

379
N81d
NO. 4563

OVERCOMING THE REGIONAL BURDEN: HISTORY,
TRADITION, AND MYTH IN THE NOVELS
OF CORMAC MCCARTHY

DISSERTATION

Presented to the Graduate Council of the
University of North Texas in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

By

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August 1997

Wegner, John, Overcoming the Regional Burden: History, Tradition, and Myth in the Novels of Cormac McCarthy. Doctor of Philosophy (English), August, 1997, 206 pp., References.

In *Overcoming the Regional Burden: History, Tradition, and Myth in the Novels of Cormac McCarthy*, I contend that McCarthy's literary aesthetic develops and changes as he moves from Tennessee to Texas. McCarthy's conspicuous Southern and Southwestern regional affiliations have led critics to expect his works to recapitulate native history, traditions, and myths. Yet, McCarthy transcends provincial regionalism by challenging the creation of the regional and national myths we confuse with our actual histories and identities. McCarthy's fictions point away from accepted histories and point instead to figures marginalized by society and myth makers. These figures, according to McCarthy, are just as much a part of the creation of myth as those figures indelibly imprinted on our consciousness by literary and historical tradition.

McCarthy's Southern novels attempt to redefine and recapture the Southern myth of community by appealing to

William Faulkner, the Nashville Agrarians, and George Washington Harris. In each novel, McCarthy examines an individual's place in the community of the South and the community's reaction to that individual. He confronts the myth of the pastoral Southern community, and what begins as nostalgic regionalism becomes too burdensome to maintain as the oppressive history of the South all but smothers McCarthy, forcing both his literary and literal move from the South.

When McCarthy moves to Texas, he exchanges the old agrarian South for the new Western frontier, and his artistic development follows his literal movement West. McCarthy's Western fictions focus on seemingly marginal historical figures and events, magnifying our vision not only of the socially obscure but also of the larger historical and cultural landscape. Chapters five and six discuss McCarthy's examination of myth and history in the Southwest. In both novels, he creates a complex web of history and fiction that forces his readers to challenge accepted myth and the creation of myth. My dissertation, in many respects, focuses on McCarthy's debunking of both

literary and historical tradition, and his concomitant
revitalization of American identity.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My wife deserves special praise for her patience and support.

I would like to thank Professor Tim Parrish for his invaluable help with this dissertation.

John Gosselink warrants thanks both for listening to my complaints (and they have been numerous) and for his suggestions and contributions to Chapter five.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

To date, few studies of Cormac McCarthy have appeared in national journals.¹ The bulk of McCarthy criticism has appeared in Southern journals, and Lewis P. Simpson, Walter Sullivan, and Thomas D. Young have all discussed McCarthy in Faulknerian terms.² Even in 1993, after the publication of *Blood Meridian* and *All the Pretty Horses*, critics called McCarthy the "most Southern of writers" (Mills 286). McCarthy is not guilty of leaving his "mule and wagon stalled on the same track the Dixie limited is roaring down" (O'Connor 45) as much as critics are guilty of putting his cart on the tracks and not letting him derail. His novels, like those of Faulkner, range beyond the Southern grotesque. His fictions do promote a grim aesthetic unrivaled in American literature. Peopled by necrophiliacs and men sporting human ear necklaces, McCarthy's texts are grotesque, literally and literarily. Like most great novelists, though, McCarthy resists easy categorization. His

earlier novels parody, challenge, and even revise regional literary conventions; his later novels work through regional issues to explore our national traditions. Far from serving the literary establishment that feels compelled to label writers Southern, Western, etc., McCarthy's novels transcend regional affiliations by forcing us to reconsider national myths that define us as Americans. He creates a complex web of history, tradition, and myth that both redefines and refocuses our idea of who we are as members of a particular region (the South and/or Southwest) and as members of American culture.

