ABSTRACT

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From Hills to Plains: Cormac McCarthy's Use of Landscape, Terrain, and Environment
(Under the Direction of DR. HUGH RUPPERSBURG)

Cormac McCarthy's novels focus on two specific regions in the United States. Along with his tenth novel, *The Road*, McCarthy's first four novels are set in Appalachian Tennessee while the next five take place around the U.S-Mexico border. The novels of these geographical settings chronicle over 100 years of human relationship to the landscape by emphasizing both individual and collective response to the environment. I will examine how McCarthy's application of landscape differs between each work. An analysis of each novel as it relates to the other novels of its region will reveal common themes and variations on those themes. In comparison, a study of noted authors of American landscape, such as William Bartram and Willa Cather, will examine McCarthy's work in the context of America's literary understanding of its environment. Further, I will gauge McCarthy's influence of narrating the landscape by comparing his Appalachian narratives to more recent works about the region, such as Charles Frazier's *Cold Mountain*. The Appalachian novels provide protagonists who encounter their environment on personal levels, and these relationships emphasize different psychological and theological dynamics of their contact with landscape. The landscape in the Southwestern novels, alternatively, emphasizes America's collective response to environment by echoing the lost cultures forced out by expansionism. While many can see in McCarthy's novels a strong conservationist theme, his work delves past ideas of preservation and reveals more fundamental elements of America's collective understanding of the physical world. Ultimately, McCarthy's novels show how we relate with landscape on psychological, spiritual, and metaphysical levels.

INDEX WORDS: Cormac McCarthy, Southern Appalachia, The Southwest, Landscape, *The Orchard Keeper, Outer Dark, Child of God, Suttree, Blood Meridian, All the Pretty Horses, The Crossing, Cities of the Plain, No Country for Old Men, The Road,* Ecocriticism

# FROM HILLS TO PLAINS: CORMAC MCCARTHY'S USE OF LANDSCAPE, TERRAIN, AND ENVIRONMENT

by

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# INTRODUCTION

Cormac McCarthy's career, thus far, has focused exclusively on two regions of the United States. His first four novels take place in southern Appalachia, the next five in the Southwest, and his most recent novel, *The Road*, offers an apocalyptic perspective on the Appalachian hills. Throughout both regions, we find individuals and civilizations alike interacting with the landscape in ways that define both the nature of man and of the wild. Certainly, one could uncover evidence in each novel for both an individual and collective response to the landscape. This analysis, however, will use each region of McCarthy's work to focus on one aspect of human interaction with the landscape. In the Appalachian novels, we will see how the individual psyche responds to and projects upon the meaning of environment. The Southwestern novels, on the other hand, focus primarily on a collective understanding of and interaction with the desert plains of that region. *The Road* encompasses both individual and collective responses to the landscape, and serves as a holistic retelling of those themes found in each of the earlier novels.

This analysis will end with a short chapter about McCarthy's place among his predecessors and contemporaries. We will see how McCarthy relates to established authors such as William Bartram, William Faulkner, and Willa Cather. For a perspective on his influence upon other writers (and for nominal variation), we will examine the relationship between McCarthy's work and that of Charles Frazier.

# CHAPTER 1
# THE APPALACHIAN NOVELS

Each of McCarthy's first four novels takes place in southern Appalachia. One could generalize, and assert that they are more specifically set in Tennessee, though there is no way to determine where in southern Appalachia *Outer Dark* (1968), McCarthy's second novel, is set. We do know, however, that *Outer Dark* is distinctly Appalachian and entirely rural. Along with *The Orchard Keeper* (1965) and *Child of God* (1974), *Outer Dark* offers readers a landscape that challenges, reflects, and interacts with characters on an individual level. One characteristic of the landscape which McCarthy utilizes to distinguish individual, as opposed to collective, interaction with the landscape is its wilderness. As this analysis will show, the Appalachian wilderness opposes domesticated and agrarian landscapes, and thus communal ideas of traditional pastoralism. In its place, McCarthy revises traditional pastoralism with descriptions of the landscape which critics have called ecopastoral. Ecopastoralism, as seen in McCarthy's novels, entails an ecocritical interpretation of pastoralism where man is no longer a steward of the natural world, but rather another species in an egalitarian ecosystem. One ecopastoral motif we will see in each Appalachian novel is an idea of *et in Arcadia ego*, which imposes mortality on the individual as his only true harmony with the natural world. We will also see elements of the grotesque, which further support an individual reading of the landscape in the way that it allows a character's psychological inscape to become his landscape.

*Suttree* (1979), McCarthy's fourth and, by some measures, most complex novel may appear out of place in this analysis. After all, most of the novel is set in the urban slums of

Knoxville, Tennessee. However, the novel begs attention be paid to Suttree's place in various modes of wilderness, including the natural, social, and urban. As we will see, mortality serves a similar function for *Suttree* as it does for the earlier three novels, and the few moments in *Suttree* devoted to the natural wilderness near Gatlinburg, Tennessee, contrast with the urban wilderness to affirm its ecopastoral legitimacy.

## *The Orchard Keeper*

Most critics agree that McCarthy's first novel focuses on addressing traditional pastoralism, but differing opinions abound as to the nature and purpose of *The Orchard Keeper*'s thematic crux. John M. Grammer reads the novel as "a more or less straightforward, elegiac celebration of a vanishing pastoral realm… [which] offers a positive image of pastoral order" as opposed to McCarthy's later novels (30). Recent criticism by George Guillemin offers a "revision of traditional pastoral readings" (20), suggesting that *The Orchard Keeper* "qualifies the nostalgia traditionally associated with pastoralism" and "frustrate[s] any superficial classification as elegiac pastoralism" (18). Rather, Guillemin proposes an ecocritical interpretation to supplement the traditional pastoral readings. That is not to say that a pastoral reading of McCarthy's work is incorrect; it simply implies that McCarthy's aesthetic is not fully encompassed by traditional pastoralism: "McCarthy's pastoralism defies traditional pastoral approaches because these tend to reduce the pastoral theme to a surface function against which other concerns are played out. McCarthy's pastoralism, however, is inclusive and holistic" (Guillemin, 15).

These recent ecopastoral interpretations of McCarthy's work (and *The Orchard Keeper* specifically) have significant implications regarding the relationship between the individual and

his natural environment. Earlier pastoral interpretations of *The Orchard Keeper* treat the landscape as a threatened value, possibly already lost, and certainly already mourned. Paired with the nostalgic and antagonistic portrayals of environment and "progress" is the idea that the competition between these forces is primarily a societal concern: "McCarthy depicts a world in which traditional embodiments of value—religion, community relationships, agrarian connections with the earth—have deteriorated as a result of the increasing pressure of urban culture, commercial interests and governmental intrusions upon the lives of the novel's essentially rural characters" (Ragan, 15). A close reading of *The Orchard Keeper* will certainly support such interpretations, but the recent ecocritical perspectives—which acknowledge ecological modes of wilderness besides the ideal of domesticated farmland—emphasize the individual and provide a more complete understanding of McCarthy's work.

The shift from interpretations which focus on wilderness and the community to those which emphasize wilderness and the individual can be seen when we apply the pastoral and ecopastoral traditions to the main characters of the novel: John Wesley, Marion Sylder, and Arthur Ownby. Grammar offers an exemplary interpretation by way of traditional pastoralism: "Like many works in this tradition, *The Orchard Keeper* centers upon the fortunes not of a single protagonist but of a community—here, of a primitive community clinging tenaciously to existence in the mountains east of Knoxville, Tennessee" (30). Under the gaze of traditional pastoralism, the three main characters all represent defendants of the old pastoral order. Among other instances, we see their stand when John Wesley reclaims the hawk he had turned in for bounty, when Sylder subverts oppressive government represented by constable Gifford and as Ownby assaults the mysterious government tank. Their collective stand against government

intrusion certainly makes a case for a communal respect of traditional pastoralism and all it encompasses, including "agrarian connections with the earth" (Ragan, 15).

An ecopastoral interpretation, however, erodes many of the communal elements seen between the three main characters. A less ideal, more ecocritical perspective of the wilderness reveals not only two of the characters' unconcerned attitudes for the pastoral realm, but also the absence of any real threat to that realm. Sylder, for one, can hardly be said to defend any tradition which values the landscape. Guillemin notes that, as much as any other intrusive force in the novel, it is Sylder who "introduces urban commodities and customs to the village of Red Branch, his machine that invades the garden" (22). The bootlegger even fails to understand Ownby's protection of the wilderness when he asks "Why was the old man shooting holes in the government tank on the mountain?" (168). John Wesley is also less concerned with the wilderness than he is with government intrusion, as we see in his attempt to reclaim the hawk. He appears to be more worried about government offices which "throw people in jail and beat up on them" and throw "old men in the crazy house" than those which offer bounty for hawks (233). And not only are these two apathetic about the intrusion of government on the landscape, but they seem to decide that the local government poses no real threat to their personal beliefs at all. In fact, Sylder states that his personal relationship with the law is symbiotic: "If it weren't for Gifford, the law, I wouldn't of had the job I had blockading and if it wadn't for me blockadin, Gifford wouldn't of had his job arrestin blockaders" (214). We see that the unthreatened status of the general pastoral realm specifically includes the wilderness when government workers keeping the mysterious tank are "serious and official, but somewhat sleepy and not in any particular hurry" (98) or, as Guillemin states, "hardly threatening to the rustic order of life" (21).

That rustic order of life and its dependence upon the wilderness, along with any perceived threats against it, is upheld only by Arthur Ownby. An ecocritical examination of Ownby reveals not only his appreciation for wilderness as a mode of ecopastoralism, but his singularity in doing so. Interestingly, Ownby's immersion into wilderness is a distinctly ecopastoral element of the novel which contrasts his abortive attempt at an agrarian and traditionally pastoral lifestyle. Regan notes that "Uncle Ather's values derive in part from his vital connection with the natural world. As his community links diminish, his dependence upon the wilderness intensifies" (20). Regan goes on to point out that "His mystical knowledge bridges the gap between the areas in which Uncle Ather grounds his understanding of life's purpose and meaning—the web of human life and the mountain wilderness—and provides the rationale for his most significant actions" of tending to Kenneth Rattner's remains and shooting the government tank (21).

