

[DOI: 10.20472/IAC.2025.068.011](https://doi.org/10.20472/IAC.2025.068.011)

SHINSUKE OHCHI

Hiroshima University, Japan

BEYOND THE MARKETPLACE: ECONOMIC MARGINALITY AND LITERARY VALUE IN CORMAC MCCARTHY'S OUTER DARK

Abstract:

Cormac McCarthy's *Outer Dark* (1968) serves as a powerful case study of how a literary work can possess profound cultural value even if it fails to achieve commercial success in its initial stages. The novel is a classic example of market failure; its artistic depth was largely overlooked by the literary marketplace at the time of publication. When writing the novel, McCarthy was living in extreme poverty and relied on minimal financial support to sustain his creative work. As a result, he was able to construct an experimental work with imaginative freedom, unbound by commercial expectations.

The novel also explores economic marginality as one of its central themes. Set in the desolate Appalachian region after the Civil War, it portrays characters excluded from capitalist labor structures. These depictions bring to light broader issues such as economic exclusion and social alienation.

Although *Outer Dark* received limited recognition upon its initial release, it eventually secured a place in the literary canon as McCarthy's reputation grew over time. This trajectory demonstrates that the value of a literary work is not always recognized by the market in real time and underscores the vital role played by non-market mechanisms of evaluation, such as academic institutions and literary criticism.

Furthermore, literature like *Outer Dark* generates positive cultural externalities—contributing to literary heritage, providing creative inspiration to subsequent writers, and enriching public discourse on morality and the human condition. However, such cultural benefits tend to be undervalued by the market, making it difficult to attract sufficient private investment. Thus, public and philanthropic support for literature is also justifiable from an economic standpoint.

In short, *Outer Dark* exemplifies how a work situated on the economic margins can possess enduring cultural significance, highlighting the essential role of non-market forces in sustaining literary excellence.

Keywords:

Cormac McCarthy
Economic marginality
Literary value

JEL Classification: Z00, Z11