My dissertation presents a McCarthy whose literary career falls into two distinct parts: Southern and Southwestern.³ His later fictions especially question canonical boundaries and illustrate McCarthy's own argument that the novel can "encompass all the various disciplines and interests of humanity." Yet, McCarthy's multi-disciplinary approach never steals his attention from the land and locale he is living in. This insistence that one's prose accord with the region about which one writes hampers any critical attempt to bind his Southern and Southwest/Texas novels together with philosophical certainty. By keeping his fictions grounded in

the concrete particulars of the region while at the same time allowing his characters to struggle with the "interests of humanity," McCarthy transcends region; however, he also binds himself to that region's history, tradition, and myth. The past of the South or Southwest becomes as burdensome as the oppressive Tennessee heat or the hot Texas sun, and McCarthy's fictions continually struggle to come to terms with both the traditions in which they were raised and the weather in which they must survive.

The first half of my dissertation is devoted to McCarthy's Southern novels. McCarthy's first novel, *The Orchard Keeper* (1965), openly challenges the Nashville Agrarian's Southern Manifesto, *I'll Take My Stand* (1932). In this novel about two men and a boy trying to come to terms with their community responsibility, McCarthy writes about the South as a region struggling to define itself in a modern age. The Southern community has no center, the contamination of industrialism having infested and destroyed its former circles. In the midst of this change, McCarthy's characters must decide where they stand as members of the new South. McCarthy, I contend, refuses to lament the

passing of an age, and he leaves his readers uncertain about his own Southern ideal.

The Southern community of his third novel, *Outer Dark* (1968), also lacks a center. Here, though, McCarthy revises Faulkner's *Light in August* by refusing to lament the Faulknerian Southern past. Instead, I explore McCarthy's offering of a darker, more hopeless version of Faulkner's novel, and a more violent, less nurturing Southern community. Southern community, McCarthy implies, is not Lena Grove's neighborly Faulknerian community, but a group given over to a kind of justice that proves self-serving, ineffective, and dangerous. However, despite his rejection and even mockery of Faulkner's idealism, McCarthy, like his characters, wants to hold on to some semblance of the Southern community, real or imagined. His various Southern novels attempt to revise, not reject, the Southern literary and cultural tradition, creating a place for him to live and work. Nevertheless, his final Southern novel, *Suttree*, reaches back into the Southern past of George Washington Harris and Sut Lovingood only to realize that the past is too burdensome to reclaim.

When McCarthy moves to Texas, he exchanges the old, agrarian South for the new Western frontier, expanding his more local concentration into a broader interest in our national past. His minute scrutiny of the culture surrounding him, though, continues. His *Blood Meridian* (1985), a novel often compared to *Moby Dick*, the *Inferno*, and the *Iliad*, on one level is a brutal examination of Manifest Destiny; on another, it is the story of a Puritanical God come to exact vengeance. But these are only two possible readings. The novel stands as something vastly more complex than simply a condemnation of Manifest Destiny or a historical chronicle of western expansion. Late in *Blood Meridian*, Judge Holden tells the kid that "Men's memories are uncertain and the past that was differs little from the past that was not" (330). History, for the Judge, has little to do with facts. Instead, in one of the few instances where the Judge's philosophy seems to mirror McCarthy's, the Judge contends that contemporary ideas about historical events depend largely on storytelling from sources that are by their very natures faulty. History, then, is about perception, not reality. In my chapter, I

contend McCarthy focuses on the myth of the frontier, and how we created that myth. He takes the Adamic myth of the West as America's last garden of Eden and gives us a new anti-myth. We do not see the pride of progress; instead, we see the post-expansion generations as "wanderers in search of bones" (337). Adam is not the myth-maker in McCarthy's world; the serpent creates the myth of the American west.

