SALVAGING THE SELF: FORM AND STYLE IN TOM MCCARTHY'S *C* (2010)

by

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(Under the Direction of Adam Parkes)

ABSTRACT

This thesis challenges the persistent explication of contemporary literature through the narrative structures and aesthetics of established literary forms. British novelist Tom McCarthy's text *C* plainly incorporates narrative elements of the Bildungsroman, modernist aesthetics, and postmodern aesthetics, yet ironic treatment of the aesthetics of each form through dissonant style asserts an insurmountable gap between inherited narrative structures and the language of McCarthy's fiction. Through close reading, I argue that the novel's style expresses the interiority of the central figure, and that consequently a gap emerges between personhood and inherited conventions. This incompatibility highlights elements of consciousness which cannot be read through traditional formal schemas but may be partially illuminated through synthesis of elements that are usually opposed to each other. McCarthy's contemporary novel compels innovative readings of human interiority, disentangled from strict adherence to literary forms inherited from the past.

INDEX WORDS: Tom McCarthy, Zadie Smith, Contemporary Fiction, Genre, Bildungsroman, Modernism, Postmodernism

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION: NO PATHS FOR THE NOVEL

Within the current literary landscape, there can be no contemporary novel. Necromantic writers and critics reanimate fossilized forms, whose ghosts console readers with their familiarity while the English novel rots. Identifying the most virulent strain, Zadie Smith influentially posited that, "A breed of lyrical Realism has had the freedom of the highway for some time now, with most other exits blocked." Curing this disease, British novelist Tom McCarthy's debut work *Remainder* (2005) presents for Zadie Smith a departure from realism's overemphasis upon subjectivity: "In its brutal excision of psychology it is easy to feel that *Remainder* comes to literature as an assassin, to kill the novel stone dead… offering a glimpse of an alternate road down which the novel might, with difficulty, travel forward."

Fredric Jameson's simplification of postmodernism as an artistic moment when "depth is replaced by surface" (12) provides a useful framework for Smith's representation of McCarthy as seeking "to flatten selfhood out." A crucial precedent which I will challenge, however, is established by this alignment of McCarthy with a vein of postmodern aesthetics opposed to lyrical realism. Smith spends as much time defining lyrical realist stylistics absent from *Remainder* through the novel *Netherworld* (2008) as she does affirming distinctive elements of McCarthy's text. Also commenting upon the flat psychology of the narrator of *Remainder*, Gill Partington writes, "he is not merely an unreliable narrator but an impossible narrator; he is a character within a novel, yet does not subscribe to the paradigm of novelistic fiction, nor to the depth model of subjectivity and space that underlies it" (63). Pausing upon Partington's claim

that the narrator "does not subscribe to the paradigm of novelist fiction, nor to the depth model of subjectivity," one notes the consistency with which commentary upon McCarthy defines the author through negative.

An essential determinant of literary form, difference between aesthetic periods, proves problematic with postmodernism, whose mere name signals reliance upon a modernist parent. Fredric Jameson's concept of postmodern surface, for example, explicitly responds to and negates modernist conceptions of depth, such as the psychological "opposition between alienation and disalienation" (12). Thus, the frequent postmodern turn by critics of McCarthy presupposes a definition of its conceptual opposite, modernism, inviting dissent over formal boundaries.

Notably, David James and Urmila Seshagiri discuss McCarthy's *C* (2010) in their definition of metamodernism, which asserts the relevance of early twentieth-century literature to present-day writing. Carefully circumscribing their modernist inheritance, James and Seshagiri refer explicitly to a span of post-World War I modernist texts, commonplace in modernist canons: "the intricate, ruptured literary architectures of *The Waste Land* (1922), *Ulysses* (1922), and *To the Lighthouse* (1927)" (87). Yet, these critics permit McCarthy to reside within a dustier corner of modernist aesthetics, tracing the lack of interiority with *Remainder* not to the postmodern Thomas Pynchon but to Wyndham Lewis, "who opposed what he viewed as a widespread tendency among his modernist contemporaries toward subjectivity" (94). Lewis complicates a modernism defined through Eliot and Joyce, emphasizing the contested temporal and conceptual boundaries between modernism and postmodernism, but also within each period internally.

McCarthy is often read first as a combatant in turf wars over literary form, and then as a novelist with individual style. Smith's move to oppose avant-garde McCarthy to psychological realism recurs on a grander scale in a frequent critical battleground of two dead literary forms which are no longer modern, but unwilling to bound their moment. McCarthy critic Justus Nieland stretches his modernism to the 1960s; postmodernism often reaches back to 1922 to claim *Ulysses*.

Through these critical perspectives, McCarthy's fiction progresses literature, back towards familiar discussions of form and genre which draw attention away from his texts. Certainly, important criticism has elaborated upon McCarthy's postmodern debts, revitalizing aesthetics largely ignored in favor of modernist legacies, yet the perpetuation of a cycle of modernist-postmodern, or postmodern-lyrical realism, readily prescribes what McCarthy's aesthetics must be and cannot be to fit a dichotomy of literary forms. Adding fuel to the fire, McCarthy frequently provokes debate, as with his comment, "I'm not trying to be modernist, but to navigate the wreckage of that project" (Purdon).

Delving deeper into this word *wreckage*, we find McCarthy's third novel *C* dancing upon the corpses of dead literary forms. On the surface, this statement conflicts with an apparent fact that *C* is particularly attuned towards form and genre. The Bildungsroman is explicitly involved in the depiction of growth for protagonist Serge Carrefax, son of a father who instructs deaf children and a mother who inherited a successful silk farm. The reader follows Serge's birth, his adolescence as a youth in early twentieth-century Britain, and then his role as a navigator serving in World War I. The aesthetics and environments of modernist poetry are then invoked as Surge traverses a postwar London. Finally and fatally, the surfaces of the postmodern novel play out through the people and places of British colonialism in Egypt, as Serge works with

communication infrastructure until his death from a scorpion bite. McCarthy's organization of the novel along these lines demonstrates an awareness of the entangled aesthetic and historical narratives playing out in one life, and in one century of English literature.

Yet a critic will struggle to explicate the novel through these three literary forms, or a hierarchy between them, because McCarthy's novel equally refuses any as a model for the mind of Serge. Confined to separate sections of the novel, each form takes a turn to fail his psychology uniquely, within a dichotomy between narrative structures, such as a Bildungsroman play, and elements of McCarthy's style, like descriptive register. Language is attuned to Serge's thoughts, an abnormal psychology which records the physical boundaries within his environment. Spatial displacements or intersecting borders particularly compel his attention, expressed through language grafted to his psyche: "The surfaces of ground and woods and clouds are gone too, fallen away like screens, encumbrances that blocked his vision, leaving the hollow—not of the indentation but of space itself: an endless space in which he can now see with piercing clarity" (144). Thus, the binary between style and structure evokes the inner depth versus external surface discussion prominent within definition of literary forms. Inherited narrative structures seek to define the humanity within Serge's inhuman interest in the contours of dirt; the relationship between structure and style will clarify how each referenced form's static approach towards the dichotomy of interiority and exterior fails to capture Serge's dynamic psychology.

The first two sections of my thesis will establish a baseline definition of the Bildungsroman rooted in Goethe and Joyce. Through close reading, I will illustrate how Bildungsroman notions of selfhood and adolescence are reflected through characters and events drawn into focus, and how these concepts utterly fail to describe Serge's evolving interest in space rather than society. Alterations in a style tethered to Serge's interiority promise growth and

depth, yet one must look beyond the failure of Bildungsroman conventions to clarify a mind that experiences a sexual awakening in mud. Within the dichotomy of external structure and inner style, the Bildungsroman is represented by McCarthy through external structures that locate the terms of personhood within ceremony and society.

The third section of my essay will map Serge's exploration of London. Referring to a sample from Ezra Pound, I will elucidate McCarthy's parody of the tendency of modernist poets to synthesize the debris of urban environments into truths about humanity and, especially, human psychology. Parroting Pound through faster prose, which darts between details, synthesizing, the narrative lens ultimately fails to elucidate significant details through its gaze and is revealed as sham, unable to amass a synthesized, unified explanation of Serge's mind. Narrative structure mimics modernist aesthetics by depicting an urban environment weaponizing drug-use and high art against postwar malaise, but Serge liked the war, which meant impressions of bombs in space, and narrative structures fail him. Here, modernist aesthetics surface within structure and style, suggesting that the aesthetic period's modeled link between interiority and exteriority prescribes a narrative for Serge's perceptions on both ends of the dichotomy.

My final section details how, upon the novel's turn toward Egypt, style abruptly represents Serge's thoughts and dialogue as lucid and nostalgic, grappling with memories. Conversely, the people and places spanning the British colony turn postmodern, a tangled web of cultures, histories, and capitalist politics in which it is impossible to identify authenticity or essence beneath veneers. Novel ending, Serge dying, the relationship between inherited structure and style has flipped relative to the text's start. Narrative structures foreign under Bildungsroman depiction turn intimate; postmodern attributes of style distance a reader from Serge, rather than expressing his spatial interests. Thus, a postmodern aesthetic insistence upon surface and

external structures reveals Serge's interior depth, mental structures reaching across years towards childhood. Each of the principal forms and aesthetics which McCarthy references is distinguished by failure, uniquely unable to define a mind within the strict binary of interiority and exteriority, narrative structures and novelistic style.

To write a contemporary novel, McCarthy must liberate psychology from genre and form and open a sea of neurons to mimesis beyond literary traditions. Denying discourse of literary forms rooted in restriction and aesthetic ownership, *C* allows synthesis, setting a precedent for criticism to move nimbly between disparate formal conventions and resolve character psychology without affirming any single model. Though my thesis will focus upon McCarthy's resistance towards mapping genre and form onto Serge's psychology, future criticism may investigate how individual elements of his mind resonate with fragments of form. Aspects of Serge's psychology fixate upon postmodern spatial surfaces, yet he retains memories suited towards modernist notions of depth, and thus a reading of the novel may interpret his psyche through coordination rather than exclusion.

Yet *C* proves equally that inherited literary forms may simply be abandoned for novel models of cognition. Various critics indicate the spaces of the mind enlivened through departure from literary precedent. Stephen J. Burns describes postmodern aesthetics within McCarthy's *Men in Space* (2008), but suggests that recent neurological research on the brain's capacity for parallel processing better explains the novel's psychologies: "To read *Men in Space* in any meaningful sense is to select between the different layers of image to create a variant draft of the novel, and—as in Crumey—the cent of multiplicity stands for the fabulating mind's encounter with polysemous reality" (451). For Peter Vermeulen, trauma repels the dichotomy of individual subjectivity and external surfaces prevalent in differentiation of literary forms: "[*Remainder*]

raises the question whether the uninvestigated attachment of trauma to individual subjectivity has not obscured the radical transitivity and mobility of trauma" (555). Perennial questions of formal definition and interiority forget that the mind's complexity has not entirely been solved by literary conventions such as free indirect discourse.

Articulating new models for literary representation of psychology, Burns and Vermeulen indicate the stakes for my discussion. Serge's interest in transgressed spatial boundaries epitomizes the fundamental aesthetic for a novel that crosses lines of fire in form's war over the representation of human psychology. To differentiate between the contemporary novel and modern consciousness, the task at hand is to slay a Cerberus of literary form, and affirm that each head does not know how to put the *C* in human.

CHAPTER 2

SERGE'S CHILDHOOD AND SOPHIE'S BILDUNGSROMAN

Youth ages; the pages of a novel turn. Mapping human psychology and its development onto novelistic elements has been a persistent endeavor across literary history. Salient among genres of development, the Bildungsroman will benefit from a contextual detour, before I describe its fraught efforts towards understanding Serge Carrefax. The Bildungsroman is represented by Franco Moretti as grafting human aging onto an aging world: "If youth, therefore, achieves its symbolic centrality, and the 'great narrative' of the *Bildungsroman* comes into being, this is because Europe has to attach a meaning, not so much as to youth, as to *modernity*" (5). In this operation, the human plays pawn, choreographed to the narrative of modernity with movement and promotion past adolescence predetermined. A dichotomy crystallizes between individuality, and the societal pressures which mold personhood.

Weldon Thornton offers a more optimistic take on the genre, promising that twentieth-century Bildungsroman texts mimetically cultivate the psychology of character:

> But in virtually every case, the psyche of the *Bildungsroman* protagonist develops through some such oscillation, and the structure of the novel reflects this. This is not, however, to imply that any *Bildungsroman* involves only one structure pattern; on the contrary, examples of the genre necessarily involve a number of intersecting, overlapping, mutually qualifying patterns. (74)

Though Thornton emphasizes individual agency rather than social conformity, a commonality may be identified between his model and Moretti's: narrative. In his reading of Joyce's *A*

Portrait of the Artist (1916), Thornton traces central character Stephen Dedalus' developing psychology through critical narrative occurrences and shifts, mapping the character's interior development to external textual occurrences. Thornton notes that, "each chapter involves a pattern of rising action or intensification, ending in a climactic scene that dramatically exemplifies his current sense of what is real and most compelling in his experience" (88). Thus, in a dichotomy between style and structure, inner and outer, Thornton affirms a deeper resonance between style and psychology than Moretti, yet both foreground structure. Spanning Goethe to Joyce, models for the Bildungsroman may be summarized as gauging interiority through externalized structures within a text.