In many ways, these remains represent nature's cold indifference to human life which Ownby comes to accept. Guillemin points out a recurring theme of *et en Arcadia ego* (Latin for "I, too, am from Arcadia") in *The Orchard Keeper.* He mentions a painting by Nicolas Poussin of a tomb in an idyllic landscape that reads "Et in Arcadia Ego" (150). The epitaph is meant to warn shepherds not to forget their own mortality, even while in such a perfect landscape. While there certainly are scenes in the novel which evoke a foreboding of mortality similar to the one in Poussin's painting (for example, the final scene of John Wesley at his mother's grave), there is one central image which aligns more closely to Guercino's version of the *et in Arcadia ego* motif where, instead of a tomb, shepherds are warned of their mortality by a decomposing skull. For example, towards the end of the novel is a scene in Red Branch during spring where mowers "speak of great deeds and men and noble eras gone" and "some wave hopefully to the passing

cars of picnickers and bathers" (223-224). This pastoral scene ends with "the green cadaver grin sealed in the murky waters of the peach pit, slimegreen skull with newts coiled in the eyesockets and a wig of moss" (224). The verdant image of a human skull is no homage to the persistence of life, but rather a reminder of human mortality.

As Ownby performs the annual rite of tending to Kenneth Rattner's remains, he recognizes both his own mortality and the incongruity of humanity and the wilderness. As the sole defendant of pastoralism in the novel, his experience chronicles the rewriting of American pastoralism to shed all ideals of man in harmony with nature. In exchange, McCarthy leaves the reader with the ecocritical acceptance of mortality in the pastoral realm.

## *Outer Dark*

The landscape in McCarthy's second novel, *Outer Dark*, abandons many of the concrete spatial elements which littered the land in *The Orchard Keeper*. We can only guess about such spatial aspects of the novel as distance and location, and the few temporal clues which we are given do little more than reveal the season or elapsed periods of time not accurately measured even to the day. Vereen Bell writes that "In *Outer Dark* the topography is vague, dreamlike, and surreal in a way that imposes an unwholesome, deranged aspect upon the entire scene" (33). Indeed, the obscure and nightmarish qualities of the landscape suggest a dream imposed upon it. McCarthy's treatment of the Appalachian landscape in this manner testifies further to its relationship with the individual. *Outer Dark* achieves this end specifically by using elements of the grotesque to render the landscape subject to Culla's internal psyche.

As *Outer Dark* works in the southern gothic tradition, it will be helpful to use Elizabeth Kerr's definition of the grotesque as it pertains to that genre: "The grotesque is characterized by

a distortion of the external world, by the description of human beings in nonhuman terms, and by the displacement we associate with dreams. The infinite possibilities of the dream inform the grotesque at every turn, suspending the laws of proportion and symmetry: our deepest promptings are projected into the details of the scene—inscape as landscape" (21). Readers have found these three elements of the grotesque throughout *Outer Dark*, and each element adds to our reading of 'inscape as landscape.'

First, the landscape's distortion in *Outer Dark* is one of the most prominent aspects of the novel, and critics are quick to notice it when discussing influences of the vague landscape such as its surreal and allegorical qualities. V. Bell, for instance, notes that the characters in the novel "encounter bafflingly incongruous aspects of landscape—sluggish rivers, mountains, moss-laden trees, swamps, precipitous gorges" (33). From the beginning to end, the novel features odd, impossible, or unlikely descriptions of the natural world, such as Culla's dream where "The sun paused…Then the sun buckled and fell like a shout" (5) and the final image of the vaporous swamp "out of which reared only the naked trees in attitudes of agony and dimly hominoid like figures" (242). Guilleman suggests, "The insertion of surrealist imagery turns the representation of landscape in much of *Outer Dark* into an obvious representation of the inscape of Culla's psyche" (57). Certainly, such unrealistic elements of the landscape cannot be the product of an objective point of view, and must therefore be the result of either the narrator's psyche or, as Guilleman suggests, Culla's. Regardless of which character's internal consciousness is imposed on the landscape, we can safely conclude that such occurrences reinforce the theory that McCarthy's Appalachian landscape relates to the individual mind.

Kerr's other two elements of the grotesque—description of humans in non-human terms and dreamlike displacement—connect pastoral elements in *Outer Dark* with those found in *The*

*Orchard Keeper* and reinforce the psyche's distortion of the landscape, respectively. The latter certainly accompanies a psychological reading of the landscape, and we are reminded of the dream-like quality of the world throughout the novel, for example, when shoats pass Culla like "creatures in a dream" (219), or when he sees people move about "beneath the blinding heat like toilers in a dream" (134). Culla's initial dream, in which he bears the guilt of humanity, is certainly the central dream of the novel. He is out of place among the "delegation of human ruin around him" (5), and we can see this displacement follow him into the external world as he constantly runs from those who inherently recognize his guilt.

The narrator describes the multitude which turns against Culla in his dream as "A delegation of human ruin…with blind eyes upturned and puckered stumps and leprous sores" (5). Like his feeling of displacement, we see the grotesque descriptions of individuals follow Culla from his dreams to the external world. For instance, the tinker is repeatedly described as "gnomic" (6) and Pan-like ("demon piping, 187), while various other characters are said to have "long bat's nostrils" (57) or are described as "stone figures quarried from the architecture of an older time" (77). The fact that grotesque descriptions of humans follow Culla from his dream into the external world, while highlighting the dreamlike quality of the landscape, also incorporates the grotesque with the ecopastoral reading of *The Orchard Keeper*.

A vivid scene in the end of the novel continues the *et in Arcadia ego* and ecopastoral motifs found in *The Orchard Keeper* by combining them with this idea of the grotesque.

> The tinker in his burial tree was a wonder to the birds. The vultures that came by day to nose with their hooked beaks among his buttons and pockets like outrageous pets soon left him naked of his rags and flesh alike. Black mandrake sprang beneath the tree as it will where the seed of the hanged falls and in spring a new branch pierced his breast

> and flowered in a green boutonniere perennial beneath his yellow grin. He took the sparse winter snows upon what thatch of hair still clung to his dried skull and hunters that passed that way never chanced to see him brooding among his barren limbs. Until wind had tolled the tinker's bones and seasons loosed them one by one to the ground below and alone his bleached and weathered brisket hung in that lonesome wood like a bone birdcage (238).

Here, the *et in Arcadia ego* motif we find throughout McCarthy's early novels works with the grotesque to redefine human interaction with the landscape. Kerr's definition of the grotesque serves the tinker well in that he is defined in non-human terms (brisket, birdcage) despite the fact that the narrator has granted humanity to the mere remnants of his corpse. Likewise, the mention of the human-like mandrake root also adheres to this definition from multiple and converse perspectives: the root is at once a distortion of the external world in its likeness to human form and a description of the human form in terms of an angiosperm, or something non-human. While the corpse, its lasting presence in the wilderness, and the narrator's attention to the skull all underscore the *et in Arcadia ego* motif, the black mandrake, a product of human seed and wild soil, seems to contradict the theme's implication of human incongruence with the wilderness. However, this root is born, as the legend goes, from a *dead* man's semen, and thus emphasizes rather than negates the ecocritical conclusion of the motif as found in *The Orchard Keeper*. We harmonize with nature only in death, and the grotesque depiction of the mandrake is a testament to the fact.

## *Child of God*

Lester Ballard—the murderer, outcast, necrophiliac, and "child of god much like yourself" (4) at the center of McCarthy's third novel *Child of God*—introduces ecocritical readers of McCarthy to a new type of human-environment interaction. In many ways, we have already seen much of what Lester has to add to our environmental reading of McCarthy in Arthur Ownby: both are failed yeomen (though Ownby abandons his plot of land while Ballard's is taken from him), both tend corpses, both take stands against authority, and both are hermits who subsist on whatever they can scavenge. Guillemin notes that the central objective of *Child of God* "is the narrative representation of wilderness, strangely mediated by the deranged (and therefore aesthetically conditioned) vision of a farmer who has reverted to the condition of a hunter-gatherer" (38). Derangement aside, this objective could just as easily be ascribed to the character of Ownby, if not *The Orchard Keeper* as a whole. However, Ballard's lack of ecological understanding distinguishes him from his fellow recluse, and makes him, according to V. Bell, "the negative impression Arthur Ownby in *The Orchard Keeper*" (64). Unlike Ownby, he is neither resourceful nor knowledgeable with respect to the natural world. Ownby, in his antipastoral role, becomes a hunter-gatherer in the traditional sense. Ballard, in his descent into lunacy, becomes a hunter-gather not of animal flesh and natural fruits for physical subsistence, but rather of female flesh for gratification of his most basic physical and social desires. Ballard's psychological deterioration, then, becomes the material by which we read his individual response to the Appalachian landscape. Inasmuch as this deterioration both reflects and is a product of his social environment, however, we must also acknowledge Ballard's role as a representative of the collective response to landscape.