McCarthy's eye for cultural detail in this novel and in his next, *All the Pretty Horses*, foreshadows his eventual challenge to archival history and the boundaries historians place on one country's past. In two novels with simple western plots, McCarthy's characters constantly mingle with historical figures who exist on both sides of the border. This intermingling of history and fiction develops into McCarthy's challenge to what we have come to accept as our history. In *All the Pretty Horses*, in particular, McCarthy contends that the "absent" history, history not sanctioned by the state, can have as great a cultural effect as the history that historians have made a part of our consciousness. In his first installment of the Border Trilogy, McCarthy tells the story of John Grady Cole's

coming of age in Northern Mexico. Intertwined with his story, Cole learns the story of Francisco I. Madero, the failed president of Mexico in 1911-1914. Madero's story is Cole's story. The border between Texas and Mexico is a man-made construct that has only created a separate history for Texans and Mexicans. John Grady Cole learns that history is complex and the history of one Texan is the history of all men, Texan and Mexican. Borders cannot stop the sharing of history.

History, tradition, and myth bind McCarthy's novels together. These same things cause his novels to resist easy categorization. He truly is a writer who "has shown himself to be a serious writer . . . who explores in his fiction the most profound of philosophical questions" (Pilkington 314). My dissertation examines McCarthy's own exploration of not just epistemological issues for individuals, but national epistemology as well. McCarthy's works, like those of most great writers, confront those issues that both divide nations and cultures and bring them together. The myths and traditions, those stories that define and create any given region, are more complex than critics and commentators have acknowledged and McCarthy's work exposes that complexity.

Lester Ballard, both murderer and necrophilic, frightens readers and draws their sympathy. He is, after all, a child of God just like all others. McCarthy's complex mythos, a mythos that is all inclusive and without boundaries, is myth just like all others. The myth that was, for McCarthy, differs little from the myth that was not. McCarthy shows his readers both myths and implies that they do not have to choose either one, just recognize their influence on all lives.

NOTES

1. The one exception to date is Dana Phillips' article in *American Literature*, "History and the Ugly Facts of Cormac McCarthy's *Blood Meridian*." There are three book length studies on McCarthy: Varen Bell, *The Achievement of Cormac McCarthy* (1988); John Sepich, *Notes on Blood Meridian* (1993); and *Sacred Violence: A Reader's Companion to Cormac McCarthy* (1995). Also *The Southern Quarterly* dedicated the whole of its Summer 1992 volume to McCarthy.
2. See Simpson "Southern Fiction"; Sullivan "Model Citizens and Marginal Cases: Heroes of the Day"; *Young Tennessee Writers*.
3. I am referring to the Southwestern United States (Texas, New Mexico, etc.) not the Southwest of the Southwestern Humorists.

CHAPTER TWO

THE ORCHARD KEEPER: MCCARTHY'S ATAVISTIC

SYMBOL OF THE SOUTHERN TRADITION

While it is true that Southern pride existed well before the Scopes Trial of 1925, the ridiculing the South took at the hands of H.L. Mencken and his cronies helped rekindle Dixie pride. In the wake of that trial and the publicity it generated, Twelve Nashville Agrarians wrote and published *I'll Take My Stand*, their defense of the South and Southern values. While each writer composed his essay independent of the others, they all agreed that "If the whole community, section, race, or age thinks it [throwing off industrialism] cannot be done, then it has simply lost its political genius and doomed itself to impotence" (xx). "It," or industrialism, for the Twelve men who wrote the book, had become "The American or prevailing way."¹ Throwing off this dominant way meant returning, not regressing, to a Southern ideal of gentility, community, and agrarianism. This call to arms was largely ignored by the

public, but, "*I'll Take my Stand* was only a beginning. And though agrarianism became something very different from what they had hoped and intended, and its effects far from what they had aimed at, it was . . . to be of great importance to American letters" (Stewart 171).² In many ways, the context for understanding McCarthy's *The Orchard Keeper* (1965) mirrors the cultural context that inspired the writers of *I'll Take My Stand*. Both works confront the changing culture of the South in the industrial age.