I now turn to *C*, which follows the life of Serge Carrefax, bound by his birth and death. Beginning with an examination of the style tethered to Serge's consciousness, I will clarify Serge's individuating perspective, before addressing its fraught representation through Bildungsroman narrative structures. Like the stylistic expression of Stephen Dedalus' earliest years through "a moocow coming down along the road and this moocow that was coming down along the road" (Joyce 1), Serge's actions correspond with shifts in the style of narration. Toddler Serge's infantile perceptions are expressed stylistically through sequence, a rich abundance of prepositions which partitions an image into spatial steps:

> Mr. Dean pulls the trap to a halt. Beside it, to its right, a narrow, still stream lies in front of a tall garden wall over which, from the far side, ferns and wisteria are spilling. To the trap's left, a veined set of rose-bush stems and branches, flowers gone, clings to another wall. The wood-smoke pall comes from beyond this. So, too, does an old man with a rake. (4)

The image produced through this writing is less a visual whole than skeletal blueprints: how the components of an image connect into a conceptual whole. Serge and a reader hardly take in a visual element, such as the "narrow, still stream," afforded a blunt adjective or two, before the sight becomes a connective for an expanding, incomplete image. This stream "lies in front of a tall garden wall," asserting one spatial connection that immediately links into more: "a tall garden wall over which, from the far side, ferns and wisteria are spilling."

Serge's observations foreground spatial connection, rather than mimetic depth. The conclusion of the passage's second sentence does not trim the edges of a sprawling perception but render it indefinite, in an application of participles common within this early section of the novel: "ferns and wisteria are spilling." Among the visual elements incorporated into the passage, connecting its corners, are sights which feel wholly unnecessary to the central focus. That "an old man with a rake" appears past the central garden wall is semantic and visual trash, even if spatially tangential. On multiple occasions, a young Serge appears compelled to dissect every plausible relation between images and actions, regardless of the narrative departure. These descriptions are rich, abundant in fragments of the narrative world, yet the intersection of such pieces across commas and indefinite spaces frustrates visualization of a whole.

However, it must be noted that Serge does not narrate the start of the book. This is not altogether uncommon for the Bildungsroman; exception may be made for a great birth to be witnessed. Yet against the singularity of purpose posed by Serge's delivery, the initial narration, which follows the perspective of Dr. Learmont, is markedly piecemeal, pulled in conflicting directions to accrue information unrelated entirely to Serge. Information about assorted images is offered patiently, in pieces connecting through contrast and casualty: "The child is reaching her arm up to the tray of biscuits. The cat is watching the child's efforts closely, still and tense.

Maureen takes Learmont's sleeve and starts to pull him into the house" (8). Shortly after, another passage reinforces the connection between cat and child, Serge's sister Sophie: "He strides out with her, heading for the drive. The child follows the biscuits, and the cat follows the child. Maureen leads Dr. Learmont in the other direction, up the staircase" (8). Bodies, events, and space are all dissected into components and causality.

Stylistic parallels are apparent between Learmont's narration and that of Serge, and two questions emerge: are these observations representative of the doctor's perspective, and why does the narrative devote such energy towards detritus, littered around the readily centralizing elements of Serge's birth and the prophetic caul he is born in? Comparing the doctor's narration with that of youthful Serge, one voice, lucid and meticulous, refuses differentiation. An obsession with spatial connection defines Serge's perceptions, yet the doctor partitions the Carrefax land across commas, which intersect and conjoin: "[The path] forks to the right and, after passing through a doorway in another wall, splits into a maze-pattern that unfolds across a lawn on whose far side stands another wall containing yet another doorway" (5).

Delving deeper into the relationship between Serge's and Learmont's perspectives, it becomes clear that Learmont is not an externality which elucidates Serge's psyche. In his reading of *A Portrait*, Thornton describes how "use of third-person presentation enables the writer to suggest levels of the psyche far beyond what the protagonist himself is aware of" (74). Yet with *C*, there is no division between the doctor's representation of space and two-year-old Serge's navigation of Carrefax land, expressed in the following passage:

> To his left is the wall between the Mulberry Orchard and the Maze Garden; coming to the doorway in this, he steers his trolley through and pushes it into the corridor formed by the paving laid into the lawn. When the corridor forks, cutting at right angles in opposite

> directions, he chooses a branch and follows it until, after performing several more right-angled turns and forking twice more, it comes to a dead end. (28)

Prepositions and nonvisual spatial vectors abstract movement into the graphing paper connection of lines. Learmont follows simply "the path. This forks to the right and… splits into a maze pattern" (5). Vocabulary repeats in Serge's ambles: "he chooses a branch and follows it until, after performing several more right-angled turns and forking twice more, it comes to a dead end." Words used by the doctor, such as "splits into a maze-pattern" and "the edge" are semantic neighbors to Serge's visual frames: "the corridor forks, cutting at right angles" and "it comes to a dead end."

The sense that one voice is articulating both the doctor's and Serge's perceptions is evidenced not just stylistically, but through narrative recursions. I have described the arrested gaze, strangely tethered to Sophie and the family cat in passages such as "the child follows the biscuits, and the cat follows the child." Inconsequential within the doctor's point-of-view, this sequence matures into a disaster during young Serge's narration, when the cat's trailing Sophie leads him to consume a fatal toxin. And amplifying this premonition, spilling it across the start of the novel, Sophie is persistently characterized by animal imagery: "I'll be a double agent," Sophie purrs, bunching up her hair" (60-61).

Within Bildungsroman conventions, external perspectives deepen insight into a main character, and births prophesize great feats, yet these inherited narrative structures fail Serge. A dichotomy arises between style, which divulges Serge's perspective through language, and narrative structures which grate against his psyche. McCarthy proves Serge's interiority through style, yet narrative structure belies its own Bildungsroman elements to obscure Serge. Within Learmont's chapter the ostensibly central figure Serge is an afterthought, born but forgotten.

Distinguished by his possession of a caul, in a chapter entitled “Caul,” Learmont prophesizes the possession: ““And the caul is meant to be a sign of—” (12), and Mrs. Carrefax interrupts the moment to demand further anesthesia: “But she cuts him short with a gesture of her hand towards the canister” (12). Serge is exhaustively scrubbed from these pages, and while the caul is eventually, summarily defined, his father immediately diverts the revelatory conversation towards copper communications wiring: “It’s meant to bring good luck—especially to sailors.” “Sailors? I tell you, Doctor: get this damn thing working and they won’t need luck. There’ll be a web around the world for them to send their signals down. You came with the delivery trap?” (16).

Following the chapter narrated by the doctor, narrative structures continue to obscure the protagonist. There is a pregnant pause before Serge appears. Performance by Mr. Carrefeax’s deaf pupils is described, and then Serge surfaces like a superfluous appendage: “In a room to the side of this one, Schoolroom Two, Simeon’s son Serge spends what he has been told in passing, although only by the maid, is his second-and-a-half birthday playing with wooden blocks” (24). His location is conditional, in a room “to the side of this one,” with the pronoun *this* cementing a peculiar vantage around a room that has exited the narrative, exhibition ended. And, more fundamentally, Serge’s existence is conditional, aged across the previous chapter’s birth through a passive, qualified description: “Serge spends what he has been told in passing, although only by the maid, is his second-and-a-half birthday” (24). The conspicuous description of Serge’s “second-and-a-half birthday” offers a much weaker narrative centering than the structurally centered performance of the deaf children, which begins the chapter. The child slinks along the edges of a novel which heralded his birth.

The inauspicious beginning predicts Serge's representation at large during these opening chapters. The boy's attention resides within his surroundings, rather than his body. Yet McCarthy's style also conceals Serge's mind through language that is recursive, unable to resolve an experience or image's significance. Seeking any aesthetic conclusion, Serge and a reader will instead rediscover their starting point, a null traversal of space. Various investigations of space hazarded by Serge enact this recursion:

> the wall's so overgrown with ivy and with bushes extending outwards like buttresses that it's hard to tell where it leads. Learmont detours away from it into a long avenue of conker trees behind which lies an apple orchard. The avenue takes him towards a set of smaller houses, but before he reaches these he picks the wall up again, emerging from still swirls of tangled hedge to turn and run beside the narrow, moat-like stream that he crossed yesterday; eventually it passes the same wooden bridge and presents to him, once he's re-crossed this, the same small doorway. He's come full circle. (13)

The language tends to glance back—against the abundance of verbs and commas moving the narrative lens, imagery such as "the wall" which Serge has previously described recurs without furthering visual clarity. The young Serge's images and sentences struggle to move, to complete a representation that is not fractured or redundant. Indeterminacy is the alternative to recursion, witnessed in Serge's desperate groping for the right verb to identify an action: "pointing up at the trails of copper running over their heads to merge with the curling poisonberries on the trellis" (15).

A dichotomy crystallizes, between narrative structure, the world of the novel which lacks Serge, and the space-obsessed narration projecting Serge's life onto page. Style and narrative form conspire to locate Serge's interiority within spatial observations, which do not translate into

affect or conventional psychology. Epitomizing the displacement of Serge's mind onto lines and colors is a nearly fatal drowning:

> He grabs at the blocks but these spin and sink away from his splashing hands. He tries to breathe in but the passageway is blocked: it makes a kind of elongated gasp that turns into a splutter, then a gulping as his head goes under again. Beneath the surface of the stream, he opens his eyes. The water is bright and murky at the same time, like honey. Snake-like fronds wave and dance in its lit-up darkness; particles of mud hang between these, stirred up into canopies of blossom. The water's right inside him; it's not nasty anymore, just cold. And he's no longer sinking: if anything, he's been lifted up, by strong arms coiled round him, hugging him … (31)

Narrative structure and content fail to depict the event's affective result. Familial response to the event is neglected; peripheral character, caretaker Maureen, offers sole commentary upon the life reclaimed, and these words fragment: ""I'll never let you from my sight again until you're …" she begins, but her voice trails away." (32). Pieces of Serge's past observations drift like flotsam into the passage; water that is "bright and murky at the same time, like honey" explicitly recalls representation of Serge's mother's eyes: "like honey, warm and murky" (29). Objects and persons beyond Serge assert greater continuity and attention than his own person.

Affect and humanity are obliterated as Serge drowns, supplanted by spatial connection. Forgetting the possibility of death, McCarthy's style here recalls Serge's physicality, transformed into inanimate geometric segments. Focus dwells on the partition of the boy's respiratory system enforced by water: "the passageway is blocked." Serge characterizes an effort to breathe through language entirely divorced from affect: "elongated gasp," and categorizes the transformation of this sound with observational detachment: "turns into a sputter, then a

gulping." As the passage continues the moment is further broken down into perceptual components and their intersections, with an emphasis upon change and contradiction. Description of the water offers one contradiction: "The water is bright and murky at the same time," a friction echoed in the phrase "lit-up darkness." Adjectives and verbs are simultaneous, so that one perception may be contradicted by another; imagery oscillates like indefinite electrons. The boundaries for every body and part within the scene are continuously rewritten, violated; Serge becomes an extension of the environmental aggressor: "The water's right inside him."

At first glance, *C*'s stylistic elevation of earthen space over human bodies suggests a dismissal of psychological depth aligned with McCarthy's previous novel. In *Remainder,* a sometimes redundant and unclear style signals the author's refusal to articulate the narrator's interiority, which suits the novel's wider aesthetic preference for physical surface over depth. Yet the narrative structures of *C* are not flat surfaces. Serge's narration is not mimetically dead; synapses fire to filter his surroundings in a particular way, here linking an element of the environment with memories of his mother: "The water is bright and murky at the same time, like honey." The question is not the presence of depth, as with McCarthy's previous novels, but its purpose. Serge's mind transforms his experiences into wrinkled lines in space without articulating a familiar affective shape. Serge's neglecting to explain away his spatial preoccupations signifies authenticity—these interpretations are normative for his psychology, needing no explanation. Yet, *C* is fundamentally a neural autopsy, engaging with rather than avoiding models for human psychology such as those provided by the Bildungsroman, to gauge the ability for familiar genres and forms to clarify divergent character interiorities for a reader. The location of Serge's interiority within these indefinable intersections recalls Vemeulen's

reading of *Remainder*: “The novel thematizes this movement in which the superimposition of two things does not lead to the cancelation of one of them, but rather to the paradoxical production of an affective remainder” (558).