The role of Lester's psyche on his perception of the external world likens him to Culla Holme in *Outer Dark*. Guillemin points out that *Child of God* "is a novel about wilderness inside and out, or, to be more precise, a representation of wild nature as reflected in a psyche gone wild" (37). This idea closely parallels Kerr's concept of "inscape as landscape" (21) as we saw it in *Outer Dark*, but the novels differ in that *Outer Dark's* surreal landscape is a product of guilt, whereas Ballard's place in the wild is a function of his insanity. Clearly, there is a direct correlation between Ballard's degree of derangement and the degree of wilderness in which he lives. In the beginning of the novel, when he is still marginally connected to the community and has what one could call friends, he has just been evicted from his agrarian and domesticated property. Later, when "he'd grown lean and bitter…Some said mad" (41), his first opportunity to have sex with a corpse presents itself by chance. After this initial derangement and his first step into necrophilia, we find Ballard squatting in an abandoned house in the woods. By the end of the novel, where Ballard is mad enough to purposefully murder his victims, don their clothes, and fashion their scalps into wigs, Ballard has found a subterranean abode in caves beneath the hills of Tennessee. This move from domestic space to wilderness is progressive, and coincides with Ballard's descent towards his most primitive psychological state. By the end of the novel, Ballard has, perhaps, shed even his most innate cognitive constructs to the point that he is barely human. According to Andrew Bartlett, "We see the animality of Ballard: a protohuman simian creature, an ape, a caveman who defecates, urinates, spits, hunts, kills, eats, and—most habitually—*squats*; who sees in animals, trees, rocks, caves, stars, rubbish, the inexplicable fragments of his own shattered image (14).

Ballard is barely human indeed, but human nonetheless. When we see Ballard in such a state, we certainly notice a lack of some human qualities, but their absence allows readers to

focus on the individual connection between his remaining humanity and the wilderness. For instance, as Ballard lies in his cave one night, looking through the smoke hole, "he watched the hordes of cold stars sprawled across the smokehole and wondered what stuff they were made of, or himself" (141). It is unlikely that Ballard has the intellect to even begin to comprehend the possible material components of stars, but the fact that he recognizes his shared materiality with the external world suggests a more complete understanding of his place in nature than one might believe the man could achieve on his own. Again in the cave we see Ballard consider the relationship between his own mortality and the natural world:

> He heard the mice scurry in the dark. Perhaps they'd nest in his skull, spawn their tiny bald and mewling whelps in the lobed caverns where his brains had been. His bones polished clean as eggshells, centipedes sleeping in their marrowed flutes, his ribs curling slender and whitely like a bone flower in the dark stone bowl (189).

The creatures that live in Lester's imagined skull connect this image to that of Kenneth Rattner's skull in *The Orchard Keeper,* and the flowering image of his ribcage connect it to the tinker's hanging corpse in *Outer Dark*. Thus, Ballard's imagination revives McCarthy's use of the *et in Arcadia ego* motif to emphasize his connection with the wild through his own mortality.

Such moments in the novel clearly establish a reading of the individual's relationship with the wilderness. As noted before, however, our reading of Ballard is incomplete without an understanding of how his relationship with society extends this reading into a theme of collective response to the wilderness. When we examine Ballard's descent into madness, we begin to see how his society may have caused it. After all, his exclusion from society and his turn to necrophilia are both the product of his community's preoccupation with sex: he is expelled from the community of Sevier County after being physically attacked by a whore and finds his first

dead female in a parked car where she and a young man had asphyxiated during intercourse. As a matter of fact, Ballard encounters another incident of teenagers copulating in a parked car, and his participation in erotic flirtation and his observation of incest and pedophilia both testify to Sevier County's fixation on taboo sex practices. It is no wonder, then, that Ballard turns to such an extreme form of sexual perversion in his madness. In this respect, V. Bell was accurate in noting that "no one in this community is even remotely like Lester; but the difference along the human spectrum is one of degree, not kind" (57).

Mark Winchell also observes Lester's connection to the community. "McCarthy also manages to draw subliminal parallels between Lester and the community through scenes that eerily resemble each other" (293-309?). Specifically, Winchell notes scenes such as Ballard's use of a rope to lift his first victim's corpse into the abandoned shack's loft (95) and the Sheriff's department's same method of lifting his victims from the cave (196). Also, Ballard's unusual fixation on his father's suicide by hanging (21) and the community's congregation for a public hanging as if it were a county fair (167) illustrate a symbolic connection between Lester (as an individual) and the community (as the collective). That said, Ballard becomes something of a collaboration of subconscious urges and collective hidden desires. His reaction to the landscape, then, reveals some innate connection to the landscape we all have on a primitive, possibly subconscious level. Ballard comes to this conclusion in his own naïve way: "Coming up the mountain through the blue winter twilight among great boulders and the ruins of giant trees prone in the forest he wondered at such upheaval. Disorder in the woods, trees down, new paths needed. Given charge Ballard would have made things more orderly in the woods and in men's souls" (136).

*Suttree*

Compared to the other Appalachian novels (and, in some respects, to the Southwestern novels as well), McCarthy's fourth novel *Suttree* stands alone in many regards. Stylistically, it is McCarthy's longest and most complex work. In terms of character, Cornelius Suttree is the most educated and introspective protagonist we find in any of McCarthy's novels. But for our purposes, the unique quality of *Suttree* which is most intriguing is its urban setting. Suttree does have occasional interactions with 'natural' landscape as we have seen it in the previous novels; his time spent harvesting mussels with Reese on the Tennessee River and his wanderings about the Smokey Mountain wilderness both come to mind. While these moments in the novel will add to this analysis of the individual's interaction with the Appalachian landscape, we cannot ignore Suttree's interaction with the urban environment. In this regard, McAnally Flats, the slums of Knoxville, Tennessee, becomes Suttree's wilderness, and we find that the modes of wilderness Suttree encounters by the polluted Tennessee River are the same as those he encounters in the Gatlinburg wilderness, and the same as those found in McCarthy's earlier novels as well.

Not surprisingly, one of the first motifs we see expressed by the landscape in *Suttree* is one of mortality. Like the prior three novels, mortality will play an intricate role in the individual's relationship to his landscape. In *Suttree,* death quite literally sets the stage:

> *Faint summer lightening far downriver. A curtain is rising on the western world. A fine rain of soot, dead beetles, anonymous small bones. The audience sits webbed in dust. Within the gutted sockets of the interlocutor's skull a spider sleeps and the jointed ruins of the hanged fool dangle from the flies, bone pendulum in motley. Fourfooted shapes go to and fro over the boards. Ruder forms survive* (original italics, 5).

The image of death, here a skull with a spider sleeping in the eye sockets, continues McCarthy's use of the *et in Arcadia ego* motif as reminder of human mortality despite ideal surroundings. Two of the other three novels (*The Orchard Keeper,* 224; *Child of God,* 189) feature similar images of a skull with some critter living within, and a comparable description of the tinker's corpse in *Outer Dark* (who shares a flowering ribcage with Lester Ballard) bring the motif to full circle in the Appalachian novels. Thus, not only is death our "interlocutor," or a possible narrative voice for *Suttree*, but we can also expect to see mortality as the ultimate connection between nature and man in McCarthy's fourth novel. While the appearance of the theme so early in the book reminds readers of the motif as they encountered it in the other three novels, it also establishes the urban environment as legitimate in an ecocritical sense. In this regard, we can anticipate parallels between Suttree's wilderness and urban experiences.

Many readers of *Suttree* have noticed death's prevalent role in the novel, and also acknowledge that perceived differences between the two modes of wilderness, the urban and the natural, are deceiving. John Longley Jr. states the observation generally: "On the first page and the last page of the novel the motif is stated: Death is always at hand; in the city, on the river, in the mountains" (84). Grammer recognizes death's role in life and nature in Suttree's dependence upon the river, in which he sees the river as "a symbol: of life, since it gives Suttree the fish which sustain him, and of death—in the opening scene the bloated body of a suicide is grappled from its depths" (40). And death's pervasiveness in the novel is no force which confines an unknowing protagonist. It is rather his fixation, even from childhood. At a horse race, Suttree's grandfather claims

> that they had witnessed a thing against which time will not prevail…He meant a thing to be remembered, but the young apostate by the rail at his elbow had already begun to

> sicken at the slow seeping of life. He could see the shape of the skull through the old man's flesh. Hear sand in the glass. Lives running out like something foul, nightsoil from a cesspipe, a measured dripping in the dark (136).

As death is Suttree's primary concern in the novel, it becomes ours as well. For the reader, mortality measures the degree of wildness in both the urban and natural environments which Suttree traverse.

With death as our narrator and, now, our gauge, we find that Suttree's encounters with urban and natural wildernesses deal a common degree of indifference. Guillemin notices that "Suttree's quest for survival in an alien cityscape parallels his quest for survival in the Appalachians. Both environments are wild; in neither environment does he care to dominate; and survival in either is equally hard" (14). For instance, Suttree's escape to the Gatlinburg wilderness "starts out as a rite of purification for him and ends, after weeks of starvation and solitude, on the border of madness" (V. Bell, 90). Suttree does not discover any transcendental truths in his ill-prepared hike in the mountains, except possibly that "the wilderness has treated him with a sublime indifference (Longley, 87). Likewise, his experience in Knoxville is equally dangerous. Longley also notes that "In "real" life, death is omnipresent, of course, but in the real life of McAnally Flats, the odds are considerably steeper" when one considers the brutality of the police, the inhabitants' inclination to drink to the point of alcohol poisoning, and the frequent and inevitable brawls which Suttree seems to survive only miraculously (84). In light of the *et in Arcadia ego* motif, Suttree's proximity to death serves a similar function in both landscapes. On the mountain, it is the same as we saw earlier in the wilderness of *The Orchard Keeper*. In Knoxville, it serves a similar function by reminding one of the false securities an urban lifestyle offers.

From a psychoanalytical standpoint, Suttree's fixation on death mediates his individual interaction with the landscape. However, as with *Child of God*, the individual and collective perspectives on landscape are not as separable as they may seem. After all, it is easy to read Suttree's trip through the wilderness as a singular and individual experience, but the same cannot be said about his experience in the urban landscape. Another distinction between Suttree and McCarthy's other protagonists is the sheer number of people he knows: the foolish Gene Harrogate, his lovers Wanda and Joyce, and various derelicts such as Leonard, Billy Ray, Callahan, and 'Trippin Thru the Dew,' to name a few. Suttree's interactions with the dozens of other characters found in McAnally Flats demand a collective interpretation of society in the urban wilderness. Death is also present in this community's collective response to its environment, in that many of Suttree's friends are dead by the end of the novel. Also, as we saw earlier, the ecopastoralism found in *The Orchard Keeper* through the *et in Arcadia ego* motif is present in the collective wilderness of Knoxville. As Guillemin puts it, "McCarthy's pastoralism is ecopastoral not just because it respects the ecological equality of all creatures and favors undomesticated nature over agricultural land, but, moreover, because it equates the external wilderness of nature with the social wilderness of the city and the internal wilderness of the human mind" (13).