The Agrarians' book attracted ridicule from many other Southerners. Erskine Caldwell and Margaret Bourke White's *You Have Seen Their Faces* (1937) attacked the idea of the noble agrarian by showing the true poverty of the region and by trying to show how the "south has always been shoved around like a country cousin" (25). The Southern Regional Committee of the Social Science Research Council, in conjunction with Howard Odum and the other sociologists at the University of North Carolina, compiled the statistics published in Odum's *Southern Region of the United States* (1936) which attacked and ridiculed the assumptions and conclusions the twelve agrarians made about the South.³

Despite the ridicule these critics endured, their ideas about the South mirrored the issues Southern novelists examined in their works. Allen Tate and Robert Penn Warren, in particular, also wrote novels struggling with the Southern past. In their novels and the novels of other Southerners, the issue of agrarianism versus industrialism took the forefront. The old order, agrarianism, represented the genteel southern past of plantations, segregation and slavery, and community values; whereas,

The increasing abstraction and complexity of political, social, and economic life in modern America tended to depersonalize one's relationship with his fellows, as did the mechanization of work and man's deeper involvement with the machine.

The erosion of the community and the family and the breakdown of traditional manners and morals were other aspects of the process. (Brooks 185)

This ever expanding industrialism, or the new order, is what the agrarians opposed.

The debate between the merits of the new order versus the old order did not begin, or end, with the Agrarians' book. In fact, six years after *I'll Take My Stand*, Margaret

Mitchell's *Gone With the Wind* (1936) trumpeted the virtues of the southern pastoral lifestyle, and in 1939 the movie showed to an even greater segment of the population the virtues of the old order. Her novel, perhaps even more effective than the intellectual Agrarians, defined the old order as a time outside of economics. When Scarlett moves to Atlanta and vows to never be poor and hungry again, her actions remove her from polite Southern society and she gets grouped with the scallywags and reconstructionists. She is less than desirable and draws the scorn of her social equals who do not discuss finances. Scarlett represents the new order that openly grubs for money.

William Faulkner reinforces this theme in his work. While Faulkner was more than just a Southern writer, his novels extolled the virtues of the old order to such an extent that Warren and the other agrarians asserted that "Faulkner was a traditionalist" (Grimwood 156).⁴ In many respects, Faulkner studies gained respectability due to the influence of Ransom, Tate, and Warren. This selfsame agrarian influence that helped Faulkner studies also kept him within the Southern literary dialogue only. In doing so, all Southern novelists to follow, including McCarthy, had to

bear comparison not only to Faulkner, but to the Southern tradition he existed in as defined by Warren, Ransom, *et al.* For the Nashville Agrarians, then, the Snopeses were taking over the Sartorises in the South (Gray 281), and Faulkner's work was the perfect example of the greater problem facing the South.

The agrarian/industrial debate was not only intellectual and literary, though, and the culture that grows out of the South influences the work of modern Southern writers like McCarthy. Comparisons to Faulkner become both a blessing and a curse, and being dubbed heir-to-Faulkner traps the young artist. Because of the popular image inspired by the Agrarians, Mitchell, Caldwell, and others, critics tend to read Southern novels with certain preconceived ideas: loose women, bestiality, fathers and mothers as drunkards, stupid country folk. Thus, Faulkner's attempt to write about the heart in conflict with itself is overshadowed by his geography. The outgrowth of the twelve agrarians, then, becomes a reinforcement of the Southern ideal, and their tract against the new order influences our reading of any Southern novel. We expect a Southern novelist to want to hold on to the past and privilege the agrarian.

Sociologists opposed the Agrarians and the critics who followed them. Social scientists like Odum, Leonard Reissman, William C. Havard, John Shelton Reed and others were uncovering the real south as a region that, after WWII, "became urbanized, standardized, neonized. Visually there is little difference between the superhighways and streetscapes of Ohio and Alabama. The cars, gasoline stations, gaudy fast-food, stands are the same" (Kirby 159-60).⁵ In spite of this social research explaining the similarities between North and South, John C. McKinney and Linda Brookover Bourque, in perhaps the seminal sociological study of the south, point out:

