the escalation of the War owing to America's participation. Greene seems to think that American Innocence has a stimulating effect on the War. Fowler, the Englishman, is shouting against Pyle's view on Democracy which the latter learned from books.

"What's the good? He'll always be innocent, you can't blame the innocent, they are always guiltless, all you can do is to control them or eliminate them. Innocence is kind of insanity."²⁰

Alden Pyle is a typical American working for the Economic Mission in Vietnam and taking a very important part. His enthusiastic impulse or deed to protect the American economy and win the hearts of the Vietnamese with the American democracy symbolizes the American innocence and its harmful-

19. Burgess, *Tremor of Intent*, pp.218-220

20. Graham Greene, *The Quiet American*, William Heineman LTD, London, 1960, P.213

ness in the international relationship. Such an impulse or deed automatically brings isolation.

It is the social and moral isolation from the majority of one's fellow-creatures, from the normal condition or the common experience of the world's ordinary men and women. This loneliness brings forth innocence toward other fellow-creatures. Innocence, in spite of its goodness, becomes harmful for others. Alden Pyle is a good youth in view of the established morality.

He is a graduate from Harvard equipped with a great deal of intellectual idealism and enthusiastic humanism. However, his intelligence is totally blind to the complexity of reality. His goodness, when it passes through the hands of General Thē, brings forth the plastic bomb murdering the innocent people.

When one looks through the eyes of Fowler's experience, Pyle's goodness is not recommendable. His spirit of fair play is remarkable, especially when he vies with Fowler for Phuong who is already the latter's mistress. His motives are pure like a saint's. His view on household is sound like a puritan's. Greene's deep contempt for this sinlessness is remarkable. Love is not harmless in itself. How man can love each other without injury was the main theme Greene put in *The Heart of the Matter* or *The End of the Affair*. In this novel, the theme is applied between countries or nations.

Among several problems that Fowler is interested in, there is that of neutrality. Both Fowler and Pyle, being civilians, wish to be neutral. But they cannot continue to be neutral. Fowler gives Pyle in the enemy's hands. Pyle was wrong in his belief that he could be neutral and remain human at the same time.

But the problem of right and wrong arises when a man gives up of being neutral and tries to choose either of the sides. In this case, it is one of the American's characteristics to give a clear-cut solution for the problem of right and wrong without any trouble. Both Greene and

An Exploration of "Freedom of Will" in Modern Eschatological Novels

Burgess doubt of the fact that choice lies between clear right and wrong. Pyle's way of giving a clear-cut solution with ease for the facts prevents him from being human and leads him to offer plastic bombs to the opponent. Fowler's elimination of Pyle is damned in view of the established morality, but he didn't lose his "freedom of choice." He was faithful to himself. He interpreted the moral rule according to his belief and responsibility. As Hillier in *Tremor of Intent* says, "Knowing God means also knowing His opposite." 21

Hillier once talked about his disbelief in a clear-cut definition on good and evil and about good and evil not existing much any more.

"Have you ever wondered," said Hillier, "about the nature of ultimate reality? What lies beyond all this shifting mess of phenomena? What lies beyond even God?"

"Nothing's beyond God," said Alan. "That stands to reason."

"Beyond God," said Hillier, "lies the concept of God. In the concept of God lies the concept of anti-God. Ultimate reality is a dualism or a game for two players. We - people like me and my counterparts on the other side - we reflect that game. It's a pale reflection. There used to be a much brighter one, in the days when the two sides represented what are known as good and evil. That was a tougher and more interesting game, because one's opponent wasn't on the other side of a conventional net or line. He wasn't marked off by a special jersey or colour or race or language or allegiance to a particular historico-geographical abstraction. But we don't believe in good and evil any more. That's why we play this silly and hopeless little game."

"You don't have to play it," said Alan.

21. Burgess, *Tremor of Intent*, P.219

"If we don't play it what else are we going to play? We're too insignificant to be attacked by either the forces of light or the forces of darkness. And yet, playing this game, we occasionally let evil in. Evil tumbles in, unaware. But there's no good to fight evil with. That's when one grows sick of the game and wants to resign from it. That's why this is my last assignment." ²²

Theodorescu in *Tremor of Intent* and Pyle in *The Quiet American* are similar in the point that they are neutrals. Theodorescu says, "You said I was evil a minute ago. I quite probably am. But I'm *honest*, you know. I couldn't stay in this business if I cheated... I'm honest, and I'm fair," ²³ and he believes in "freedom of choice." However it is merely connected with his self-interest and his fairplay and neutrality "opted out of the modern age," ²⁴ without any responsibility.

A question arises here. Is Hillier's "freedom of choice" completely realized in this world? Alan had done murder as Fowler did. Clara had been initiated. They were baptized. Hillier was an initiator. He did that from his "freedom of choice." However, he cannot help being awakened by the old morality when love is taken over by lust in relationship with Clara.

Hillier settled in his wretchedness to the bottle of Old Morality.

.

He reflected,, on how wrong he had been about things, too much in choice and free will and the logic of men's acts; also the nature of love. ²⁵

22. Burgess, *Tremor of Intent*, PP.113-114

23. *Ibid.*, PP.201-202

24. *Ibid.*, P.218

25. *Ibid.*, P.194

An Exploration of "Freedom of Will" in Modern Eschatological Novels

Fowler in *The Quiet American* also has the same agony: "How I wished there existed someone to whom I could say that I was sorry."²⁶ This is the last sentence in the novel after Fowler murdered Pyle.

Hillier had been discharged dead: "Only after death, he had once said, was regeneration possible."²⁷ Only after death, man can face his Existence, "freedom of choice." This theory belongs to Sartre. De Vitis gives us an interesting comment on the relationship between Greene and Sartre.

At the heart of Sartrean Existentialism lies the point that has attracted Greene, who is always the champion of the individual. This point is the individual's freedom of choice, or his "engagement." The vital force of Sartre's Existentialism is how it demonstrates the essential and indefinable character of man; this demonstraion often produces anguish, "angoisse." For Sartre only a dead man be judged, for he alone is defined; he alone has finished forming himself.²⁸

26. Greene., *The Quiet American*, P.247

27. Burgess, *Tremor of Intent*, P.216

28. A. A. De Vitis, *Graham Greene*, Twayne's English Authors Series, Grossete Dunlap, New York, 1964, P.116

Bibliography

1. Burgess, Anthony, *Tremor of Intent*, Ballantine Books, New York, 1966
2. De Vitis, A. A., *Graham Greene*, Twayne's English Authors Series, Grossete Dunlap, New York, 1964
3. Eliade, M., *Myth of the Eternal Return* ("Eien Kaiki no Shinwa" translated by Ichiro Horii), Mirai-sha, Tokyo, 1963

-
4. Greene, Graham, *The Quiet American*, William Heineman LTD, London, 1960
 5. McCarthy, Cormac, *The Orchard Keeper*, Ballantine Books, New York, 1969