# CHAPTER 2
# THE SOUTHWESTERN NOVELS

Given the similarities between all of McCarthy's Southwestern novels, *The Border Trilogy* could actually be called the Border Pentology. All five novels, from *Blood Meridian* (1985) to *No Country for Old Men* (2005), deal with disastrous journeys across the U.S-Mexico border, brutal violence, and tragic heroes whose fatal flaws are that they believe to know something about the world. Each of the novels begins its action in either Arizona, New Mexico, or Texas, and progress south to Mexico. The landscape, as we will see, is of desert plains and ruinous mountains. While each protagonist's journey across the landscape reflects his own interaction with the wilderness, there are certain motifs throughout the Southwestern novels which generalize each individual's encounter and encourage reader's to interpret a collective response to the desert landscape. This chapter will focus primarily on two of those motifs.

First, the landscape in McCarthy's Southwestern novels often bears witness to past civilizations. Such moments are occasionally pondered by characters, such as Judge Holden in *Blood Meridian*. But more often they are ignored or left unnoticed by the tragic heroes, such as John Grady Cole in *Cities of the Plain* (1998) and Llewelyn Moss in *No Country for Old Men.* Since the inherent warnings of these traces are products of societies rather than individuals, they do not speak just to the main characters of the novels, but rather serve as warnings to society at large.

Second, we see in two of the novels the danger of logocentric interpretations of the landscape. For our purposes, logocentrism is the tendency to confuse an actual or physical thing

with an idea about the thing. John Grady Cole, in *All the Pretty Horses* (1992), makes this near-fatal mistake with his ethnocentric interpretations about the significance of the Rio Grande—that feature of the Southwest used as a border between Texas and Mexico. Billy Parham, in *The Crossing* (1994), makes a similar mistake in regards to the landscape, but in an ecological manner. His attempt to protect a wolf by displacing it proves fatal for the wolf and detrimental to him. In turn, we see how these mistakes are not specific to these characters. They are, in fact, the result of common worldviews which the novels attempt to expose.

### *Blood Meridian or the Evening Redness in the West*

*Blood Meridian* marks McCarthy's departure from the hills of Tennessee. This departure actually begins the novel's episodic narrative as we are introduced to "the kid," an unnamed character who is not so much a protagonist as he is, like Ishmael in *Moby Dick* (1851), the novel's central observer. The kid, despite his father's erudition and occupation as schoolmaster, is illiterate and in him, as is the case with the collection of sociopaths he later joins, "broods already a taste for mindless violence" (3). By the second page of the novel he has already fled his home state of Tennessee for good, and he arrives in Galveston, Texas by the end of the first chapter.

Here, McCarthy's chronicle of America's history with the southwestern landscape begins. Violence is the narrative medium in *Blood Meridian*, and it is undoubtedly at the core of American history in 1849-1850, when the novel takes place. In this regard, the novel exposes the ethnocentrism of American expansion as it relates to the landscape. Steven Shaviro highlights this function of the novel when he suggests that "the American dream of manifest destiny must be repeated over and over again, ravaging the indifferent landscape in the course of its

lemmings' march to the sea" (155). McCarthy's exposure, though, is not limited to the evils of ethnocentrism. While it is true that the groups the kid joins work under an us-and-them mentality—first on a filibustering expedition with the U.S. Army and then as mercenaries on behalf of Mexican cities—these groups, especially the Glanton Gang, hire and kill indiscriminately. Indeed, the Gang, under the command of Judge Holden, includes whites, blacks, Lenape (or Delaware) Native Americans, and a Vandiemenslander. Though they are hired by the state of Chihuahua to hunt threatening Apache Indians and are paid by the scalp, they eventually begin to kill all southwestern Native Americans in general, prey upon small Mexican villages, and finally take on the Mexican Army itself. The violence represented by the Glanton Gang, then, neither discriminates amongst its practitioners nor its victims, and the victims themselves are often just as diabolical and murderous as the Gang. These two facts, together, suggest that violence in *Blood Meridian* alerts us to anthropocentrism rather than ethnocentrism.

Throughout the novel, the desert landscape often asserts its independence and indifference to human presence, as it occasionally does through silence: "There is hardly in the world a waste so barren but some creature will not cry out at night, yet here one was and they listened to their breathing in the dark and the cold and they listened to the systole of the rubymeated hearts that hung within them" (281). The blank silence of the desert suggests a void of human influence, and undermines any assumed dominance of civilization over the landscape. As Guillemin notes, "The novel's narrative thrust ultimately renders the desert hostile to human signification altogether, so that the silent deadlines of the ecotope becomes generally emblematic of the silence of death" (81). Another example of nature's indifference to mankind can be seen in its reciprocal violence, such as when a bat sucks the blood from the neck of one sleeping

character soon to die of gangrene (66). This scene in particular aptly illustrates a point made by Dana Phillips: "In the raw orchestration of the book's events, the world of nature and the world of men are parts of the same world, and both are equally violent and indifferent to the other" (447).

The Judge, however, seems to counter this point entirely, and we never see him suffer the consequences of his admitted anthropocentrism:

> Whatever in creation exists without my knowledge exists without my consent… These anonymous creatures, he said, may seem little or nothing in the world. Yet the smallest crumb can devour us. Any smallest thing beneath yon rock out of men's knowing. Only nature can enslave man and only when the existence of each last entity is routed out and made to stand naked before him will he be properly suzerain of the earth (198).

Judge Holden, in his mysterious manner of cataloguing every detail of nature he finds, does so in an attempt to achieve dominance through gnosis. We might expect many McCarthian characters to suffer the consequences of imposing such dominance upon the nature world, but not so with the Judge. At the end of the novel, he is the sole survivor of his gang, and he whimsically announces his immortality: "He is dancing, dancing. He says that he will never die" (335). In light of the ending, we are left to wonder about the inscription on the Judge's rifle: *et in Arcadia ego* (125). In the Appalachian novels, the motif served as a reminder of one's mortality in the face of wilderness. The Judge, however, seems to use the phrase not as a sober reminder of his own mortality but rather as motivation to overcome it through actualizing his anthropocentrism over nature, possibly by becoming a 'judge' who blindly serves death to whoever crosses his path. The absolute demonic nature of the Judge and the fact that he is the ultimate antagonist, along with our assumption that he must, one day, meet his mortal end, leads the reader to believe

that he has not actually achieved immortality, but rather that he represents the terrible consequence of collective anthropocentrism. Barcley Owens makes such a suggestion: "His brag at the end that he 'will never die' represents the brag of the whole species rather than of any one individual" (56). Thus, the Judge's actions and attitudes are the outcome of collective anthropocentrism when it is followed to its logical conclusion.

We witness these atrocities against man and nature throughout *Blood Meridian*. From various scenes in the novel, we gather that genocide against humans and nature alike is of the same type. Years after the Glanton Gang has disbanded, the kid, now a man, speaks with an old hunter in a camp on the prairie. The hunter tells the kid of the carnage he witnessed as a buffalo hunter, and states "They're gone. Ever one of them that God ever made is gone as if they'd never been at all" (317). The Judge, aside from murdering any Indians he comes across, is also bent on removing every trace of their existence. When he and his men come across "a group of natural stone cisterns in the desert," he systematically copies the images into his notebook. But before leaving, "he rose and with a piece of broken chert he scappled away one of the designs, leaving no trace of it only a raw place in the stone where it had been" (173). In the next paragraph, we learn that "In three days they would fall upon a band of peaceful Tiguas camped on a river and slaughter them every soul" (173). The tendency to eradicate entire groups and species, whether from the broad expanse or the smallest corner of the desert landscape, works hand in hand with the Judge's attempts to become a suzerain over the world, and the collective sentiment of his final statement in the novel underscores the collective anthropocentrism he embodies.

Of course, the traces (or lack thereof) of prior civilizations in the landscape suggests both grief for their loss and a warning for current civilizations. Just as the skulls and corpses in the Appalachian novels were depicted as omens of mortality to the individual, the mark of dead

civilizations throughout the desert landscape serve as a warning to current civilizations in *Blood Meridian*. This motif begins a running theme throughout McCarthy's later novels, and we will see it again in *Cities of the Plain, No Country for Old Men,* and *The Road* (2006).

## *All the Pretty Horses*

*All the Pretty Horses,* like *Blood Meridian*, uses the landscape to illustrate the danger of imposing ideas on the natural world. Grammer notes that "What one takes from McCarthy's novels… is a 'hyperrealistic' rendering of the physical world in all its dense, vivid specificity—and particularly the power of that world to upend whatever conceptual grids are imposed on it. To begin discovering themes and symbols in McCarthy's work is to risk the very delusive logocentrism that the novels themselves are meant to expose" (28). In *All the Pretty Horses,* one of these "conceptual grids" is the ethnocentric tendencies of nationalism, which become anthropocentric attitudes when imposed on the landscape. Consider this scene near the border, where John Grady and Rawlins ask the child Blevins why they should let him tag along:

> What the hell would we want you with us for?
>
> He didn't answer. He sat looking at the sandy water running past them and at the thin wicker shadows of the willows running out over the sandbar in the evening light. He looked out to the blue sierras to the south and he hitched up the shoulder strap of his overalls and sat with his thumb hooked in the bib and turned back to look at them.
>
> Cause I'm an American, he said (45).