In aggregate, these three sources [historical, belletristic, and mass media] have drawn a picture of the South as a colorful land peopled by a variety of picturesque types of humanity--blacks, crackers, creoles, red-necked sheriffs, mountaineers, sharecroppers, itinerant preachers, snake handlers, planters, decadent aristocrats, klansmen, and political demagogues; a South that is characterized by poverty, ignorance, backwardness, agrarianism, traditionalism, and

extreme forms of resistance to change. (400)

Southern novelists have traditionally fit this claim. The two sociologist's point, though, is that "The writers of Southern novels and plays have written with dramatic rather than representative purpose" (399). The historic, belletristic, and mass media representation of the South, as Jack Temple Kirby's *Media-Made Dixie* (1986) points out, creates the public image of the South. Southern novelists and literary critics uphold the public image by discussing works as part of a region or as an outgrowth of a tradition.

A twentieth century southern novelist cannot escape the debate between the new and old order. Eudora Welty, Erskine Caldwell, and even Walker Percy write novels that involve the past versus the problems of the present. In many ways, history has become the God of the Southern novel. Cormac McCarthy's first published novel, *The Orchard Keeper*, seems to reflect the Southern literary tradition as defined by David Paul Ragan when he claims that

McCarthy depicts a world in which traditional embodiments of value--religion, community relationships, agrarian connections with the

earth--have deteriorated as a result of the increasing pressure of urban culture, commercial interests and governmental intrusions upon the lives of the novel's essentially rural characters.

(10)⁶

The temptation to place McCarthy in the Southern tradition that *I'll Take My Stand* represents is hard to resist. Such noted critics as Lewis P. Simpson, Walter Sullivan, Thomas Daniel Young, and Louis Rubin have all characterized him as a writer who has "continued to write within the required tradition, offering personal reworkings of familiar preoccupations and theme" (Gray 231). Jerry Leath Mills goes even further, calling McCarthy "The most southern of writers" (286). The desire to categorize McCarthy as a southern writer stems as much from his existence in Tennessee as it does from the content of his work. In other words, we expect a novelist from the south to want to hold on to the past and privilege the agrarian; therefore, for us, McCarthy's novels reflect the southerner's desire to remain different from the rest of the country and reject industry. But, even though *The Orchard*

Keeper examines the agrarian versus the industry debate, McCarthy refuses to embrace either side. In essence, he avoids falling into the stereotypical trap of lamenting the past by remaining ambivalent and ambiguous.

Agrarianism/industrialism is neither destructive nor constructive. They are both there as a part of the culture each individual must encounter and confront, just as the Southern writer must encounter and confront the ghost of Faulkner (kept alive and active by the literary establishment).

The epigraph to the novel gives an early glimpse of McCarthy's ambiguous response to this debate. Three men are cutting down a tree that has fused with the fence surrounding a cemetery. They "cain't cut no more on it" because "It's growed all through the tree" (4).

Interestingly enough, the three men cutting down the tree do not reappear later nor does the tree, but this seemingly disconnected opening does have everything to do with the novel's theme.⁷ Critics note that industry and nature come together in this tree. The problem is deciding whether the tree takes over the fence, or the fence attacks the tree. The men credit the fence for having "growed all through the

tree." The paradox, of course, is that fences do not grow and the tree must have grown around the fence. The opening, then, seems to portend that man's desire to fence things in (or fence things out) has overtaken nature to such an extent that they are inseparable. However, the intentional vagueness of this episode (where the men are, who they are, and why they are cutting the tree down) points to a more ambiguous possibility. At the end of the novel, "The workers had gone" and John Wesley "passed through the gap in the fence" (246). Assuming the workers in the epigraph are the workers in the final scene, they have not solved the problem. Neither the tree nor the fence stands. In essence, the tree and fence, nature and industry, cancel each other out and leave nothing.