The obfuscation of Serge within the text, in spite of a centralized birth recalling the Bildungsroman, creates a vacancy for a coming-of-age hero; the position is filled by his sister Sophie. When paired with the narrative focus upon the young girl, the aforementioned linguistic patterns trace the opposite of self-discovery: a suicidal probing for another main character, letting Serge remain unmolded by the casts of any genre. During the novel’s early chapters, Sophie embodies clear signals of the Bildungsroman. Style articulates her presence through conventional description and emotion: “Sophie prances into the library and straight up to Widsun. “I’ve found seven of them!” she sings” (60). This is a simple, straightforward sentence, and that is the entire point. Unlike Serge, Sophie is allowed to be a child. The phrasing “prances into the library and straight up to Widsun” lacks the expected stylistic maturity; a verb is expected before *straight* for a formal, literary register, and the hastily conjoined prepositional phrases evokes a childlike preference for directness over convention. Articulating a girl who “prances” and “sings,” the style chooses age-appropriate actions and descriptors which firmly distance representation of Sophie from Serge. The clarity of dialogue and description anchored to Sophie recalls the Bildungsroman investment in lucid conversation for growth: “One must *trust in language*” (Moretti 49).

Crafting a narrative arc which cleaves to the Bildungsroman, *C* draws Sophie’s growth across adolescence as a vector clearly intersecting with social norms:

> While Sophie scribbles neatly and assiduously, and always faultlessly, inscribing each word as it emerges from Mr. Clair’s mouth, Serge, bathing in the phrases’ afterglow,

usually gives up after a few lines and just lets the words billow around him, losing himself in their shapes and patterns, bright and alive in front of Clair's grey skin. (66.

The emphasis placed upon Sophie's voracious perfectionism recalls the classical Bildungsroman protagonist, who benefits from welcoming and imbibing socializing structures: "the well-cut prism in which the countless nuances of the social context blend together in a harmonious 'personality'" (21). Familiar haunts for the novel and Western learning, realism and mimesis are readily incorporated into Sophie's drawing style, an inversion of Serge's: "He sees things flat; he paints things flat. Objects, figures, landscapes: flat… Sophie, meanwhile, takes a leaf or branch with her and copies it in photographic detail" (48).

Sophie's early life maps neatly onto the conventions of the Bildungsroman, comprising encounters and actions which, integrated, discover significance: "No character will ever reveal his essence in a single gesture or encounter" (Moretti 46). The narrative arc of her character asserts continuities within her life's minutiae, amounting to development and growth. Stylistically imbued with a feline streak, Sophie is attached to the verb *purrs* on multiple occasions, as with the excerpt: ""I'll be a double agent," Sophie purrs" (60). Narrative payoff is delivered in the accidental demise of Maureen's cat, stemming from Sophie's use of poison within scientific experiments. And like a Jane Austen dinner party, the event has deeper, resounding consequences, fertilizing varied narrative branches. Sophie's interest in science has persisted from her childhood tracing of leaves and gripped the narrative, earlier catalyzing an explosion which almost killed her and Serge, and here accomplishing a fatality with the cat. A familiar affect is articulated when, as a result of the cat's death, familial bonds are tested; resolutely, her father believes that Sophie harbored no ill intentions, against the word of Maureen.

Thus Sophie's life follows an identifiable Bildungsroman vector, arranging experiences neatly along intersections between her interests and the socialization provided by family and education. Intrigue and tragedy, familiar shapes for affect, blossom; Mr. Carrefax's old friend Widsun takes Sophie under his wing for instruction in cryptography, turning traitor as ripples of potential sexual grooming surface unexpectedly: "Widsun mumbles to Carrefax without breaking off his signals to his daughter" (66). Education and socialization intermingle through Widsun, who instructs Sophie while modeling a negative social dynamic. Her learning how to decode symbols suits these plot developments, as a reader is encouraged to unravel conventional adolescent confusion surrounding sexuality. Wisps of truth flit by the narrative, such as a peculiar veiled shape witnessed by Serge, likely Sophie and Widsun engaged sexually. The continuities of Sophie's life and body are clear as she ages. At university she excels at science, as is to be expected, and identifies love as a source of anxiety, in language which implicates relations with Widsun or a comparably imbalanced dynamic: ""He's my instructor in—" she begins; then, cutting herself short, says: "He's secret; it's all secret. But he's made me sensitive. He's done stuff to me" (92).

But soon the Bildungsroman taxonomy does not hold; homo sapien until Chapter 5, sudden and severe disintegration of Sophie's continuities collapse the girl into Serge. The Bildungsroman emphasis upon education and socialization ruptures, as the Enlightenment epistemology of her childhood experiments, which foregrounded observation, fractures into free-floating pattern analysis. Sophie juxtaposes scientific texts and charts with news materials, highlighting patterns indecipherable to Serge. She attempts to explain the impact of her lover to Serge by describing her ability to, ""See things. What's coming. When the bodies meet and separate, and more bodies come out, the parts all lie around in segments." "What bodies?

Where?" asks Serge. "In London, Stamboul, Belgrade, everywhere," she says. "It's all connected. I feel it inside me. Look" (92).

As the Bildungsroman plot vectors which best locate Sophie within convention, education and romance, are mangled beyond recognition, so too are her conventional symbolic associations. Previously feline, or described through other animal imagery with a place within the domestic sphere, such as birdsong, Sophie's animal self devolves in the face of death. Sophie physically decays in the days preceding her suicide—she "looks haggard, much older than she did six months ago" (87), her body insectoid: "her exposed legs angling sharply at the knees, like an insect's articulated limbs" (89). This Sophie cannot grow wings or purr, limited to bug metaphors hitherto reserved for Serge: "she leaves the path and starts moving around the flower bed itself, her lower body lost among tall iris-stems, like some giant grasshopper" (91). In the wake of her death, accompanying funeral processions, there is also a dirge for the metaphoric associations the girl held: "the sound of hammering and tapping that's filled the estate's air falls silent, leaving only birdsong in its place" (91).

It's a tragedy, then, that Serge's sister dies well before the fatal dose of cyanide has been consumed, humanity emptied out from a body in space. Alternatively, it is an essential Bildungsroman embalming. As Moretti emphasizes, youth's transience is paired with "modernity's dynamism and instability" (6), to create, through the Bildungsroman, a symbol for capitalist society as conceived in the late 18th century. Youth was thus chosen for its potential to "share in the 'formlessness' of the new epoch, in its protean elusiveness" (6). An untimely death is where the hands stop for the Bildungsroman clock. There is no twelfth hour for Sophie, whose death preserves her youth, releases her from insect metaphors. McCarthy limits the presence of a degraded Sophie in the text to a brief few pages, to prove the terminal incompatibility between

the Bildungsroman and character psychology outside its strict norms. In addition to aging out of the genre, death works as well for retaining Sophie as Bildungsroman protagonist. Thus her tale is finished; Serge's never began, prophetic caul shrugged off. The moment in which Sophie attempts to reveal her interiority to Serge, the Bildungsroman lens for viewing her character shatters. Conceiving the novel upon this fraught character adherence to the Bildungsroman genre, McCarthy is poised to contrast Sophie's psychology, unfulfilled through genre norms, with that of Serge, who will remain unbound despite the continuing presence of voided novelistic conventions.

The artificiality of genre conventions exploited by *C* is reinforced by comparable treatment of narrative threads. In the case of Sophie, one may attempt to navigate her psychology through plot: sexual abuse, insect metaphors as an inheritance from a family built on silkworms. Her arc even extends outside the text, to recall an infamous patient of Freud given the pseudonym Wolf Man, as noted by critic Henderson Downing: "Several details of the Wolf Man's case history are reconfigured within the fictional life of the novel's main character Serge Carrefax, particularly in relation to Serge's failure to mourn his sister Sophie, who also poisons herself and dies" (Downing 30). But none of these textual signals reaches the human—a reader will never learn more about Sophie's relationship following her death, whose referentiality splits her tomb, only half-interred in *C*. An indecipherable interiority, surfacing briefly, finds no elucidation through the wreckage of plot and Bildungsroman conventions: ""It's all connected. I feel it inside me. Look." She takes his hand and lays it on her stomach. Her skin, through the cotton of her thin white dress, is soft and pliant. Serge can feel a rumbling beneath it" (92). The glimpse into Sophie's mind is brief, opaque, and an indication that her psychology exceeds Bildungsroman archetypes.

The opacity of the central figures in *C* encourages a reader to interpret interiority from the outside, through patterns in the text. Obliging, the narrative organizes plot around a few central events which are expected to center the story but don't. Unmet expectations for Serge abound, as has been discussed, yet various other events grapple for narrative focus. The play put on by the Carrefax school's deaf children, a literal performance of growth and adolescence, evokes Bildungsroman conventions through a recognizable ceremony of childhood and learning. But it's off; representation of the deaf children obscures their faces and dwells upon aural qualities, describing a central actress as follows: "In a weird voice that seems to buzz, she starts charitably goading him, suggesting that while the powers on earth obey his "mighty hand" (66). Narration here steps in to paraphrase the girl's lines, a silencing performed elsewhere by Carrefax, who must clarify events like a narrator: ""Her way of mourning," Carrefax adds" (71).

What is humanity if it can't be performed, signaled? Mr. Carrefax's project, shared with the Bildungsroman, is a sculpting of humanity into familiar forms. Moretti characterizes the genre as epitomizing "the conflict between the ideal of *self-determination* and the equally imperious demands of socialization" (15). This conflict turns impassable chasm, in Carrefax's presumption that deaf children validate their humanity by regurgitating a Greek play through rote memorization. The actors are stylistically represented as inert because their speech does not fit the particular Carrefax and Bildungsroman model of verbal communication as revelatory communion: "every conversation beyond a mere exchange of civilities (or of insults) presupposes the willingness of the participants to abandon their own viewpoint in order to embrace that of the other" (Moretti 49). As Moretti emphasizes, speech is socially entrenched to the point that the Bildungsroman's reliance upon its clarity feels customary: "conversation has become by now so habitual, having read so many novels and engaged in so many conversations,

that it is hard for us to see it as something artificial" (50). The play just does not work under these assumptions; the novel knows this and acts accordingly. Narrative commentary is brusque as if lacking faith in its own story: "The next few scenes are confusing" (72). This summary condenses a lengthy stretch of the play so that a clear overview of the story is unobtainable. Transitions and scene shifts during the play, which is the most centralizing event of the novel's first four chapters, are harsh, jarring. In contrast to the typical stylistic insistence of an object, its spatial linkages, the play as a narrative object is chopped up into phrases strewn about carelessly: "Sophie remains as absent as Persephone. Eventually people slink off, their footsteps dwindling up the path's gravel. Urns, tables and chairs are brought back in; the props are returned to the schoolrooms" (75). Then the narrative breathes a sigh of relief, relishing in a protracted static spatial description the moment that the narrative flagpole has collapsed: "The wind's died down by now; clouds hug the ground more closely, warming the night air. It's quiet: the only sounds Serge hears are the slow oozing of the stream and a kind of rustling that he thinks at first must be a badger or hedgehog in the undergrowth beside it" (75). The pivotal play is a vacant textual structure, Bildungsroman ruins thrown into stark relief only when stripped down to the unassuming grass.

The textual space devoted towards central narrative elements, such as the plays, Sophie's animal metaphors, and Mrs. Carrefax's addictions, compels reader investment, even though each thread must be viewed through the lens of a fraught Bildungsroman. Character-driven questions naturally follow: "What are the deaf actors thinking? What is the origin of Mrs. Carrefax's addictions?" Each will linger in the dead air of the Carrefax manor, boarded-up by a page commencing the novel's second section: "Chute" (146). Discussing Goethe, Moretti justifies the presence of secondary characters only so far as they elucidate the protagonist: "What interests us

about Lothario and the others is not their autonomous existence, but only the effects they have had on Wilhelm" (21). The Carrefax manor with all of its metaphors and persons becomes silent, with Sophie buried, and Mrs. Carrefax subdued, while Serge crosses new frontiers, because Serge was born in the first chapter like a typical Bildungsroman protagonist. Late in the novel Serge does not return to the great complex family, but a pitiful relic of his past: "now seems like a small, inconsequential circuit: a transceiver loop or well-worn route round a familiar parade ground. It's as though, in Serge's absence, the whole estate had, by some sleight of hand, been substituted by a model, one into which he's now been reinserted, oversize, cumbersome and gauche" (241). In this diminished home there is no space for remorse for Sophie.

The affective resonance of Sophie's failed Bildungsroman, discarded to pursue Serge's inert adolescence, draws attention towards the tendency of the Bildungsroman to express character interiorities through inflexible structures. Trusting in the model of character study, the genre will emblematize Serge as a stand-in for youth, the reader, and the generation that will fight in World War I. And Serge will look at space, denying these templates for psychological understanding.

Prior to the novel's second section and Sophie's death, however, subtle stylistic shifts indicate changes within Serge's consciousness. Serge's growth is silent, subversive, a vector moving against the principal plot developments centered around Sophie and the theatrical production. Depicting a lexical adolescence, the novel beyond Chapter 4 arranges its images more neatly than before, centralizing visuals so there is less frantic movement: "Serge moves his head round and looks down into the reproducing horn. Its brass has turned slightly green with time. The tube darkens as it narrows, then disappears into the sound box. Listening to Rainer, Serge thinks of entrances to caves and wells, of worm- and foxholes, rabbits' burrows, and all

things that lead into the earth" (54). Spatial concerns evidently persist in this passage, which privileges shape and contour in choice of metaphor for the horn: "entrances to caves and wells, of worm- and foxholes, rabbits' burrows, and all things that lead into the earth." But the eye lingers here; semantically, there is a grounding in earthen ground, one shape within a particular domain of images, distinct from the less compact amalgamations of prior chapters, cutting across sense and space: "The bees' hum first grows and then recedes, changing pitch as his ears turn through the air. As trees, grass and hedge run together, the bees seem to relocate, and hum from a new spot within his head, their pitch and volume being modulated from inside him now, not outside" (29).