The boys tacitly approve, and their ethnocentric ideas of being American allow them to impose their "conceptual grid" more definitively, or at least have it reinforced so early in their adventure.

The conversation above clearly evokes a contrast between Grammer's suggestion of conceptual grids and the tangible world. The boys, when hearing Blevins's case for his companionship based on nationality, are standing at the border. The river which physically separates two nations only does so because political interpretations of terrain, longitude, and latitude (literally, a conceptual grid) are imposed on it. This particular terrain, the "sandy water running past them and…the thin wicker shadows of the willows running out over the sandbar in the evening light," does not suggest to Blevins particular characteristics about the terrain which he can help the other two overcome, but rather a seemingly arbitrary sense of nationality. His reasoning confuses the thing with a "delusive" logocentric assumption about the thing. John Grady buys into Blevins's reasoning, which is fatally misleading to Blevins and almost as costly to John Grady and Rawlins. While the boys' understanding of being 'American' makes sense on one side of the border, they find that it provides nothing except unwanted attention on the other.

John Grady's blind faith in his logocentric ideas resulted in trouble in Mexico, but their relationship to the border may actually be multifaceted: "Southwestern frontier history and geography produce deep feelings of ambivalence. On the one hand, the vastness of its area seems to negate borders; on the other, the region's location on the edge of Southern and Western culture and along the long Rio Grande border with Mexico reinforces an awareness of borders" (229). Busby addresses seemingly conflicting ideas, in that the Southwestern terrain both nullifies and demands borders. By this reading, we do not necessarily see in *All the Pretty Horses* "the power of that world to upend whatever conceptual grids are imposed on it," as suggested by Grammer. To the contrary, the land itself seems to have an affinity to borders and grids of some kind—though not necessarily those grids of John Grady's. This is not to say that Grammar missed the point of McCarthy's use of terrain against logocentric thinking; the tragic result of

John Grady's romantic ethnocentrism supports that point. The ambivalence, though, does require a less conflicting relationship between our ideas of the world and the world itself.

V. Bell offers an alternative approach to human understanding as it relates to the real world: "At best, human understanding and language can mediate being only imperfectly and, in action, only intuitively and in dreams or through the feeble agency of objective correlatives" (39). Just as there is some affinity between the actual terrain and the borders imposed upon it, there is also a likening between human understanding and the world we live in. Dueña Alfonsa, in one of her conversations with John Grady, tells him "The world is quite ruthless in selecting between the dream and the reality, even where we will not. Between the wish and the thing the world lies waiting" (238). The world, by Dueña Alfonsa's model, is not always in direct opposition to our wishes, dreams, or conceptual grids. To the contrary, the world appears to balance a duality between what we believe about the physical world and the physical world itself. In *All the Pretty Horses,* we see this concept realized in the national border between Texas and Mexico. As noted earlier, Blevins is standing on the border—both the conceptual border and its physical representation—when he acknowledges the logocentric significance of his nationality to John Grady and Rawlins. Here we have a profound sense of entanglement between the wish and the physical. Busby notes that the opposition of the wish to "the 'real' of trees, rocks, [and] rivers…emphasizes the liminal state of humankind, the border living in a world of between" (227). The novel, then, becomes John Grady's crossing from his "wish" of living the ranch life and avoiding American progress of big oil and military projects to encountering the harsh reality of the world.

We can certainly see John Grady's worldview change in certain passages near the end of the novel. On his journey north, back towards the border, "He remembered Alejandra and the

sadness he'd first seen in the slope of her shoulders which he presumed to understand and of which he knew nothing and he felt a loneliness he'd not known since he was a child and he felt wholly alien to the world although he loved it still" (282). Here, John Grady's memories and feelings express his understanding of his liminal existence. In the context of a logocentric reading, it is clear that John Grady realizes the emptiness of imposed concepts and meanings upon this recollection. Interestingly, the image of Alejandra's body evokes earlier moments near the Southwestern landscape, particularly the border scenes where conceptual borders and physical borders are one in the same. An earlier example highlighted the scene where Blevins contemplates the significance of his nationality: "He sat looking at the sandy water running past them and at the thin wicker shadows of the willows running out over the sandbar in the evening light. He looked out to the blue sierras to the south…" (45). In this passage Blevins "presumes to understand" how the landscape fits into his conceptual grid, though in actuality he knows nothing of what being an American will cost him in Mexico. Likewise, the "landscape" and slopes of Alejandra's body sparked a false sense of understanding in John Grady which later dissolved, sadly and tragically. John Grady's memory of Alejandra evokes his early presumptions of the cowboy life and how he had expected to ride away with her. Though this experience never came, the experience of losing his lover and feeling alone and alien to the world is one which provides a more painful, though less delusive perspective of his existence.

By the end of the novel, John Grady seems to realize such a conclusion: "He thought that in the beauty of the world were hid a secret. He thought the world's heart beat at some terrible cost and that the world's pain and its beauty moved in a relationship of diverging equity and that in this headlong deficit the blood of multitudes might ultimately be exacted for the vision of a single flower" (282). In many ways, this passage rings true with Dueña Alfonsa's assertion that

"between the wish and the thing the world lies waiting" (238). The world, then, becomes the deficit of the diverging equity between the wish of its beauty and the pain of its existence. The bittersweet realization is that the balance is such that all the violence, blood, and murder in the world may one day account for a small and simple vision of beauty. The notion is at once tragic in its scale and yet a hopeful reckoning for the sins of the world. This realization may not have been the reason John Grady decided to cross the border, but it had become so by the end of his travels. A friendly restaurant proprietor tells John Grady that "it was good that God kept the truths of life from the young as they were starting out or else they'd have no heart to start at all" (284).

### *The Crossing*

While the second novel of the Border Trilogy takes a markedly different tone than *All the Pretty Horses*, *The Crossing* is essentially a variation on the same journey and tale. The focus, of course, is still on "crossing" the border between the United States and Mexico; though in the second novel there are three separate crossings instead of just one. Billy Parham makes his first crossing in an attempt to relocate a wolf he has trapped. Upon his return, he finds that his parents have been murdered and his horses stolen, prompting a second crossing with his brother Boyd to search for their property and for revenge. Billy crosses the border a third time to procure his dead brother, who had stayed in Mexico with the mysterious girl they had rescued earlier. For Billy, each of the three crossings is ultimately dangerous and ends in tragedy.

Susan Kollin's summary of *The Crossing* also summarizes its similarity to *All the Pretty Horses*: *"The Crossing* is ultimately a melancholy text that begins with fantasies of the region's promise but ends by revealing them to be illusions" (581). Here again, McCarthy is dealing with

Grammar's idea of "delusive logocentrism" and the consequences of its imperfect reflection of reality. Concepts of nationality, however, are not the primary focus of *The Crossing*. Busby points out that "*The Crossing* shifts the focus from the human to the natural world in the first part and to more metaphysical questions, especially the existence and purpose of God in a violent and inhumane world" (227). In place of these human concerns, his story concentrates on nature and the wild: it is the she-wolf who sets his journey in motion, and his story becomes more of an "ecological" western rather than a traditional one.

The metaphysical questions raised during Billy's travels come from the series of shamans, anchorites, and wanderers—all *filósofos*—who share with him their expositions on understanding reality. Interestingly, the natural motif throughout the novel, along with the advice of the philosophers he meets, contributes to the same concept of "delusive logocentrism" we saw in *All the Pretty Horses.*

The wolf, who is one of the novel's primary characters in her own right, is in a situation which embodies many modes of conceptual grids discussed in *All the Pretty Horses*:

> The Wolf had crossed the international boundary line at about the point where it intersected the thirtieth minuet of the one hundred and eighth meridian and she had crossed the old Nations road a mile north of the boundary and followed Whitewater Creek west up into the San Luis Mountains and crossed through the gap north to the Animas range and then crossed the Animas Valley and on into the Peloncillos as told (24).

The diction in the passage is devoid of almost any details about the terrain, except for the most general terms such as 'valley,' 'gap,' and 'creek.' Also, McCarthy's use of longitude and latitude (arguably the most literal embodiment of a conceptual grid), cardinal directions, and American-

given place names is an interesting and unusual way to describe an animal's travels. What McCarthy achieves by describing the movements of the wolf, a symbol for the natural world, in terms of a conceptual grid is a sense of displacement on the part of the wolf and of forced geographic understanding on the part of humans. Perhaps Billy Parham's unidentified motive for returning the wolf to Mexico alive entails a respect for the wild and unknown paired with a naïve faith in conceptual place names and national borders. Furthermore, it may even be an attempt to balance the two opposing ideas, where both the laws of human-imposed knowledge and of nature's wild mystery can be satisfied in the act.

Both of these ideas are discussed by various individuals Billy either meets or seeks out. Don Arnulfo, the old Mexican rancher whom Billy questions about a vial of wolf scent he found, warns Billy of the futility in his attempt to trap the wolf. He sees in Billy a desire to know the wolf completely, one that has been in him since that winter night when he "could feel their presence of knowing that was electric in the air" (4). He tells Billy, in Spanish, "The wolf is an unknowable thing, that which one has in the trap is no more than teeth and fur. One cannot know the true wolf. Wolf or what the wolf knows. It's like asking what the stones know. The trees. The world" (45). While Billy has come to Don Arnulfo to learn about how to catch an animal in the physical world, the old man is teaching him about what is impossible to catch in the metaphysical. Billy's desire to trap the wolf is actually a desire to know the wolf's secrets, the world's secrets, and to understand them according to a false conceptual grid. The rancher explains further:

> He said that the wolf is a being of great order and that it knows what men do not: that there is no order in the world save that which death has put there. Finally he said that if men drink the blood of God yet they do not understand the seriousness of what they do.

> He said that men wish to be serious but they do not understand how to be so. Between their acts and their ceremonies lies the world and in this world the storms blow and the trees twist in the wind and all the animals that God has made go to and from yet this world men do not see. They see the acts of their own hands or they see that which they name and call out to one another but the world between is invisible to them (46).