This opening scene avoids making a statement about either agrarianism or industrialism and actually does little to enhance McCarthy's reputation as a Southern novelist. Critics of McCarthy thus far have been tempted to look at *The Orchard Keeper* as an "elegy commemorating a doomed way of life" (Bell, *Achievement* 10). In doing so, critics pigeonhole him into the southern tradition and belie the

complexity of his work. *The Orchard Keeper* bucks the southern agrarian tradition because McCarthy does not extol the virtues of the land, he simply shows the land. Unlike the agrarians, McCarthy does not call for a revolution to reclaim the old order. Concomitantly, he rejects the encroaching industrialism. Instead, he utilizes the south as a region not as a tradition, and, in doing so, he offers a completely ambiguous solution to the problems of the south where people might endure but one is left to wonder if they will prevail.

McCarthy's contribution to the debate between the old and new order is fairly simple. *The Orchard Keeper* shows a progression of the south forward to the industrial age, but it also shows the uncertainty of moving into the new order. After the epigraph, McCarthy introduces us to Kenneth Rattner, the community of Green Fly, and Marion Sylder. It seems no accident that a description of the community separates and connects these two characters. The narrative strategy of part one of this novel makes it clear that these two men are connected in some way also. The narrative alternates between Sylder and Rattner, especially as their

meeting gets closer. When they do meet, in Sylder's mind, "It began to seem to him that he had driven clear to Atlanta for the sole purpose of picking up this man and driving him back to Maryville" (35). Because, to this point, the narrative has painted a picture of Sylder as a good man and Rattner as an evil man, the temptation is to claim that Sylder and Rattner offer two contrasting responses to the new social order (Ragan 10). Actually, Rattner's actions are beyond the pale. He rejects the traditional community values by robbing those who try to help him, and he rejects the new order despite his apparent knowledge of the machine. Rattner's and Sylder's actions in the story place them squarely in the agrarian versus industrial issues of the text. Rattner rejects and is rejected by the community, a staple of the agrarian life, and we could expect him to embrace the industrial era. Sylder, on the other hand, tries to accept and be accepted by both orders.

Rattner's exile seems unwarranted, though. He was a "rakish [captain] in an overseas cap" once (61). Beyond that we know nothing about him except what he is not. He is not worth more dead than alive, as Legwater's absurd search discovers; he is not rejecting "govmint disability" for

noble reasons(72); he is not "a provider"(73), regardless of Mildred's claims, and he is not "a war hero" (240). Rattner is a "loathsome bastard" who instills in Sylder "a profound and unshakable knowledge of the presence of evil" (33).

Rattner's evil aura could be his rejection of the community. Our knowledge of him is a knowledge of omission, and for all Rattner is and is not, he is also not wholly ignorant of the coming industrial age. His talents, whatever they may be outside of stealing, are never told. We do know that he knows something about cars. When we meet him, he is walking to Atlanta. He walks to a filling station where

he had a long drink of water and smoked one of the cigarettes. There was a grocery store adjoining and he wandered in, cruising with a slithery sound up and down the aisles of boxes and cans and filling his pockets with small items-- candy bars, a pencil, a roll of adhesive tape. (8)

Remarkable in itself is the variety of items he steals. Only the candy bars serve any purpose, but this list shows his total absorption in stealing for stealing's sake, and his total lack of concern for other people's property. What really stands out, though, is his knowledge of mechanics.

After "he caught the storekeep eying him," he quickly thinks to divert him by asking about "tire pumps" (8).⁸ Standing in the store he invents a "new tire pump" that

you don't have to pump up and down thisaway

(pumping) but what's got a kind of lever handle

you go at like this (pumping, one hand).

That a fact, said the storekeep.

Bet it is, he said. Makes it a whole lot easier on a feller too.

What kind of car you drivin? the storekeep wanted to know.

Me? Why I got me a new Ford. Brand-new thirty-four, v-eight motor. Scare you jest to set in it.

(9)

Although this scene shows Rattner as a congenital liar, it also shows his ability to think quickly. He reveals an innate ability to invent not only lies but tire pumps, a mechanical device used in the most industrial of devices--the automobile.