These stylistic changes enact an adolescence, suggesting a comparable, unseen process within Serge, changes in his psychology remaining veiled behind style as the play looms. Parallel with Sophie's death is Serge's expansion, much more palpable, as his thoughts and experiences discover more concrete presence within the text. His emotional state and motivations remain unclear, spatial: "He lets a fart slip from his buttocks, and waits for its vapour to reach his nostrils: it, too, carries signals, odour-messages from distant, unseen bowels" (83). Yet the radio transmissions Serge experiments with literalize his interest in space and signal, grounding the narrative for the first time in a physical incarnation of his perspective:

> Serge spends the last half hour or so of each night up here among these pitches, nestling in their contours as his head nods towards the desktop and lights flash across the inside of his eyelids, pushing them outwards from the centre of his brain, so far out that the distance to their screen seems infinite: they seem to contain all distances, envelop space itself, curving around it like a patina, a mould. (84)

No longer subdued, Serge's thoughts catch the signals of both spatial obsessions and pivotal narrative events which previously eluded him. Showing a bare minimum of sibling concern, Serge notes of Sophie: "She works the next day, and the next night too, and the day after that. Serge starts to wonder when—or if—she ever sleeps" (87). Standard but significant, this moment depicts Serge as main character, who will interact with and consider the events of his story, preordained by caul. Yet interiority cannot be celebrated within the empty signal of Serge's thoughts, lacking representation of emotion, or at least affective response a reader may identify with. His response to Sophie's death is represented not through an emotion, but a search for connection across signs: "What he feels is discomfort: at his priapic condition and, beyond that, at a sense he has of things being unresolved or, more precisely, undivulged. The charts, the lines, the letter-clusters and the fragments" (103). A strange dichotomy accompanies Serge's growth, which so tightly mirrors the cessation of Sophie's. As has been noted, the supporting cast of a Bildungsroman exists to illuminate the protagonist, and there is a logic to Sophie's departure as a means of making more space for Serge within the novel. Yet the cruelty of this explanation imbues Serge's first adherence to the genre with a nostalgia for his absence. Sophie's departure from the text compels an affect stronger than Serge's journey towards manhood, as her humanity asserted the familiar shape of Bildungsroman conventions. A question comes into focus: is there something comparatively human, affectively resonant, within Serge's skull filled with shapes and space? Can an external mold like the Bildungsroman give meaning to his life and spatial investments?

Remainder presupposed a boundary that *C* must navigate. The line between the authentic and the real was a hard rupture in *Remainder*, which divested from style the interiority of language and character. The transgressor *C* blurs the line between avant-garde and tradition in a

narrative structure which is something less postmodern, a bit more familiar, maybe an unrecognizable mixture. Through Sophie Carrefax and a mangled play, you can squint and make out a Bildungsroman. How opaque may characters be while maintaining affective resonance? If twisted and mangled, will conventions of the Bildungsroman serve any purpose for identification with a character and their growth?

As Gill Partington notes in her discussion of *Remainder*, the novel's reconstruction of domestic space opposes a conventional association between these locations and interiority: "If novelistic convention often invokes domestic space as an analogue for psychological interiority, then McCarthy's Madlyn Mansions, like Schneider's *Haus u r*, is all surface and no depth" (62). *C* operates in similar fashion by tearing down the walls of the Bildungsroman, exposing the support structures for a prominent and safe space towards understanding character psychology. This early section of *C* sets the stage for the rest of the novel, foregrounding a navigation between authentic formal conventions and their collapse into mimicry. Serge's representation across the rest of the text will clarify the wider status of affect within the novel while also indicating that, beyond engaging with Bildungsroman conventions, McCarthy navigates a much greater boundary in historicizing the text and connecting the performance of genre and form to particular aesthetic moments.

CHAPTER 3

BILDUNGSROMAN ADOLESCENCE AND THE SPATIAL LIBERATION OF WAR

Sophie's death catalyzes an adolescence as if sharing forsaken life; but does this maturity belong to Serge or the novel? The Bildungsroman maps onto the ensuing narrative neatly. A young man convalesces after a childhood trauma at a spa in Kloděbrady, distanced from family for the first time. His steps cross paths with history, as the multinational denizens of the resort mimic in miniature the conflict that led to World War I. And of course there is a young, proper girl, and a conclusive sexual blossoming.

Through Serge's perspective, this Bildungsroman loses everything but this outline. His narrative gaze dulls every contour of the genre's expectations for socialization and growth, by a marked stylistic shift towards formula and repetition. Few visual elements merit a description that is rife with sluggish commas artificially prolonging passages: "On one wall, beneath curled-vine cornicing, a fresco shows, in Greco-Roman style, ladies and gentlemen in togas sipping water" (110). Serge identifies centerpieces to his convalescence and obliterates them with this style. An orchestra merits such description: "The orchestra, heart shape abandoned, follow behind, intermittently striking up tunes that sound rather funereal, breaking these off, then striking them up again, reprising the same passages" (134). The musicians are trapped within cyclical performances and ensnaring commas which, listlessly, dull the repetitive motions: "follow behind, intermittently striking up tunes that sound rather funereal, breaking these off." The phrase "Heart shaped abandoned" accentuates the sense of mimetic regression, describing the orchestra relative to a previous iteration, in the way that a subsequent chapter updates its

status: “Beside the Mir the orchestra no longer plays; the floor of its bandstand, like a horizontal version of the fresco, is covered in sheets as workmen repaint the trellised ironwork of its rails and columns” (135). Serge’s environment is represented through repetitions and binaries— the orchestra is either playing or isn’t, shaped like a heart or not, and no more information is offered. Attention towards repainted ironwork and the covered floor epitomizes a holistic depiction of Serge’s surroundings as superficially changing across seasons, as the boy’s malaise persists, his growth arrested.

Accepting Serge as Bildungsroman hero, the novel indicates his cognitive unsuitability for archetypal protagonist by dulling and exaggerating narrative structures which resonate with the conventional Bildungsroman. Lucia, a young woman near Serge’s age, would be at home in a much different, lighter novel, perhaps belonging to Austen. She describes the condition which brought her to the spa: “Oh, anaemia,” she tells him, rolling her eyes up like a naughty schoolgirl” (127). The phrase “naughty schoolgirl” is a meager infraction against cliché, for a girl to be flattened paper-thin by subsequent representation. Dull and literal description trivializes a repeated gesture of grabbing onto Serge: “letting him support her as though she were about to lose her balance even though the patch of ground they’re on is straight and flat” (130). The passage’s detached analysis which questions her grabbing Serge, though the “ground they’re on is straight and flat,” dissects and neutralizes the gesture’s affect; the emotional excavation is accentuated by use of the phrases “as though” and “even though” to redundantly assert contrast within a simple, straightforward action.

Serge’s romantic socialization is staged through stylistic stagnancy, and distanced from the spatial descriptions whose expansive detail enlivened the novel’s introductory chapters. Potential lover Lucia is stifled by a lexical claustrophobia, and her dialogue and representation

draw upon a scant selection of clichés. The passage “Lucia finds it all very amusing” (133) reiterates the term *amusing*, which previously characterized the girl: “Well, well,” Lucia says, nodding at him wide-eyed and amused” (128). Days at the spa pass and stagnate, style crawling across pages, Lucia clutching onto Serge, amused. Earth and space, the apple of a younger Serge’s eye, remain buried during his lethargic recovery but surface to expunge any hint of agency and purpose from one outing between this romantic pairing: “bubbles rise up from the churning water; the pleasure boat moves on; so do Lucia and Serge. After a few more yards the bridge turns into a weir. Sluice-gates beneath it channel and filter the water; above it, at intervals, gate-houses rise like watchtowers” (129). Broad in scope, alive, this intrusion of nature exerts agency over Serge and Lucia; their movement is portrayed as consequential, an echo produced by the motion of “churning water” against their craft: “the pleasure boat moves on; so do Lucia and Serge.” Repelling the stylistic redundancy grafted onto McCarthy’s Bildungsroman heroes, space and nature are represented as dynamic, continuously altering across verbs and commas: “the bridge turns into a weird. Sluice-gates beneath it channel and filter the water.” Against a romance emblematic of Bildungsroman socialization, the passage affirms Serge’s psychology, its invigoration by bubbles and dirt and earth.

Serge, however, plays the Bildungsroman part and only excavates space on rare occasions, as the novel adds historical narratives to the structures vying for a simplified understanding of Serge. Reiterating one of the few facts he has read about the spa, he tells another resident, “no one knew about the healing powers of Kloděbrady until Baron von Arnow found the water under the castle” (123). He speaks minimally to the other convalescents, outside of pamphlet regurgitation. Equally subservient to historical narratives, the other residents act out clichéd nationalist ideologies predicting World War I strife: ““This is Prussian arrogance

typique!" M. Bulteau almost shouts, his hands still gunpowdering apart. "They think all Europe's theirs, and make these stupid mythes to justify their avarice for land and power." "Mossieu!" The German lady slams her coffee down, red-faced. "You are not polite" (123). The descriptor "gundpowedering" roots the speakers in World War I, as if the event alone determines their identities. Both strands of dialogue, Serge's and the political talk, place the adolescent in time and history, yet doubt the ability for historical narratives to resonate with his life and rise beyond cliché.

Histories embodied in museums, pamphlets, and the presence of soldiers cement conventional historical narratives which Serge will oppose:

> the gramophone's account of wars against the Turks, Hungarians and Czechs, of infanticide, betrayal and sedition, echoes at them from the room's high walls. The words soften and run together as they step into the cellar, in which rotting boat-fragments, the charcoaled skeletons of old canoes, are laid out among sepulchres whose stone reliefs level accounts between aggressors and their victims by giving the faces of both the same worn-down, characterless quality. (127)

Serge simplifies atrocities and trauma into "Infanticide, betrayal and sedition," suggesting an ambivalent disinterest in further detail. Language instead explores the physicality of this conflict, within tombs that deny affect and humanity by leveling the faces of the combatants into "the same worn-down, characterless quality." War will change Serge, but the output of his psychology onto the page will not register as recognizably human. Concepts such as trauma or political implications compact upheaval across time into something familiar: shapes suited for human psychology. As will be shown in discussion of Serge's wartime experiences, McCarthy prefers orthography.

The inability for Bildungsroman or historical narratives to understand Serge ensures that there will be no ambiguity when geometric intersections of space and bodies perfectly accomplish the task. Lucia, shaped from Bildungsroman cliché, traces the idealized template which Serge's sexual partner Tania, crippled, cannot articulate. The liaison between Serge and Tania, who is a masseuse at the spa, rather than an affluent attendee, does not retread conventions of love or amused laughter:

> She doesn't stop him, or react in any way. Her eyes, glazed as always, stare through him at the black earth. He brings his mouth up to her face and licks the wine from it. Her neck, beside his ear, emits a low, guttural sound, of the same character and pitch as low-frequency radio waves. He can smell the musty odour rising from her body—from its corners, enclaves, holes. He tugs at her blouse and, meeting no resistance, pulls it off completely, then does the same to her skirt and underclothes. (143)

Style here is matter-of-fact, describing the act through unornamented language: "He brings his mouth up to her face and licks the wine from it." Affect and feeling lack spatial translation and are thus absent from the act, characterized instead through signal and space: "a low, guttural sound, of the same character and pitch as low-frequency radio waves." Emphasis is placed upon Tania's complete disinterest in the liaison, which does not affirm any human connection: "Her eyes, glazed as always, stare through him at the black earth."

Bodies become shapes, undifferentiated from and connected with earthen geography. Serge obsesses over the curvature of Tania's spine, which he imagines more as the contours of land than human body: "There it is, right under his face: the crook, rising beneath her shoulder like a ridge with valleys running down its side" (144). The climax purifies Serge of conventional humanity, filling his insides with beloved dirt: "The surfaces of ground and woods and clouds

are gone too, fallen away like screens, encumbrances that blocked his vision, leaving the hollow—not of the indentation but of space itself: an endless space in which he can now see with piercing clarity. What he sees is darkness, but he sees it" (144). An emphasis is placed upon perception through repetition of *sees*, yet Serge's point-of-view explicitly rejects postmodern flatness: "The surfaces of ground and woods and clouds are gone too, fallen away like screens." Depth is asserted within Serge's psyche, which cannot be named through inherited forms such as postmodernism or the Bildungsroman. At this moment, Serge's novel begins.