The old man is warning Billy that, try as he might, he will not trap that aspect of the wolf which he truly desires to see. He says that the wolf is like a *copo de nieve*, a snowflake, which is gone once you have caught it. Essentially anything Billy sees in the wolf will be derived from his own conceptual grid, the acts of his own hands and not of God's.

Before Billy even captured the wolf, Don Arnulfo explained the rightness in the wolf's knowledge. By the end of the novel, the Native American Quijada explains to Billy the fallacy of his understanding of the world by place names. After Billy explains his reason for returning his brother's bones back to America, Quijada cuts to the core of Billy's erroneous worldview:

> The world has no name. The names of the ceros and the sierras and the deserts exist only on maps. We name them that we do not lose our way. Yet it was because the way was lost to us already that we have made those names. The world cannot be lost. We are the ones. And it is because these names and these coordinates are our own naming that they cannot save us. That they cannot find for us the way again (387).

For much of the novel, Billy has been occupied with re-arranging the world according to place names and coordinates, initially by relocating the wolf, and later by relocating his brother's remains. Interestingly, the reason Quijada must explain Billy's fallacy to him is that he did not learn from his earlier experience with the wolf. By attempting to manipulate the world to fit his man-made understanding, Billy inadvertently leads the wolf to her death. Obviously, the two

ideas of his conceptual grid of the world and of his desire to know the wolf are mutually exclusive. Ironically, Billy had the opportunity to glimpse the wolf's knowledge through his futile attempt to know it completely. The old rancher had mentioned that the wolf knew "that there is no order in the world save that which death has put there" (45), and Billy had seen in the wolf's eyes "the knowledge of the world it held sufficient to the day if not to the day's evil" (55). Indeed, death and evil have certainly influenced the course of events throughout Billy's attempt to order the world himself: first in the murder of the wolf, then that of his parents in his absence, and finally of his brother.

The point seems clear enough that in Billy's case, his "delusive logocentrism" by which he attempted to force understanding upon the world was upended. Just as the impotence of John Grady's conceptual grid led to his acceptance of a liminal existence, the failure of Billy's natural and manmade worlds' to complement each other leaves him with nothing except the realization that he had believed in an illusion. The novel ends with a particularly gripping scene which illustrates this realization. After Billy settles in an abandoned roadside building, a deformed and persistent dog, "An arthritic and illjoined thing that crabbed sideways and sniffed at the floor to pick up the man's scent" (423), tries to settle with him. Billy harshly comes at the dog with a pipe, and the thing runs off wailing "As if some awful composite of grief had broke through from the preterite world. " (424). Late that night, after awaking to witness what is probably the atomic Trinity Test of Alamogordo, New Mexico on July 16 1945, Billy tries to call the dog back. The thing never comes, and Billy weeps in the street, dejected. In contrast to the natural and mysterious wolf, a symbol for all that Billy wants to restore in himself, the dog is a victim of the human world: beaten, dying, and lonely. In light of the dawning nuclear age, "the ultimate symbol of human alienation from nature" (Busby, 243), Billy realizes that the disfigured dog is a

better representation of himself than the wolf will ever be, as noted by Kollin: "Although Billy sought the wild of the wolf at the beginning of the story, by the end of the novel he is more aligned with the mongrel dog whose experiences with the domestic world and the wild are both writ across his body" (582). In the end, Billy mourns the fact that he is now alienated from even this creature's companionship.

## *Cities of the Plain*

*Cities of the Plain* concludes *The Border Trilogy* by following John Grady Cole's romanticism to its inevitable outcome. The world is not what John Grady imagines it to be. For instance, his insistence that Magdalena is not a whore—that she is in fact a type of victimized Madonna—does not negate the fact that she is a whore in the eyes of the world. In *All the Pretty Horses*, John Grady's romanticism left him morally beaten and tattered. In *Cities of the Plain*, the world is less forgiving and charges John Grady with his life for his delusive romanticism. In this sense, McCarthy continues in the final novel of the trilogy to illustrate the danger of imposing ideas on the world. While John Grady's romanticism is certainly central to McCarthy's exposure of what Grammer calls "delusive logocentrism," *Cities of the Plain* continues some of the more subtle threads of exposure we find throughout the Southwestern novels (28). One of these threads is the imposition of meaning on the landscape, as seen in *All the Pretty Horses* and *The Crossing.* Another is resurrected from *Blood Meridian*, and concerns the traces of past societies in the landscape. Both motifs, as we shall see, continue to critique society's collective interaction with the landscape.

While Grammer noted McCarthy's power to "upend whatever conceptual grids are imposed" on the world well before *The Border Trilogy* was complete, the idea still makes itself

present in *Cities of the Plain* quite explicitly (28). At the end of an evening scene where the cowboys are waiting for their dogs to return from a mountain lion hunt, John Grady observes the landscape from the edge off a desert bluff:

> The desert plain lay cold and blue below them in the graying light and the shape of the river running down from the north through the break of gray winter trees lay in the pale serpentine of mist. To the south the cold gray grid of the distant city and the shape of the older city across the river like stampings on the desert soil. Beyond them the mountains of Mexico (92).

The "cold gray grid of the distant city" is not only a literal representation of the city's infrastructure, but also the stamp of human perversion on the desert landscape. Charles Bailey points out that "The urban world encroaches on the wilderness, and the urban world is rotten—El Paso and Juárez, the cities of the plain, Sodom and Gomorrah" (298). The urban world also embodies a collective dependence on and pursuit of technology, which compromises human interaction with the landscape through its eradication of the cowboy lifestyle. Not only do the ranchmen in *Cities of the Plain* rely less on traditional cowboy methods and traditions, but the encroaching U.S. military wants to acquire their land to use for nuclear testing.

Just as the conceptual grids of anthropocentrism and ethnocentrism prove delusive in the earlier novels, humanity's physical encroachment on the landscape also alludes to death. Owens interprets the use of the color grey in the scene above as "the absence of life in a dead landscape seen close up" (105). Interestingly, both the wilderness and the cities are described as grey, suggesting, like the urban landscape in *Suttree,* the indifference of all wild environments (whether natural or urban) to human life. Again, McCarthy underscores the only harmony we ever have with the environment, individually or collectively, is through mortality.

Another theme regarding mortality is found in the resurgence of the landscape's testament to past civilizations. As in *Blood Meridian*, *Cities of the Plain* contains several moments where the narrator focuses on artifacts, rock paintings, and other traces of ancient civilizations. For example, in the scene noted above, the ranchmen "sat against a rock bluff high in the franklins with a fire before them that heeled in the wind and their figures cast up upon the rocks behind them enshadowed the petroglyphs carved there by other hunters a thousand years before" (87). Later, John Grady and Billy Parham will ride upon

> gray bands of midden soil from ancient campsites washed down out of the arroyo that carried bits of bone and pottery and they passed under pictographs upon the rimland boulders that bore images of hunter and shaman and meetingfires and desert sheep all picked into the rock a thousand years and more. They passed beneath a band of dancers holding hands like paper figures scissored out by children and stenciled on the stone (165).

The Southwestern landscape, as in *Blood Meridian*, constantly reminds a close observer of civilizations, people, and ways of life that are now extinct. One could read their presence as an optimistic outlook on humanity's endurance, in that evidence of humanity's long history in the landscape suggests its likelihood to continue. Such an interpretation is certainly valid when paired with the mysterious traveler's comments in the novel's epilogue: "The world of our fathers resides within us. Ten thousand generations and more. A form without a history has no power to perpetuate itself. What has no past can have no future" (281). The history of our ancestors, then, could suggest the likelihood of our own future. However, some considerations render an alternative interpretation of the artifacts. For one, the mystic speaks to Billy about an internal connection with our ancestors, not one that is the result of landscape. Such an internal

connection, though, is subject to the same imposition of human will as demonstrated by John Grady's romanticism and Billy's ecological anthropocentrism. The landscape, however, is more honest with us than we are with ourselves, and the midden of broken bones suggests a dire future. Also, these are not the remnants of either Billy's or John Grady's ancestors, but of those whom their ancestor's slaughtered. The dismal fact that humanity's evil destroyed such civilizations, as chronicled in *Blood Meridian*, reminds readers of the nuclear age in which the novel is set. While the government's pursuit of nuclear technology indirectly destroys the cowboy way of life in *Cities of the Plain*, the implications of such a pursuit remind readers that America (and the world) is entering an age where bombs alone can level modern societies to mere artifacts. The fate of humanity, then, merges with the past fate of former inhabitants of the southwest.

Indeed, in each novel of *The Border Trilogy* looms the threat of nuclear annihilation. *All the Pretty Horses* is set in the cold-war era, and the threat of the atomic age is latent. *The Crossing*, as noted, implies a nuclear explosion as strongly as a narrative can without naming the actual occurrence, and such tests by the government become the shadow of death over the cowboy lifestyle in *Cities of the Plain*. In its own way, the landscape in each of the three novels alludes to the ultimate destruction of modern civilization. Each also suggests that the force behind this destruction is our own imposition of ideas onto the natural world, through anthropocentrism, ethnocentrism, and the menacing presence of technology.

### *No Country for Old Men*

As noted in the introduction to this chapter, Llewelyn Moss embodies McCarthy's typical Southwestern tragic hero. He cannot foresee the consequences of his actions, and the resulting

events prove calamitous. Like John Grady Cole and Billy Parham, he attempts to seek an ideal (in his case, safety) by crossing the border to Mexico without realizing that random violence is indifferent to borders. Ultimately, his idealism is crushed by an opponent who, like Judge Holden or the leader of the marauding trio in *Outer Dark*, is an agent of the random violence that is the world's metaphysical foundation. As *No Country for Old Men* comes near the end of McCarthy's work, an attuned reader can recognize Moss's fate just as the story begins. The clues, not surprisingly, are in the desert landscape.