The human guise worn by history at the spa, shapely commemorative tombs and polite conversation, is derobed by an unfettered view of spatial connections and transformations when Serge's service in the Royal Air Force begins, and he flies:

> The coast peels away now and the land tilts towards him, swinging from a hinge running perpendicular to him and his box, along the same line as the Farman's wheel axle. It lifts up to meet him: a flat earth-plane rising to join a wooden rectangle held in a wiry frame set in a huge white-and-blue circle of sky. (156)

The dense breadth of verbs animates land with an energy absent in the spa's Bildungsroman structures: "the land tilts towards him, swinging from a hinge running perpendicular to him." Space moves relative to Serge in this excerpt, permitting unfettered insight into his point-of-view, though this clarity is strictly visual, his location relative to stimuli; his interior thoughts remain concealed. Terms semantically appropriate for human connection, *meet*, *held*, and *join*, imbue intimacy into intersections of space, nearly wiring a conventional affect into the imagery which electrifies Serge's mind, before abstract geometry is reasserted: "a flat earth-plan rising to join a wooden rectangle." A dichotomy frustrating interpretation thus arises—style clarifies

Serge's place within space that is vibrantly three-dimensional, yet refuses any paradigm for comprehending Serge's depth, or the affective significance of the spatial imagery.

McCarthy does not map Serge's interiority onto the text, yet proffers brief insights into the nature of Serge's rejection of cognitive norms. When strafing enemies, Serge's visualization of the action explicitly reverses cause and effect:

> Serge develops a knack of splitting his gaze in two, locking the line with one eye while the other slides ahead, setting up camp in the spot at which a successful hit "happens" and thus bringing this event to pass. He experiences a strange sense of intermission each time he does this, as though he'd somehow inflated or hollowed out a stretch of time, found room to move around inside it. (158)

Time's forward momentum, palpable in the preconfiguring of World War I by the spa residents, punctuates Serge's antithetical celebration of nonlinearity. Through this process time is "hollowed out," clarifying the relationship between Serge's perceptions and space. While the affect produced in "a strange sense of intermission" remains obscure, Serge asserts agency in his spatialization of time, the narration proclaiming that accurate volleys hit their mark after his gaze splits an instant.

Yet *C* positions this alternative spatial psychology in a world and novel where it is not the dominant logic. Serge cannot remain in flight indefinitely, and style shifts abruptly towards a dull staccato when Serge is removed from the sky. As Mark Blacklock says of Serge's spatial perspective, "Serge's gridding conceals as it reveals, but it cannot conceal sufficiently: the repressed returns" (80). McCarthy's narrator spatializes a world that always rediscovers human shape. Duller style rife with lethargic commas narrates portions of the war which ground Serge: "Serge, chewing on his omelette, wonders if it's really necessary to fight the Germans after all:

they could all just lounge around, each on their own side, dying in random accidents until nobody's left and the war's over by default …" (165). When Serge is not exalting in the war's spatial footprints, a bemused levity towards its human significance surfaces.

Conventional affect is not wired into Serge's brain, whose psychology is spatialized in arresting passages that trace impressions of the war: "The black surface of the water around the rat's head is laced with garish streaks of colour: orange-yellow, greenish white, reflections of the gunfire flickering across the sky" (171). The vibrant succession of colors is deflated by the word *garish*, denying the image an aesthetic value which might be affirmed by a modernist poem. Constant prepositional phrases expand and clarify the imagery, distracting from the visual centerpiece of vibrant water to remind a reader of its production through intersections of space, such as "reflections of gunfire flickering across the sky."

Charting the contours of land through war, McCarthy does not abandon time or history, but interpret these concepts through Serge's spatialized psychology. There is depth within the novel, spatial exchanges between interiority and exteriority which struggle to be understood through affect. Yet the war ends; Serge's story finishes, and alternative conceptions of psychology must compensate for the loss of an aerial perspective that marries human bodies with earthen space. As the London stretch of the novel demonstrates, McCarthy represents depth in its inscrutability, rendering human psychology as ill-suited for inherited forms of cognitive understanding like the Bildungsroman or modernist aesthetics.

CHAPTER 4

MODERNIST AESTHETICS, URBANITY, LONDON

The current running through the words and world following German defeat is the modernist moment. Portraying Serge's civilian life in London, a modernist epicenter, the novel clothes itself in suitable garb, centering within the narrative theatrical reimagining of Classical plays, intermingled with hedonistic drug use and social malaise to evoke pivotal aesthetics of the period. McCarthy's style noticeably shifts as well, adopting a frenetic pace distanced from Serge's methodical examinations of space, and more at home with modernist poetry. A brief excursion into Ezra Pound's *A Draft of XXX Cantos* (1930) will establish a baseline for the modernist style that McCarthy parodies.

An excerpt from Canto III demonstrates the shifting, unpredictable poetic gaze characteristic of modernist Imagist poetry:

> Through all the wood, and the leaves are full of voices,
> A-whisper, and the clouds bowe over the lake,
> And there are gods upon them,
> And in the water, the almond-white swimmers,
> The silvery water glazes the upturned nipple,
> As Poggio has remarked.
> Green veins in the turquoise,
> Or, the gray steps lead up under the cedars. (11)

Each individual line is a collage of various smaller kinetic images or allusions, so that description is blurry from the motion of parts which do not precisely fit together. Enjambment in the line "A-whisper, and the clouds bowe over the lake" shifts the gaze abruptly from voices in the woods described previously, to the appearance of an unrelated lake, intermingling components of each image within one poetic unit.

There is not a clear visual or narrative continuity here in Pound's examination of lake and land; attention shifts within and across lines, as when abrupt description of the woods beaches preceding representation of the bathers: "The silvery water glazes the upturned nipple, / As Poggio has remarked. / Green veins in the turquoise." Prepositions such as *and* supplant precise connection between spaces, serving to add imagery without clarifying its orientation in the narrative scene: "And in the water, the almond-white swimmers." A reader frequently encounters unexpected verbs which evoke abstract and imaginative spatial designations, as occurs with *glazes* in "The silvery water glazes the upturned nipple."

Yet the visual fragments do not collect aimlessly on the page; organization is asserted both at the level of the passage, and through higher formal structures. Color weaves an aesthetic thread through the poetry, rather than mimetically clarify the imprecise imagery. Simultaneously, the description of a mythical woods, which Pound fills with satyrs and nymphs, creates a dichotomy between a fabricated Classical past and Pound's own experiences in Venice, described directly prior to the quotation: "I sat on the Dogana's steps / For the gondolas cost too much, that year, / And there were not "those girls", there was one face" (53). The gaze here shifts, but does not affirm a mass of images. Instead, exclusion and restriction prove the logic. Pound is compelled to dwell upon "one face," and sits "on the Dogana's steps / For the gondolas

cost too much." The two passages share stylistic similarities, but obey disparate logics indicating Pound's distaste for his present moment.

Pound's *Cantos* is thus abundant but ordered. One may identify structure at the level of the individual canto, such as the historical juxtaposition prominent within the preceding passage, or within the collection as a whole, in which this temporal opposition persistently recurs. In between cantos, stories, characters, and locations persist, and structural parallels and oppositions are frequent, particularly between adjacent cantos. For example, Canto XVIII represents Kublai Khan's establishing a currency as methodical and precise, with prepositions connecting each step: "And they are written on by officials, / And smeared with the great khan's seal in vermillion; / And the forgers are punished with death" (80). The logic granted to Khan's system through style clashes with Pound's representation of twentieth-century capitalism through absurdity: "And he knew, and they knew, and each knew / That the other knew that the other knew he knew" (87). In the dialogue between these cantos, a strain of Pound's antisemitic distrust of money lending surfaces which, in the wider context of the *Cantos,* fits in with the poet's elevation of past historical figures over modern society.

The persona projected by Pound onto his *Cantos* envelops various perspectives which surface and ebb, so while interiority is not fixed like a novel with a central narrator such as *C*, a collective Eurocentric consciousness discovers shape. A stand-in for Pound is the *Cantos'* most frequent orator, relating the poet's lived experiences while adhering to the collection's overarching Imagist aesthetics, yet divergent voices and citations shelve this figure. Canto XI fabricates the voice of a soldier in service to fifteenth-century Italian nobleman Sigismondo Malatesta, and the speaker's optimistic portrayal of Malatesta affirms Pound's trust in authoritative figures:

> And he went by ship to Tarentum,
> I mean Sidg went to Tartentum
> And he found ‘em, the anti-Aragons
> busted and weeping into their beards. (48-49)

Stylistic incorporation of colloquial speech deepens the resonance with Pound’s overarching thematics. In dressing this dialogue in modernity, rather than lexical antiquity, Pound collapses European history into one unending search for great leaders, vocalized through varied, but harmonized perspectives. Even Pound’s allusions frame exterior texts within this collective consciousness; Cantos VIII to XI, devoted to Malatesta, conceive upon a citation of Eliot’s *The Waste Land* which frames the Malatesta Cantos as historical synthesis: “These fragments you have shelved (shored)” (28). Of course Pound was misguided in his political leanings, rooted in racist conceptions of a global elite and ultimately leading Pound to fascism, yet the formulation of an interiority shared among bodies across time affirms the modernist poetic project of expressing the inner self.

The principal takeaway here is that various threads and cohesions structure the chaos of Pound’s unhinged verse; no matter how many fragmented images or voices accrue, structures of continuity and opposition will reconcile the disorder with order. McCarthy will challenge this presumption by modernist poets, like Pound and Hope Mirrlees, that order may be asserted against a lyrical wreckage. The London Serge traverses is teeming with material trash waiting to be sorted:

> Sucking walnut pieces from the gaps between his teeth, he strolls through Russell Square Gardens, trying to work out the logic governing the fountains’ spurting sequences (a task to which he sets his mind obsessively for as long as it takes to wander past them, but

> instantly forgets as soon as he's left the square), then skirts the stone lion-guarded rear wall of the British Museum and, finally (and always anticlockwise), follows the fence-rails round the closed garden in Bedford Square until their long ellipse deposits him a few yards from the Architectural Association's front door. (250)

The passage loosely emphasizes space, tracing Serge's meandering walk, and resonates with his examinations of space during war and childhood. Yet geometry only weakly holds the prose, whose attention is scattered and antipodal to earlier dissections of an image, its every line. Conceiving upon "Sucking walnut pieces," the passage thrusts a reader into an action that fails to orient the scene, or assert any clear purpose as a participial phrase describing Serge's actions at this time. Every succeeding clause is comparably disjointed, finding a new verb, as well as a new thought, place, or event, within the single sprawling sentence. McCarthy selects verbs which communicate movement as a spatially uncertain displacement of matter: *spurting*, *skirts*, and *deposits.* While this tendency accords with verbs found earlier in the novel, the speed of the prose here recalls Pound's style, and his spatially ambiguous verbs: "The silvery water glazes the upturned nipple."

As Serge breathes in the city air, spatial examinations dwindle even further, overridden by place, London with a capital L. A gathering between Serge and his lover Audrey, breaching a din of drug use, supplants geometry with allusion and material breadth:

> they emerge into a vast industrial space, a storage room or assembly hall, that's been transformed into a setting as fantastic as an emperor's opium-dream or some exotic film. The room's pillars, coiled about with red-grape-heavy vines, tower above the room like columns of a bacchanalian temple. Crane-hooks around the walls are similarly vine-decked, as are gantries hanging from the ceiling" (270-271)

McCarthy builds his London out of Joycean cardboard, costuming Serge's spatialized perspective with a stylistic emphasis upon objects in abundance, an empty mimicry of modernist aesthetics. Serge's gaze is moving here, absorbing "pillars" with "red-grape-heavy vines," "Crane-hooks" and "gantries hanging from the ceiling." Yet the narration's articulation of a significance behind each details falters, distanced from Pound's use of color to merge disparate imagery. The room itself is characterized vaguely as three possible containers: "a vast industrial space, a storage room or assembly hall," establishing Serge's inability to mimetically structure the space he inhabits. Undaunted, his narration still attempts to understand the room and its decor. Describing the location as like "some exotic film" falls upon vague cliché, signaling a video medium surging during this time period, and asserting no deeper reading than that afforded by a glance at a calendar. The description of the place as an "emperor's opium-dream" is similarly more factual than interpretive, given the partygoers' drug use, and echoes Pound's poetic responses to various antiquities, without the sense that McCarthy's references arrive at comparative synthesized meaning.

Holistically, the rivers of time stagnate within modernist poetry, pooling the aesthetic strata of past and present into a mixture which Eliot and Pound wade through for significance. Serge happily drowns. Imagery within the scene, such as the "pillars, coiled about with red-grape-heavy vines," reaches clunkily towards antiquity, the hyphenated descriptor here emphasizing the presence of grapes to transition into Serge's suggested Classical correspondence. Comparing the sight of the pillars to a "bacchanalian temple," signaling the Roman god Bacchus celebrated through wine, Serge's meaning-making once again struggles to affirm significance in the parallel between modernist drug-use and Classical revelry beyond merely indicating a connection. Serge is no Pound; literal in his symbolism, any reference to

antiquity may be justified by semantic proximity to the Amazon play which his fellow revelers conduct. Shades of modernist aesthetics and a shifting gaze signal modernist style, yet there is no overarching meaning or structure to connect the allusions and aesthetic fragments.

McCarthy's modernist style is all a sham; Serge cannot and could never provide the core which you discover within Mirrlees' *Paris* (1920) or Eliot's *The Waste Land* (1922). The image coordination and interiority of Joyce are absent; while McCarthy's focus on things over space recalls Modernist poetry there is no depth to mimic Pound's purposeful gaze. The sense that Serge's narration has a modernist poetic veneer, without the aesthetic's essential depth or structure, suggests a superficial performance of the literary form legitimized by the novel's placing Serge in 1910s London. The emphasis by James and Seshagiri on a historical modernism, rooted in a limited time frame in a circumscribed European space, indicts McCarthy as metamodernist solely on the basis of historical referentiality: "On the other hand, "narratives of modernism" describes fictions—overtly experimental or otherwise—plotted around the very creation and reception of modern art and letters" (89). Perpetually shifting under critical pressure, the boundaries of modernist aesthetics appear even more arbitrary when the theatrics of a novel acting modernist will suffice.

Dennis Kersten and Usha Wilbers provide qualitative data which substantiates McCarthy's performative modernism, analyzing the presence of terms related to modernism and postmodernism within critical and recreational responses to *C*: "On the whole, "Modernism" is used less with regard to narrative techniques than it is to label C's exploration of both its relationship with the canon and literary Modernism as an archive of a particular historical period, or, indeed, a history into which the novel tries to "insert itself"" (34). Demonstrated by the style of *C* as well as these critics' research, representation of modernism as historically precise,

restricted to a span of canonized authors, shifts genre differentiation away from the salience of aesthetic features.

McCarthy's style fails at being modernist, but modernist aesthetics do not fail McCarthy's style. The velocity of Pound's verse, altering between perspectives, images and patterns, surfaces within McCarthy's language to construct striking, unstructured imagery: "Each morning he's awoken by the rattle of glass bottles and the tap of hooves, mingling with men's voices as they rise through his dreams to break their surface like the tentacles of some primordial kraken" (250). Emphasizing sound, the first half of the quotation crystallizes around a stylistic connection between noise and source through the word *of*: "rattle of glass bottles and the tap of hooves." After the comma, these noises, displaced to Serge's dreams, gain a violent physicality as the prose rushes across verbs, and these sounds "rise through his dreams to break their surface." *Of* returns in the final image of the passage, "the tentacles of some primordial kraken," resonating with the preexisting pattern yet without the aural quality. Aesthetics of modernist poetry animate McCarthy's language into patterned configurations, but the text is a body without a soul, performing limber, fleeting stylistic feats which dissipate rather than develop into overarching structure. In the context of this passage, the patterned usage for *of* does not recur, while sound or sleep do not prove important subjects within the narrative, and the image of the kraken emerges only momentarily from the waters of past superstition.

Within the early sections of *C*, organized along Bildungsroman conventions, narrative structures proved the dominant metric for evaluating personhood. Sophie's performance in school or a deaf pupil's rendition of Persephone poses identifiable junctures where socialization may be judged. By contrast, modernist poetic convention that any heap of imagery may be reconciled into structure and truth promises that selfhood may be discovered within a pile of

glass bottles, or a pillar decorated with grapes. McCarthy obliges this presumption with parody, depicting Serge as sifting through heaps of aesthetic trash which do not resonate with his psychology, and instead obscure the spatial intersections burned into his neurons. McCarthy implicates Pound's stylistic abundance as a dubious promise, that a perceiving body may fertilize aesthetic minutiae into a flowering thought, when the context of earlier sections in *C* indicates that Serge is particularly rooted in spatial imagery and unfit for broader synthesis. In the dichotomy between style and structure, however, modernism is implicated on both fronts. Narrative structures in the London chapters represent the vast range of overarching modernist ideologies as fraudulent, unable to interpret not only Serge's interiority, but a collective experience of postwar malaise.

The semantic breadth of the modernist period, apparent in Pound's encyclopedic references, manifests itself in the ideologies and structures which clash in *C*, sentence by sentence. The text is woven around a range of modernist topics circulating amidst drug parlors, each concept grabbing hazy attentions for a second. An Amazonian play featuring Audrey, Serge's current love interest, thrusts our narrator into a crossroads of feminism, high art, and advertising culture: "There's the occasional man-woman couple, but many more pairs and groups of women unaccompanied by men. They talk to one another loudly, smoking, laughing, exuding an air of masculinity. Serge flips through the programme. On the inside cover there's an advertisement for Good Printing" (254). Shifting gender roles in the first half of the passage signal a feminist strain prevalent during British writing at this time, incorporated by modernist poets like Mina Loy. Yet, like Serge, modernist poets freely turned from gender discourse towards scraps of paper, evaluating print advertising's capitalist surge within cities. Print media were appropriated for the manifestos published by movements like Pound's Imagism, yet

advertisement itself became a poetic form, as the layout of words and images within advertisements inspired formatting within poetry. Hope Mirrlees' poem *Paris* dwells upon various flyers in her aesthetic exhumation of the city, juxtaposing their lexical formatting with her own. The following excerpt describes the sale of Spring clothing at one of Paris' earliest modern department stores, Le Bon Marché:

AU

BON MARCHE

ACTUELLEMENT

TOILETTES

PRINTANIERES (94-98)

Mirrlees validates advertisements not only as mimetic focal points within her traversal of Paris, but as pictorial arrangements of words, imagery fit for replication through her verse.

McCarthy's brief mention in *C* of "groups of women unaccompanied by men" and "an advertisement for Good Printing" may be mapped onto the breadth of modernist narrative elements, but also the genre's unabating search for depth, a poetic gaze which questions gender roles as much as department store copy which might inspire poetic form. T.S. Eliot's famous reference to "These fragments I have shored against my ruins" (430) aptly describes the modernist tendency to hoard, and to relinquish an image or ideology only after extracting truth.

Clearly, McCarthy's quotation does not suggest any of this context; in the dichotomy of style and form, *C* mimics modernist stylistic abundance, but only vaguely signals the ideologies and concepts which structure modernist narratives, such as print culture with Mirrlees and historical precedence with Pound. Rather, a reader is struck by Serge's inability to elaborate upon these concepts. Upon noticing "groups of women unaccompanied by men," Serge identifies

distinctive behaviors: “They talk to one another loudly, smoking, laughing.” His reductive analysis of these actions asserts the gender binary being challenged, when he then describes the women as “exuding an air of masculinity.” The human element of feminism, its affect, is stripped through Serge’s inability to discover depth within people and behaviors, instead abstracting the actresses through recursive gender norms.

Consistently, elements of the narrative are strung into these cognitive chains which fizzle out before excavating an overarching meaning, despite Serge’s effort to assert unity. Advertisements, which present formal significance for Mirrlees, are processed through a less successful sequence of interpretation with McCarthy:

> an advertisement for Good Printing, proclaiming that the Finest House in London for Commercial Typesetting, Lithography and Account Books is the House of Henry Good and Son. Serge wonders if that’s their real name, or whether the father and son exist at all. Carrefax Cathode: his father never mentioned that plan again. Maybe Henry lost a child, too, in the war. Serge thinks of ink and ribbons, floating letter-blocks. On the next page the cast are listed. (254)

Serge first orients the advertisement through capitalist culpability, in suggesting the fabricated identities of “Henry Good and Son.” Yet before this idea can be substantiated, another possible depth arises through resonance with the intention of Serge’s father to start a family business called “Carrefax Cathode.” The familial thread is a dead end, as “his father never mentioned that plan again,” and so Serge introduces the most resonant context for his moment, “the war,” just briefly, before thinking about the mechanical underpinnings of printing: “ink and ribbons.” Serge offers each semantic diversion as a possible interpretation for the advertisement, amassing an abundance of narrative structures within *C,* so that his narrative gaze feasts upon imagery as well

as ideas. The tragedy realized through Serge is a reading of Pound, Mirlees, or Joyce without annotations. If the variety of thought and aesthetic within modernist poetry is not simplified by historical context or overarching structure, disorder erupts, implicating modernist meaning as an ornate veil flung over a bin of aesthetic and ideological trash.

Style in the passage analyzing the advertisement communicates not only the implausibility of reconciling modernist ideas and images with meaning, but also the demands this process makes upon a narrator. Conceiving upon a lengthy quotation of the advertisement, the excerpt devotes less textual space to each interpretive option, up to mention of the war. Syntax accentuates this lethargy, with a colon simplifying Serge's description of Carrefax Cathode, and two commas halting Serge's questioning whether Henry's son served. Breathing life into the passage, description of the mechanical printing press is elongated rather than curt, with the comma in "ink and ribbons, floating letter-blocks" accomplishing Serge's only mental elaboration upon the ideas encompassed. Ignoring capitalism, his family, and the Great War as interpretive frameworks, Serge opts, very briefly, to instead spatialize the mechanical production of the advertisement into "floating letter-blocks." For an instant, Serge's rapt attention towards space resurfaces before modernist debris falls onto the page, reminding Serge of the play about Classical figure Penthesilea.

The concept within modernist poetry that everything must be cataloged and given depth or interpretive resonance, individualized, is challenged by Serge's very particular spatial psychology, which hazards and fails Pound's vast descriptive encapsulations. The London stretch of *C* deals in a surplus of narrative and stylistic elements demanding deeper meaning, and Serge, obliging, excavates a wide mental abyss, which cannot be salvaged by any ideology.

A drug-fueled party dwindling, Serge cannot make sense of London, or anything: “The tide’s out; the exposed mud is deep and black. “Maybe it’ll be like this, when it comes,” he finds himself saying to nobody, not knowing what he means” (272). Yet Serge’s inability to synthesize a deeper meaning for the modernist condition proves, in itself, a revelatory experience. World War I is a lingering question, answered by feminist theatre, bright lights, play bill advertisements, cocaine. And it is answered by Serge, in surprisingly forthcoming narration suggesting that drugs, high art, and even the war force meaning and narratives onto an unknowable interiority: “It’s like a city of the living dead, only a few of whose denizens could proffer the excuse of having had shells constantly rattling their flesh and shaking their nerves. No, the shock’s source was there already: deeper, older, more embedded” (268). The collective consciousness realized by Serge is not Pound’s authoritarian obeisance, but a despair which can only be classified by resistance towards ideological resolution.

While Serge disregards the impact of the war on human psyche, McCarthy foregrounds the concern in the individuals surrounding him to suggest a communal search for existential meaning. A University instructor attempts to understand Serge’s truancy through his service: “You’ve lived through war and all its horror, and—” (267). But, of course, nothing is excavated through the explanation, or the ensuing visual dissection of Serge: “Serge looks back at him, frankly, letting his face be scrutinised. There’s no reason to resist it: Burnet and his like will never disinter what’s buried there, will never elevate or train it” (267-268). Serge repels efforts to decode communal trauma, yet answers and ideologies continue to surface, most significantly in the seances which reunite Audrey with a brother killed in World War I. Watching a table tilt autonomously to signal messages from the dead, Serge experiences discomfort at a unity among people that is affective, answering the despair of every audience member with deceased relatives:

"He looks at Ralph's parents, then Paul's: they're hanging on the table's every tilt, the blackboard's every slowly transcribed word. So is Audrey; so is everyone apart from him. The isolation makes his heart beat even faster, so fast that he starts to worry that he'll have a heart attack and die" (288). The seance does not suggest a framework or ideology in naming and describing elements of the attendees' traumas, and the inscrutability unnerves Serge, who cannot deconstruct an insight into one's interiority with no logic or process.

The chair's careful and miraculous selection of letters resolves a communal interiority in the same way that Pound's poetic arrangements extract meanings from the objects taken in by his gaze; both chair and Pound validate the fundamental goal of modernist poetry to manifest meaning through language. An animate chair ordering strings of letters into the names of audience members' dead relatives promises significance within every letter articulated, coalescing into a shape for loss, a sign that artistic interpretation, and no further logic, is needed to excavate the mind's deepest truths. Pound structures his imagery and style through overarching meanings, as the seance turns sequences of letters into manifestations of grief.

But it's a sham, table moved by an electronic receiver, dead like McCarthy's modernist aesthetics. And with that realization Serge decides to attend the seance once again, to the joy of Audrey: "She kisses him on both cheeks, then buries her face in his neck and sniffs it lovingly. He spends the week making a remote controller" (288). The physical, human intimacy displayed here is rare for the novel, and particularly the London stretch, in which drug-infused actors rhyme their way across binges like a tragic chorus. Serge's determination towards "making a remote controller" in the second sentence supplants the previously affective style with a neutral, efficient register, a promise of imminent violence against this salve for humanity. He exposes the fraud with his remote controller; the masses riot; returned to his apartment, Audrey collapses:

> Serge sits beside her for a long time, watching her back rise and fall. It seems bulkier, as though the weight lent by her body to the world of spirits, loaned out through the twin agencies of love and conviction, had been returned unclaimed. Her hair, too, looks heavier, greased by sadness. Her shirt and dress are crumpled. All of her is downward-sagging, solid, heavy. If mass and gravity have been added to her, something's been stripped away as well: despite her layers of clothes, she somehow looks more naked than she does even when undressed, as though a belief in which she's clothed herself till now, a faith in her connectedness to a larger current, to a whole light and vibrant field of radiant transformation through which Michael might have resonated his way back to her, had been peeled off, returning her, denuded, to the world—this world, the only world, in which a table is just a table, paintings and photographs just images made of matter, kites on walls of playrooms unremembered and the dead dead. (293-294)

Ironically, poignantly, McCarthy lets his characters attain insight into their humanity only to be stripped of it. Like a realist painter the style here chronicles Audrey's body and its weight with mimetic detail unfamiliar to *C*: "watching her back rise and fall… Her hair, too, looks heavier, greased by sadness. Her shirt and dress are crumpled." This human form describes an inverse psychological realism: an outline of what is missing, incomplete in the mind. Her body, its "downward-sagging, solid, heavy" presence, illustrates explicitly the voided impression previously filled by the seances: "a faith in her connectedness to a larger current."