Indeed, the beginning of the novel is littered with references to the Southwestern landscape which continue the theme of mortality and ancient civilizations we have seen in *Blood Meridian* and *Cities of the Plain.* The references even share similar diction with those from earlier novels. For example, in *No Country for Old Men* we find the protagonist among "rocks… etched with pictographs perhaps a thousand years old. The men who drew them hunters like himself. Of them there was no other trace" (11); and we find the cowboys in *Cities of the Plain* sitting near "petroglyphs carved there by other hunters a thousand years before" (87). We also see protagonists impose their presence upon the landscape through shadow imagery: "their figures cast up upon the rocks behind them enshadowed the petroglyphs carved there" (*COP*, 87); "Somewhere out there was the shadow of Moss himself" (*No Country,* 8).

From our reading of the earlier Southwestern novels, we associate the impending death of individuals and society with such images of the landscape. Even as Moss runs from the drug dealers trying to kill him early in the novel, the narrator takes time to mention "Round cups in the shelving rock where the ancients had ground their meal" as Moss pulls himself out of the Rio Grande (33). These images certainly suggest a sense of dread, but it is the image of Moss's shadow which ultimately seals his fate after he steals the drug dealers' cash. As noted above,

Moss's shadow became a part of the Southwestern landscape as he hunted for antelope (8). When he returns to the scene of the failed drug deal to give a wounded dealer a jug of water (a decision which sets in motion the events culminating in his death and his wife's), Moss senses a dreadful quiet, "His own shadow was more company than he would have liked. Ugly feeling out here. A trespasser. Among the dead. Dont get weird on me, he said. You aint one of them. Not yet" (27). His shadow represents his inevitable union with the landscape, or with death. And in fact, the union ultimately occurs. Despite his assertion that he "aint one of them," Moss joins the ancients recycled into the landscape and the newly dead drug dealers yet to be buried.

Interestingly, Moss seems to be at least partially aware, if only too late, of the consequences his actions will bring. Soon after taking the unclaimed millions, Moss realizes his predicament and says to himself "If you knew there was somebody out here afoot that had two million dollars of your money, at what point would you quit lookin for em?... That's right. There aint such a point" (29). We can also see the same sentiment reflected in his comments about the dead: "You aint one of them. Not yet" (27). In some respects, this attitude separates Moss from John Grady in *All the Pretty Horses* and *Cities of the Plain.* At least Moss realizes he is in trouble, whereas John Grady is so disconnected with reality that when Billy asks him "How did you ever get in such a mess?" and "How did you let it get this far?" all he can say to both is "I don't know" (*Cities of the Plain*, 121). However, the two are similar in that they both believe, despite warnings from others, that they can outsmart the forces acting against them. If the desert landscape is the common element of mortality between John Grady and Moss, then the logocentric desire to impose their wish on the world is their common fallacy.

For Moss, this fallacy is rooted in his rejection of randomness, or luck. After counting the money and finding it to be worth $2.4 million, Moss states "You have to take this seriously…

You cant treat it like luck" (23). But if not luck, then what? Luck and randomness seem to be the only ruling forces of the novel. A hotel night clerk's death is attributed to "About as bad a piece of luck you could have" (136). Also, the hitchhiker whom Moss picks up attributes their acquaintance with one another to luck, and she ultimately dies because of it (234).

Luck, then, is the aspect of the natural world which Moss rejects and Chigurh, the juggernaut of violence, represents. The villain explains Moss's fallacy to his wife, just before he kills her on principle: "I have only one way to live. It doesnt allow for special cases. A coin toss perhaps. In this case to small purpose. Most people dont believe that there can be such a person. You can see what a problem that must be for them. How to prevail over that which you refuse to acknowledge the existence of" (261). The same argument can certainly be made in regards to John Grady and Billy Parham, who both were punished by the world for refusing to acknowledge its nature and trying to impose their own ideas upon it.

Moss's fallacy and unavoidable death, which the landscape suggested at the beginning of the novel, is portrayed as a collective condemnation through the nostalgic monologues of Sheriff Ed Tom Bell. In many ways, the Sheriff is the antithesis of Judge Holden: he is a lawman who has a stern sense of right and wrong. Also, he is particularly inept on a few occasions, primarily in his inability to save Moss and his wife from Anton Chigurh. His inter-chapter monologues are the backdrop to Moss's story, and they mainly focus on the nature of law enforcement and the world's degeneracy. He blames many of the world's problems on narcotics, that same social ill which instigated Moss's conflict: "*I think if you were Satan and you were settin around tryin to think up somethin that would just bring the human race to its knees what you would probably come up with is narcotics*" (original italics, 217). In some ways, Sheriff Bell's statements are the transition between the Southwestern novels and *The Road*. His assessment of how people act

today relative to how they used to act, along with his suggestions about what we can expect for the future, set the stage for some of the atrocities witnessed in McCarthy's most recent novel. For example, he tells the story of a couple in California who would torture and kill elderly people in their basement. "*Said: Neighbors were alerted when a man run from the premises wearin only a dogcollar*" (125). Such a scene truly resembles certain scenes of human bondage and depravity found in *The Road.* In short, Moss's violent journey, Chigurh's cold logic, and Sheriff Bell's expositions on contemporary culture trace the culmination of society's degradation. *No Country for Old Men* depicts a society whose vileness has left it teetering on the point of collapse. McCarthy leaves that collapse and its aftermath, however, to be told in *The Road*.

# CHAPTER 3
# THE ROAD

*The Road*, often referred to as a 'post-apocalyptic' novel, tells of a father and son heading south in a desolate landscape. The central event of the novel, the cataclysmic and unnamed occurrence which destroyed all life on earth save a few humans, happens before the novel begins. In fact, we are unable to determine the precise nature of the event, aside from the destruction it left behind. Despite the fact that the earth is scorched, ashen, and barely able to support life, the landscape and environment in *The Road* still has a presence. The geographical setting of the novel would be even more indeterminate than that of *Outer Dark* if it were not for a few details. For instance, the barn with the letters "See Rock City" painted on the roof places the travelers somewhere near Chattanooga, Tennessee. This may not be their exact location, but we can safely say that the father and son are traveling somewhere in the Southern Appalachians. While McCarthy may take us back to Appalachia to, he does so by using themes from the Southwestern novels. *The Road* is a summation of McCarthy's themes up to this point, and combines motifs from both regions in what is at once his most forlorn and optimistic novel.

In the first four Appalachian novels, this analysis focused on the individual's response to landscape. One of the motifs throughout those novels included aspects of the grotesque which, according to Kerr, "is characterized by a distortion of the external world, by the description of human beings in nonhuman terms, and by the displacement we associate with dreams" (21). *The Road* certainly fulfills all three of these requirements, and in doing so projects the nightmarish state of the man's psyche onto the landscape. For example, one morning the man "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" (130). Pair with this scene such images as eternally burning forests and gray snow, and one can see a truly distorted view of the physical world. Richard Gray asserts that "the general contours of the landscape through which father and son travel are those of surreal nightmare" (137). In this case, the world becomes the father's nightmare of a meaningless void.

Images such as these contrast some of the father's actual dreams, which are our only glimpse at what his pre-disaster life was like. While there are a few dreams which focus on the man's past relationship with his wife, most of his dreams provide an ecocritical perspective on the man's childhood encounters with nature. For instance, the man recalls an early memory of watching men pour gasoline on a bolus of snakes to "burn them alive, having no remedy for evil but only for the image of it as they conceived it to be" (188). Such a memory exposes anthropocentric tendencies in its condemnation of man's slaughter of another creature. The memory takes an ecocritical turn, however, in this particular context where such a massacre could very well have happened to people who were likely burned alive in a similar manner at the time of the catastrophic event.

The nature of this event, as noted earlier, is a mystery, and there are not enough clues in the text to determine whether it was a nuclear holocaust, life-ending meteor, or any other form of disaster. However, the collective attitude of society represented in the Southwestern novels, whether literal or metaphorical, seems to suggest that this event was caused by man. Specifically, there lies beneath the surface of each Southwestern novel a latent foreshadowing of nuclear destruction. For instance, we find in *Blood Meridian* that the sun is often the image of a

destructive fireball ("The sun to the west lay in a holocaust,"105) and, at times, has a shape which could suggest that of a nuclear explosion: "The enormous sun… sat boiling on the edge of the desert," (207), "like the head of a great red phallus…[the sun] sat squat and pulsing and malevolent behind them" (44-45). *The Border Trilogy* also suggest such a possibility, as *All the Pretty Horses* is set during the tense Cold War, *The Crossing* ends with Billy Parham witnessing the atomic Trinity Test of Alamogordo, New Mexico, and the pastoral existence on the ranch in *Cities of the Plain* is brought to an end when the government plans to use the land for nuclear testing. *No Country for Old Men*, likewise, portrays the landscape as if such a holocaust has already occurred: "The raw rock mountains shadowed in the late sun and to the east the shimmering abscissa of the desert plains under a sky where raincurtains hung dark as soot all along the quadrant. That god lives in silence who has scoured the following land with salt and ash" (45). Thus, *The Road* becomes the realization of disaster foreshadowed throughout McCarthy's Southwestern novels.

Again, we cannot determine if this realization is literal, in the form of a nuclear holocaust, or simply the figurative culmination of the world's evil. Regardless, it is safe to say that *The Road* embodies those collective reactions to the landscape found in the Southwestern novels. For instance, the traces of past civilizations found throughout the earlier novels become traces of the current civilization in *The Road.* The inherent warning in the landscape has come to fruition as the billboards, possessions, and mummified bodies of the recent past are now integrated with the landscape, as the narrator explicitly reminds us: "Do you think that your fathers are watching? Do they weigh you in their ledgerbook? Against what? There is no book and your fathers are dead in the ground" (196).

*The Road* also utilizes the themes of logocentrism found in *All the Pretty Horses* and *The Crossing.* Those place names, nationalities, and 'conceptual grids' which used to be no longer have any bearing to the world, real or imagined. "The sacred idiom shorn of its referents and so of its reality" (89). In a sense, the delusive logocentrism which mankind imposed on the landscape is finally shown to be false and empty.