In articulating her loss Audrey finds community; McCarthy's characters, typically comical or embodying cliché, attain bodies at the apex of loss. Sophie is corporeal as her dialogue turns Serge-like, grappling at connection and sex. She is described by Serge as "haggard, much older than she did six months ago; staring at her cheeks, Serge can see worry-

lines snaking their way down from her eyes towards the corners of her mouth" (87). The pilot doomed by Serge's refusal to man a gun is made real, desperate, by Serge's unexplained refusal to strafe enemies: ""Shoot at them when they come back!" Gibbs shouts, pointing to the Lewis gun" (87). Then his body is rendered physical with the death that Serge ensures, after their plane crashes: "Gibbs's shoulders first straighten suddenly, straining against the belt, then slacken and slump forwards" (217). The humanity of his emphatic gestures and lifeless body lifts a character from the cliché which buries the rest of McCarthy's side characters; another soldier refers to French soldiers as "Nothing but playboys: race-car drivers" (181).

McCarthy's adherence to conventions of realism crescendos at these tragedies to show that psychological realism can be a key to what is missing: an illustration of the unknowability of the mind. In the same way that stylistic emulation of Pound emphasizes aesthetic disorder rather than order, passages of *C* which evoke realism service physical detail to trace traumas and cognitive disorder, rather than to simplify psychology. *C*'s London is saturated with the paradigms and aesthetics of modernism, drug psychology, war trauma. Each similarly demonstrates a slippage. Serge explicitly rejects simplifications of his war experience, stating, ""But I liked the war" (267), and his actions dismantle any supernatural resolution of trauma, whether by seance or language.

Ideologies, genres, and paradigms clothe McCarthy's characters in reliability and reality to demonstrate the lengths a reader will go to stretch the fabric into a perfect fit. Gill Partington writes of *Remainder*: "Fiction is a highly artificial way of conceptually organizing space. Interacting with it successfully involves a knowledge of its conventions, its rules and zones of demarcation" (65). Yet *C* goes beyond *Remainder* to prove this arbitrariness by realizing a variety of fictional conventions and exposing their cracks through intersections with character

psychology. Denuded like Audrey, the cast of *C* exposes psychological chasms when these paradigms are unrobed. Serge's mind is configured to geometry and any effort to affirm his humanity through inherited forms suggests an innate tendency to simplify and understand novelistic characters through familiar conceptions. World War I looms over the novel, an Everest of Western history, to illustrate how variably and unpredictably such an acknowledged, documented event may propagate across lives and fiction, outside of a teeming body of modernist poetry or war novels.

McCarthy's staging of the seance, offering a rare and genuine affect in Audrey's vacated emotions, indicates a consequence of the historical setting beyond its accentuating McCarthy's parody of modernist aesthetic norms. *C* exists within a clear stretch of time which is not isolated from world events, like World War I or the social environment of postwar London. Malaise accruing throughout this modernist moment outlined by the text is frequently historicized through World Wars and urbanization, human displacements massive in scale. As Justus Nieland suggests in his article "Dirty Media," the common element to McCarthy's historical periodization of modernism is technology, unable to locate affect but uniquely poised to touch upon the places where its absence is palpable.

A historicizing of the modernist period through technology affirms the psyche's existence through burial, technological language and metaphor which can visualize impressions of interiority. Even Joyce could not protect language and literary expression from competing technologies: "Modernist experiments in writing as a medium transmission were hatched in anxious competition with new technologies of transmission within earthly air like the radio and the wireless. Such media promised a particularly expansive quality of communication that Douglas Kahn has called 'globalness'" (Nieland 581). Serge's wireless controller reaches the

gulf of despair within Audrey, unlocking the vacated shape of hope in an afterlife, and only then does the novel mimetically represent details of her deflated body. Nieland points to a comparable moment in the novel, in Sophie's botched preservation of the cat she poisoned: "Serge, watching the leg move with the angular stiffness of a clockwork mechanism, thinks of semaphore machines, their angles and positions, then of the strange, moving shapes he saw played out across the sheet" (77). Technology does not offer Serge the language to process affect related to the image. The opposite occurs; the semaphore machine models expression without words or affect, crystallizing a reference which Serge later uses in his neutral depiction of massacred human bodies: "detached arms semaphore quite randomly across the ground; torsos, cut off at the waist" (216). As Nieland indicates, machines mime human actions without humanity, modeling an interpretive framework outside traditional realist representation: "observing Sophie's reanimation of Spitalfield, which he reads as a code, morbid and hypnotic, but finally uncrackable, Serge is reminded of the screen's inhuman play of articulated parts" (Nieland 592).

McCarthy's modernist aesthetics offer not only a style to be subverted, but also an alternative historicization which locates the imprint of lost affect within the ahuman contours of a wireless set or semaphore machine. Nieland offers a useful dichotomy to understand McCarthy's historicizing of modernist interiority within the London section of the text: "By privileging the figure of transmission over expression, the poet as the coherer and scatterer of voices, Mc Carthy extends and radicalizes the Eliotic principle of impersonality" (580). Communications technology, able to transmit messages without the emotions and conventions baked into speech and prose, parallels McCarthy's transmission of psychological depth within nonverbal forms: Audrey's emptiness, viewed only through the photographic negative of ruptured joy, and Serge's spatial ecstasies.

CHAPTER 5

SERGE'S POSTMODERN WORLD

Something is missing, unsaid. Modernism slain, *C* does not yet evoke Perseus clutching dead, limp literary forms. A novel that repudiates representational norms of the Bildungsroman and modernism becomes postmodern by default. Theoretical representations of language and meaning within the postmodern novel substantiate this labeling, as exemplified in features identified by Fredric Jameson through analysis of French Nouveau Roman author Claude Simon: "the degradation of the signified into its material signifier or, if you precer, the eclipse of the illusion of transparency, the unexpected transformation of meaning into an object, or better still, its deconcealment as something already reified, something already opaque in advance" (140-141). The language here precisely fits McCarthy, with the phrase "the illusion of transparency," suiting McCarthy's obfuscation of interiority; a "degradation of the signified into its material signifier" articulates McCarthy's refusal of Pound's elevation of aesthetic fragments into signified meaning.

The sinking feeling that McCarthy has written a postmodern novel and will relinquish Serge's psyche after every trace of humanity has been flattened is exacerbated by resonance between *C* and postmodern novelist J. G. Ballard. Serge's emotional response towards geometry and radio waves mirrors Ballard's persistent discovery of affect within grotesque intersections of sex and technology, in his novel *Crash* (1973): "In my mind I visualized the cabin of Helen's car, its hard chrome and vinyl, brought to life by my semen, transformed into a bower of exotic flowers, with creepers entwined across the roof light, the floor and seats lush with moist grass"

(107-108). Sexual fluids spilled upon “hard chrome and vinyl” germinate and affirm life, the vehicle “transformed into a bower of exotic flowers,” so that mass-produced car parts imbibe the positive affect produced by floral imagery. Ballard emphasizes the neutral affect traditionally elicited from technology in his reduction of the vehicle to “hard chrome and vinyl,” material components which relocate the car from the human sphere to a manufacturing plant, to heighten Ballard’s subversion of technology’s inert affect.

Yet purposeful decisions in diction complicate the affect elicited by the car, beyond a simple dichotomy of positive or negative. The term “Creepers” evokes floral imagery in tandem with the negative affect associated with the word *creep,* while classification of the flowers as “exotic” distances a reader from imagery which is otherwise intimate and tangible. Ending the passage upon “moist grass,” Ballard selects a liminal plant which may be wild or domesticated, an overgrown eyesore or trimmed embellishment, to underscore the passage’s fraught affect which does not wholly imbibe floral positivity. Ballard’s reconfiguration of affect, which crosses wires between car parts and flowers, encompasses neutrality, transgressive sensuality, and striking beauty, so it is as hard to name the holistic feeling, as it is to interpret the emotions which Serge projects onto space.

A spatial consciousness is produced within the passage through a style which foregrounds geometry, moving briskly between segments of the car to span various intersections of machine and nature without emphasizing mimetic detail. The following excerpt elucidates Ballard’s interest in space: “From the forecourt I watched her leave for the airport in her sports car, her white crotch flashing a gay semaphore between her sliding thighs. The varying geometry of her pubis was the delight of bored drivers watching the rotating dials of filling station pumps” (42). Orienting and then reorienting the narrative, successions of prepositional phrases shift across

disparate spaces and perspectives: “From the forecourt I watched her leave for the airport in her sports car.” Accentuating this sense of kinetic movement, Ballard’s marked usage of participles perpetuates actions which animate matter: “watching the rotating dials of filling station pumps.” Though Serge’s perspective is comparatively static, *C* might stand for *Crash,* not merely in McCarthy’s naming the novel’s third section “Crash” (240), but through the shared organizing principle of spatial investigation, rather than a narrative embedding in time or conventional feeling. An emphasis upon participles recurs in both texts, as does terminology related to space and signals, like the word *semaphore,* occurring here and discussed previously within the context of *C*.

Various clarifications resist classification of *C* as postmodern, against these stylistic resonances. Turning to McCarthy’s incorporation of inherited aesthetics and forms, one might distinguish referentially within *C* from Jameson’s representation of postmodern pastiche: “speech in a dead language. But it is a neutral practice of such mimicry, without any of parody’s ulterior motives, amputated of the satiric impulse, devoid of laughter… the practice of a kind of blank irony” (17). The Bildungsroman narrative structures erected within *C* are not defiled, in the way that Ballard warps floral and religious imagery to connote a transgressive sexuality. Rather, as has been shown, McCarthy authentically represents inherited conventions for understanding interiority, so that modernist parody is not dead imitation, but dialogue across aesthetic moments, processing a new logic for human psychology.

Stripping McCarthy’s modernist reference of its logic for character psychology and accepting Serge’s mind simply as a posteriori postmodern surface would fit the novel neatly in with postmodern forms, which disintegrate styles, logics, words. A passage from postmodern novel *Gravity’s Rainbow* (1973) epitomizes the referential practice: “Trees creak in sorrow for

the engineered wound through their terrain, their terrenity or earthhood. Trout flick by in the stream… In the middle distance are haystacks. The flower is shaped like the cunt of a young girl" (Pynchon 748). A paragraph which conceives upon a realist style, representing with granularity "Trees creak[ing]," "Trout flick[ing] by," and an emotional response rooted in "sorrow" for the injured "terrenity," abandons these roots at the punctuating period. Representation of nature later in the paragraph forgoes emotion or mimesis, vaguely describing haystacks as "In the middle distance," and transgressing Pynchon's established affect for the woods, with a disturbing comparison to genitalia. The realist novel and an identifiable emotion pose logics for two of Pynchon's sentences, but no larger formal unit, so these rusted anchors do not discover ground in the seas of Pynchon's prose, which will drift across countless styles and references, affirming none.

McCarthy is self-conscious in writing Serge's consciousness; his effort to evolve discussions of interiority through inherited forms, rather than doom psychological understanding through language, distinguishes *C* from Pynchon and Ballard. Further elaboration upon pastiche and reference might bolster this assertion, yet protracted formal differentiation is antithetical to *C*. Resist the impulse, McCarthy asks. There are clear stylistic parallels between the novel and postmodernism, yet the Egypt section of *C* challenges an understanding of Serge's psyche through postmodern spatial style. Mimicking postmodern narrative structures, the ending throes of *C* oppose postmodern formal elements to elements of Serge's psychology rooted in time and affect. Like an errant Gorgon snake, one more inherited form must be killed to prove the text's determination toward an unskewed gaze at psychology and interpretive structures.

Postmodern aesthetics describe the text's representation of Egypt, its denizens, and world history. Serge is offered a role in the region by family friend Widsun, and is tasked with

assessing British telephone infrastructure, though Serge is never certain of his duties, and the occupation's legality appears increasingly dubious, following Egyptian independence. Time periods and cultures overlap and intersect in breakneck prose, recalling Ballard's semantic transgressions: "Native men in European dress embellished by red flowerpot fezzes hurry past them carrying briefcases of legal documents, newspaper copy or insurance claims" (306). Against the novel's stylistic conventions, description elaborates upon human bodies, rather than space, and switches from visual abstraction of one image, to overabundance. The "briefcases of legal documents, newspaper copy or insurance claims" are explicitly multiplicitous, containing possibilities rather than a single type of document. Differentiating this semantic breadth from Pound's modernist style is a disintegration of boundaries; Pound synthesizes European symbols, while McCarthy crosses the aesthetics of European and Egyptian cultures: "Native men in European dress embellished by red flowerpot fezzes."