However, the novel seems to accept such fallacies as necessary for the human will to live, even despite their emptiness. For instance, some of the most endearing scenes in the novel are those where the boy begins to reenact the beliefs his father has cast off. In logocentric terms, consider such scenes where the boy "sat looking at the map. The man watched him. He thought he knew what that was about. He'd pored over maps as a child, keeping one finger on the town where he lived. Just as he would look up his family in the phone directory. Themselves among others, everything in its place. Justified to the world (182). Such scenes suggest that our anthropocentrism with regards to the environment is central to our humanity, even if it is what has destroyed everything. It then becomes the "fire," or faith in humanity, which the father passes to his son.

While such beliefs may be central to the human existence, McCarthy does not spare us the fact that these beliefs are, for better or worse, incompatible with the natural world. The novel's last paragraph reads:

> Once there were brook trout in the streams in the mountains. You could see them standing in the amber current where the white edges of their fins wimpled softly in the flow. They smelled of moss in your hand. Polished and muscular and torsional. 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. In the deep

> glens where they lived all things were older than man and they hummed of mystery (287).

This paragraph essentially weighs the cost of humanity on the world. It also incorporates themes we have seen in both the Appalachian and Southwestern novels. The ecological focus of the passage and its assertion that what is lost "could not be put back. Not be made right again" suggests an ecocritical nostalgia for the environment that was. The "vermiculate patterns that were maps of the world in its becoming" are maps true to the landscape, the real maps of the world. They are not arbitrary coordinates or distinctions of nationality, as seen in *The Crossing* and *Al the Pretty Horses*, which, somehow, are to blame for the current state of the world. But despite all this, the novel still maintains its optimism in the final sentence: "In the deep glens where they lived all things were older than man and they hummed of mystery" (287). Here, McCarthy seems to counter Judge Holden's nihilistic statement that "The mystery is that there is no mystery" (252). There certainly is, even if only within the natural environment. And that, as of this writing, is the last word from McCarthy.

# CHAPTER 4
# CORMAC McCARTHY IN CONTEXT

If it is true that McCarthy "may well be America's greatest living novelist" (115), we will certainly want to place his work in the context of those authors who influenced him and those whom he has influenced. This chapter will provide a brief summary of McCarthy's relationship to some of his predecessors, including the naturalist William Bartram and novelists William Faulkner and Willa Cather. We will also examine McCarthy's influence on his contemporaries, specifically Charles Frazier.

William Bartram, the early American botanist and naturalist, may seem an unusual addition in an analysis of McCarthy's predecessors. However, *The Travels of William Bartram* (1791), his work which details the landscape in the southern Appalachians, clearly has much bearing on any analysis of McCarthy's use of landscape in his earlier novels and can be useful in unraveling Judge Holden's attention to his environment in *Blood Meridian* as well. The two writers' affinity for Appalachian botany is clear. Howevr, a more subtle similarity between the two can beseen in McCarthy's characters. First to come to mind is Arthur Ownby, the hermit of *The Orchard Keeper* who we found to be the embodiment of ecopastoral appreciation for the landscape. Bartram demonstrates a similar appreciation: "This world, as a glorious apartment of the boundless palace of the sovereign Creator, is furnished with an infinite variety of animated scenes, inexpressibly beautiful and pleasing, equally free to the inspection and enjoyment of all his creatures" (li). The egalitarian treatment of all of God's creatures satisfies most ecocritical standards. While Bartram's cheerful environmentalism counters McCarthy's morbidly

egalitarian ecology, the two certainly share an appreciation for a landscape where the human species is not dominant.

Two more of McCarthy's characters, Cornelius Suttree and Judge Holden, evoke the spirit of Bartram in their frequent cataloguing of nature. Paul Quick notices that Suttree is an amateur environmentalist: "The episode in the novel that most clearly identifies Suttree as an environmentalist character concerns his trek into the Smoky Mountains," he claims, while also noting Suttree's inclination to copy images of nature into a notebook, or to share natural findings with friends (168). Judge Holden's appreciation for nature is equally ravenous, though less innocent. Like Bartram, Holden seeks to learn as much about the natural world as he can. Unlike Bartram, he seeks power over the natural world. Often, after cataloguing certain items, he will destroy them in an act of dominance which illustrates his anthropocentric pursuit of environmental knowledge (*Blood Meridian, 173*). McCarthy pairs the Judge's desire for power over the landscape with naturalist methodology to show man's forceful dominance over the environment. Bartram began the naturalist tradition in America by writing optimistically about man's equality with nature, and McCarthy continues that tradition by revealing the sinister character of anthropocentrism.

Critics often claim that William Faulkner alone stands above McCarthy in the Southern Gothic genre. There are certainly some similarities in the McCarthy's Appalachian novels, such as Rinthy Colme's affinity to Lena Grove and certain aspects of southern nostalgia in *Suttree*, though these similarities seem to wane with the progression of McCarthy's career. That similarity discussed most often, style, could be the one which successfully distinguished McCarthy as one of Faulkner's more legitimate successors. Madison Bell suggests that many authors dare not imitate Faulkner's rhetoric, "and most of the ones who did ended up as blighted

little acorns pushing up feeble sprouts under the vast shadow of Faulkner's huge, overshadowing achievement… Not so with Cormac McCarthy" (4). Indeed, McCarthy has been one of the few writers "big and strong enough to appropriate Faulkner's toolbag and use its contents to make artifacts entirely his own" (5). Besides their similar styles, McCarthy shares with Faulkner certain sentiments regarding the individual and the landscape. Compare, for instance, Isaac's appreciation for the wild in "The Bear" from *Go Down, Moses* (1942) to Billy Parham's admiration of the wild wolf: "It was in him too, a little different because they were brute beasts and he was not, but only a little different—an eagerness, passive; an abjectness, a sense of his own fragility and impotence against the timeless woods, yet without doubt or dread," (Faulkner, 192). Both characters recognize the unknowable difference between beast and man, and both respond with fear and awe.

Willa Cather, like Bartram, may be another unusual point of comparison in regards to McCarthy. Her use of the Southwestern landscape, however, is strikingly similar to McCarthy's in many respects, and the historical and geographical proximity of *Blood Meridian* and Cather's *Death Comes for the Archbishop* (1927) warrants some analysis. Both of the novels take place in 1848, the year of America's victory in the Mexican war in the Southwest. Both also use evidence of Native American lifestyles and civilizations to warn against or contrast contemporary American interaction with the landscape. For example, Father Latour in *Death Comes for the Archbishop* judges that

> just as it was the white man's way to assert himself in any landscape, to change it, make it over a littler (at least to leave some mark of memorial of his sojourn), it was the Indian's way to pass through a country without disturbing anything; to pass and leave no trace, like fish through the water, or birds through the air (233).

The passage criticizes American encroachment not only on the landscape but also upon the native civilizations. In contrast to the Navajo, who "when they left the rock or tree or sand dune that had sheltered them for the night…was careful to obliterate every trace of their temporary occupation" (232), Judge Holden is driven by obliterating every trace of the Natives from the landscape, both temporary and permanent (173). Other novels by McCarthy and Cather also share this common warning of 'no other trace.' This analysis has already examined the implications of Native American artifacts in McCarthy's *Cities of the Plain* and *No Country for Old Men*, and Tom Outland in Cather's *The Professor's House* (1925) spends time as an amateur explorer of ancient Native American cities.

Finally, we now consider McCarthy's influence on other writers. One recently published and widely successful novel by Charles Frazier, *Cold Mountain* (1997), closely parallels some of McCarthy's work. M. Bell writes that Frazier "appears to be channeling Cormac McCarthy… not only the language but the content of the episodes is derived from McCarthy's work. Inman drifts around through a dark, inimical world, full of incomprehensible, unreasoning violence (6-7). Indeed, there are strong similarities between *Cold Mountain* and McCarthy's second novel, *Outer Dark.* Both are set in a dark and surreal landscape in a poverty-stricken area; both are haunted by a violent gang (the Homeguard in *Cold Mountain* and the marauding trio in *Outer Dark*); Holme experiences a calamitous river passage at the hands of his hunters, as does Inman; both are constructed around a man's pursuit of a woman; both encounter corrupt clergymen; Rinthy is taken in by the tinker, an old pan-like goat man, and Inman is nursed by an old female goat herder; and, as if the plot similarities were not enough, both mention the southern custom of placing a snake rattle in an acoustic instrument to improve its sound quality. It is also worth mentioning that, while McCarthy may have followed in Bartram's tradition, Frazier actually

quotes several of the naturalist's excerpts throughout his novel. M. Bell writes that while many of *Cold Mountain*'s dark episodes are plot related, much of the novel maintains an optimistic romanticism contrary to anything found in McCarthy's work (7). In fact, such sentimentality is exactly what McCarthy challenges as delusive in many of his novels, most notably *All the Pretty Horses.* In this respect, Frazier's adaptation of McCarthy's style is certainly acceptable, but becomes problematic to many McCarthy critics who find McCarthian gloom and genuine romanticism an incongruent combination. Even in the face of *Cold Mountain*'s success, M. Bell aptly concludes: "In this respect the novel resembles a marshmallow elaborately wrapped up in barbed wire, and so, no doubt, deserves its great success" (7).

We can trace McCarthy's progress as a writer under the scope of such authors as Bartram, Cather, and Faulkner. In doing so, we find that McCarthy has further developed many foundational traditions in American literature, and certainly deserves much of the praise he receives. One could further compare him to his most direct predecessor, Faulkner, by claiming that he is one of his generation's overshadowing literary giants. In this regard, it will be interesting to see who else, besides Frazier, attempts to make McCarthy's dark style his or her own. Hopefully, the literary traditions which McCarthy embodies will further evolve in American literature.

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