The text's postmodern structures include a narrative historicizing; unintelligible intrigue and duplicity among the postcolonial Egyptian inhabitants evoke the late capitalist abstraction of politics into subterfuge, and economics into complex global systems:

> "The truth?" Macauley repeats. "Who's to say? Scientists—physicists—are telling us that two things can be true at once nowadays. The point is, if we think the butterflies are something other than what they are, or that they serve some purpose other than that which they serve, or if we act as though we think this, then the French will also think they are—(332)

Truth becomes stranger than fiction; Macaulay suggests that any narrative or logic, whether scientific or political, is an arbitrary, unjustifiable vantage point, in the vein of Pynchon's treatment of styles.

As postmodern forms take root in the text, the opposition between spatialized style and inherited narrative structures collapses. The intersections Serge previously celebrated within nature have become actualized in his social surroundings, while the flat surrounding landscapes reject contour: “Beyond the sails, just past the shoreline, irrigated fields form neat-edged planes; beyond these, the desert is, once more, ungeometric” (349). An inversion of the relation between narrative structure and style locates Serge’s intersecting geometries within postcolonial society, humanity, rather than natural imagery.

Breaking the preexisting mold for cliché or archetypal figures, the speech of the novel’s Egyptian denizens resists reductive narratives. An associate of Serge’s named Petrou describes Alexander the Great’s ambitions for the city of Alexandria: “He wanted it to be the great hub of the world, connecting everywhere to everywhere else. More than that: it would be Greece’s grand self-realisation, its ascent, beyond itself, into a universal condition. Über-Greece: a kind of simulation better than the real thing ever was” (307). The opacity and redundancy of Petrou’s language, as with his representation of Alexandria as connecting “everywhere to everywhere else,” excavates certainty from diction and history. Petrou instead speaks of simulations, an “Über-Greece,” which is clarified by frustratingly simple and generic language, characterized as “the real thing.” The colon is a collapsed bridge, unable to link the speaker’s conception of “Über-Greece” with concrete description. Egypt proves a mass of histories and paradigms, which style or syntax cannot resolve into ordered narratives.

Serge struggles to discover a footing within the sprawling discontinuities of these postmodern conversations; previously cannibalizing the supporting cast, like Audrey, whose faith in deeper meaning was shattered by his receiver, Serge is consumed within McCarthy’s Egypt, where traditional affect is not the accepted currency. A female tourist named Abigail

disengages from any emotional response towards Egyptian history and sites, on the basis of a palpable inauthenticity:

> until recently you could pitch up here with a compass and a map, and your hosts would arrange for you to find—to 'find'—" her voice goes high and squeaky at this point—"a tomb, which they'd prepare overnight for you, mummy and all, while you slept on Oriental cushions. It's all so … fake! (325-325)

Detached, Abigail exposes no emotion, affect, or weakness for Serge to dominate, and he in turn finds no footing in their exchange, spoken over at every turn: "I suppose—" Serge begins, but she continues" (325). Like a praying mantis Abigail consumes Serge, proffering sex only after he exposes a potential trauma: "You were in the war?" she asks, looking straight at him for the first time" (328). Sex act completed, Abigail, rather than Serge, trivializes the affective dimension of death: "So, did you kill anyone?" (328).

Egypt would appear to be Serge's white whale. No longer beached against Bildungsroman and modernist shores, Serge is swimming in postmodern narrative structures and figures, who embody his psychology's drought of affect and investment in intersection. Were Serge to submerge his psychology within flat individuals and flat landscapes, all preceding discussion of McCarthy's rejection of inherited forms would be invalidated, and postmodernism declared the novel's dominant, both in terms of style and structure. At this crucial precipice, McCarthy inverts the established dichotomy between narrative and interiority, in which Serge's psyche clings to style and resists integration into narrative forms. As Serge's spatialized mind is splayed across Egyptian peers and landscape, his point-of-view, miraculously, gropes for conventional notions of order. Confronted by his sexual liaison Abigail's disregard for conventional narratives of history or affect, Serge waxes nostalgic for the purpose he discovered

through transcribing signals he listened to while at home in Versoie: “the sense that, in transcribing all the clicks, notating all the messages, logging the stations and their outputs, he was performing a task so vital that a single wrong entry would have disastrous consequences for whole hierarchies of—of what? Committees, subcommittees? Of important bodies who relied on him” (326). The passage evolves into an articulation of displacement, which expresses that radio’s binary transmission of signals and receivers rooted Serge, establishing “a “there” as far divorced from “here” as angels from the mortals… Now, though, there’s no “there”: he’s here where “there” was and it’s not “there” anymore, just “here”” (327). Serge longs for a structure which designates a clear purpose and recipient, opposing the postmodern suggestion that interiority and language may not transit meaning. In retrospect, the Bildungsroman and modernist narrative structures did not model Serge’s interiority, yet their permitting growth and interiority proves preferable to psychological flattening. The rigidity of Bildungsroman and modernist models for depth cemented reference points for Serge’s psychology, affirmed and elucidated through deviation from these forms.

Rejection of a postmodern entanglement of signals is explicit here and elaborated upon through Serge’s increasing tendency to filter his experiences in Egypt through personal history. As surrounding characters speak about cultural and historical intersections, Serge localizes discussions to threads from his own narrative: ““It all began here: city of sects and syncretism.” “And incest,” Serge adds. Ignoring his words, Petrou leads him to a large scroll” (316). Disregarded not just by Petrou, but every other character who talks past these interruptions, Serge untombs unexpected figures like Lucia, previously little more than a Bildungsroman archetype, but now emblematic of a gesture: “Laura tugs at his sleeve, in a way that’s familiar to him, though not from her” (365). Obliging Serge’s impulse, the narrative affords unexpected

recursions. Early in the text, Widsun instructs Sophie in cryptography: ""I'm training her up as a spy," Widsun confesses" (60). Egypt rediscovers this memory, preserving Widsun's sexual innuendo in application towards Serge: "He brought his head right down to Serge's and half-whispered: "You'll be my little spy"" (303). Widsun's sexual abuse of Sophie and Serge's incestuous feelings, tossed aside during the Bildungsroman chapters, propagate to this late stage of the text, affirming depth within the novel and Serge's mind, and the construction of meaning through this depth.

Unexpected recursions abound, which elicit unexpected affect: "One evening, in the Savoy Palace brasserie, Serge runs into his old Hythe training partner, Stedman. "You survived!" they blurt out simultaneously, equally incredulous" (322-323). Having previously regarded the corpse of an ally in terms of spatial arrangement, Serge here expresses a genuine emotion at an affirmation of life. Serge once grafted his obscure interiority onto the stability of Bildungsroman and modernist conventions; now, postmodern inscrutability discovers a center within Serge's personal history. Each narrative-interiority dynamic represents a configuration for unity among disparate inherited forms.

A character in negative, Serge has inverted whatever canvas McCarthy has painted his image upon. A backdrop of war drew Serge toward land rather than bodies; postmodern Egypt unearths an affectual interest in the lives he has touched. The dichotomy of surface and interiority, of postmodernism and modernism, fails his psychology. And the novel's final narrative canvas, Serge's death, dissolves any boundary between these two inherited forms. A fundamentally human anxiety over termination is expressed through Serge's awareness of the impending death: "he pictures himself as a dead man in a sarcophagus, swathed in spells and imprecations, heart replaced with secret writing and censorious seals" (377). Serge's fixation

upon his floundering mortality, which clutches and stalls the narrative, recalls Hemingway's Robert Jordan, and modernist anxiety over cessation. Yet while the text grounds death in palpable humanity, here stripping away Serge's still-beating heart, Serge's end straddles inhumanity, replacing the organ with indecipherable "secret writing and censorious seals."

Representation of Serge's approach towards death encompasses traditional affect, twisted just beyond recognition. An image begins with elements of Serge's life rendered meaningful through the structure of a Bildungsroman, then warps towards inhumanity: "[Images] show siblings passing through an orchard, running down the neatly ordered rows between its trees. The trees themselves—their bark, leaves and fruit—are a corroded colour. The siblings are as well. The whole scene's flat, like film" (384). Childhood memories with Sophie are appropriate, human reflections for Serge's final moments, even if guided by an overarching presence of incest. Yet Serge's thoughts oscillate between his life and flat signals and space. Early in this sentence, attention towards the "neatly ordered rows" subtly prefigures the gradual collapse of the scene into flat, spatial perspective, "like film."

Affectually resonant elements of Serge's humanity are consistently paired with a psychological opacity. Description of the pained movements of his failing body exposes tangible suffering: "It's by virtue of the gangly, mutinous movement willed from elsewhere he experienced earlier that he finds himself, after the steward's disappeared again, crawling across the floor and, taking hold of each machine part with his feelers" (380). The emotional resonance of a human desperately grasping for the fixation of his life, a wireless set, is undone by the single word *feelers,* dissolving the image and its affect right as the passage concludes.

Crystallizing another intermingling of affect and abstraction, Serge's dying delusions discover the shape of a marriage, yet the reveal of his bride is polluted by a warping of names

into textual noise: “Serge’s is “Ra-Osram-Iris-K4-CQD”; his bride’s is “CY-Hep-Sofia-SZGY”” (383). A reader will latch onto reference to Sophie and the incest plotline to resolve the veiled woman, yet the dash within the names denies this reducibility, affirming additional contexts and interpretations. Serge is married to Sophie as much as to the word *syzygy*, meaning a parallel configuration of celestial bodies, which he encountered during an aeronautic exam. And Serge figures himself not as Serge but Ra, connected to *syzygy* through the “solar trinity Khepri-Ra-Atum” (358), and incest through archeologist Laura’s broken reading of a tomb: “‘Ra-something, master of…’ ” reads Laura, narrowing her eyes; “ ‘his sister, his beloved, in his heart” (370). In this final moment of self-determination and marriage, the dash is the undesired, emergent solution. Equating symbols and signs inside and outside Serge’s life, the novel permits no clear narrative or paradigm to understand Serge, at his attainment of the Bildungsroman ideal of marriage.

Neither Serge’s traditional humanity, rooted in affect, nor his inhuman interest in space emerges as dominant up until his death, which is itself an indecipherable sign, a dash. All a reader feels is the absence of an observing body when, after his death, the perspective detaches from Serge: “The young man’s eyes roll upwards and his face wrinkles into what looks like a smile” (387). An image lingers across the text’s conclusion without a perceiving body:

> The moon’s gone: only the ship’s electric glow illuminates the wake, two white lines running backwards into darkness. When the stretch in which the scraps are bobbing fades from view, the steward turns away towards the staircase. The wake itself remains, etched out across the water’s surface; then it fades as well, although no one is there to see it go. (388)

Death could not reveal Serge's psychology. Yet a reader's lingering expectation that this disturbance in the water would mean something to Serge suggests that narrative psychologies, unaligned with forms such as the Bildungsroman, modernism, and postmodernism, may still carve an interiority onto the novel.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION: WRITING NEW HUMANITIES

There will never be another Goethe, Joyce, or Pynchon. But there is McCarthy. By exposing the inability of the Bildungsroman, modernist aesthetics, or postmodern aesthetics to adequately structure Serge's consciousness, *C* validates conceptions of thought and personhood that eclipse singular perspectives. Each respective form fails, exposing limited flexibility towards strange thoughts and persons, yet in tandem the forms partially succeed. Serge is not the ideal Bildungsroman protagonist, yet cognizance of the genre elucidates the social and educational pressures which he grows away from. Asserting an interiority focused upon spatial surfaces, yet also mental growth demonstrated by style, which culminates in nostalgia for personal history, Serge embodies elements of modernist and postmodern aesthetics, embracing surface and depth.

Looking forward, the novel will benefit from nimble critical movement between genres, which, synthesized, diversify the tools and approaches for assessing consciousness in the twenty-first century, rather than the twentieth. Naming a genre for the present moment is to name contemporary humanity, and poignant critics and novelists have suggested the breadth of new interiorities that must be considered. Various critics have read contemporary novelist Kazuo Ishiguro through trauma and memory, structures in the mind which warp his novels' structures into nonlinear, unfamiliar shapes. Synthesizing further, implementing postmodern aesthetics within this conversation could explain the resonance Ishiguro asserts between memory and space, rather than memory and time.

Most critically, McCarthy's rebellion against literary form as providing psychological omniscience pairs well with recent African American and Native American texts of cognitive rebellion. Linda Hogan's *Power* (1990) and Randall Kenan's *A Visitation of Spirits* (1989) both employ style in order to express the unknowability of their protagonists' minds, subjugated through incompatible social norms. Serge Carrefax dreams of vaporized bodies and flat perspective, yet the contemporary novel might imagine a million new twenty-first century selves, if unencumbered by the inherited forms of Western aesthetics.

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