Despite his apparent mechanical knowledge, Rattner clearly rejects the new age and new order of industrialism. He obviously knows the modern age. He was in the military,

and shows some capacity with cars and tire pumps.⁹ His knowledge of these basic mechanical devices shows that, instead of simply rejecting that way of life for the old way, he consciously rejects the old way too. His anonymity in the local bar highlights his exclusion from traditional values, but his actions on the road reveal an active removal from the community also. The first instance is the Green Fly inn incident, where he steals from his fellow citizens. In addition to that thievery, he asks for help from travelers and then attacks the samaritans. After getting a ride "t'wards town," Rattner lies about his "daughter . . . in the hospital . . . the one in Atlana. The big one there" (9-10). His lie is not the worst offense, though, and we soon find out that he has a "torn leg" and a "skinned and stinging" elbow. After staunching the flow of blood, he "ripped the billfold open, scattering cards and pictures. These he examined carefully along with the insides of the ruined purse, then kicked them away and tucked the money into his pocket" (15). Rattner's dismissal of the pictures is telling. He discards the signs of humanity and family and tucks the money away, much like one would tuck a child to bed. When he meets Sylder, he sinks to the depths of

depravity according to the ethics of the agrarian community. He chooses Sylder's car because he sees his "plates, Blount County-- that's where I'm from, Maryville. I figured you might be goin thataway. I need a ride bad . . . 'm a sick man" (33). He not only lies, he tries to appeal to Sylder's sense of community; then, he tries to kill him.

Sylder's life is a life of contradiction within the old and new order also. Sylder, though, is trying to include himself in the community not by working hard, but by economics, a staple of industrialism.¹⁰ He seems more confused than Rattner. At least Rattner flat out rejects both the new and the old order. Like Rattner, Sylder could survive in the community:

Marion Sylder labored with hammer and saw until late September of that year and then he quit, knowledgeable in purlins and pole plates, and with his savings bought some clothes and a pair of thirty dollar boots mail-order out of Minnesota, and disappeared. He was gone for five years. Whatever trade he followed in his exile he wore no overalls, wielded no hammer. (12)

Sylder's exile, self-imposed as it is, is his rejection of

the old system of community. He discovers, though, that his exile from his community is less than satisfying. Upon his return, he realizes that the community he rejoins offers him a false sense of community. He comes into the Green Fly Inn after his five year absence in a brand new Ford. Sylder

came through the door of the inn resplendent in gray gabardines, the trousers pressed to a knife edge, the shirt creased thrice across the back military fashion, his waist encircled by a strip of leather the width of a whip-end. Clamped in his jaw was a slender cheroot. On the back of his neck a scarlike gap between sunburn and hairline showed as he crossed to the bar. Then he propped one pebbled goat-hide shoe upon the rail, took from his pocket a handful of silver dollars and stacked them neatly before him. Cabe was sitting on a high stool by the cash register. Sylder eyed the coins briefly, then looked up. (13-14)

Cabe welcomes Sylder after "He studied the man again.

Wraithlike the face of the lost boy grew in features of the man standing at the bar" (14). Sylder clearly knows how to make sure the community welcomes him. He arrives with a new

car, new clothes, and a new haircut. His focus, though, is not on introducing himself until after he has his coins out. Sylder "eyes the coins" not the men around him. While he does talk to Cabe, he only talks to the others after he gives "these highbinders a drink" (14). What we do not see is the highbinders' reaction to Sylder after his offer. This paragraph focuses, instead, on Cabe and Sylder, who are both distinctive by the possible economic transaction. Cabe sits by the cash register while Sylder fiddles with his coins. Only after Cabe knows he has an economic reason to move does he, and only after Sylder knows he has a monetary reason to move Cabe does he do so. Cabe does not greet Sylder simply because he returned to the community. In essence, Sylder buys his way back into the Green Fly Inn crowd. This economic reintroduction contradicts the agrarian tradition that values people over money.

The contrast to Rattner's time at the bar seems clear until we consider that Sylder attempts to buy his way back into the community that Rattner has rejected. Sylder does not so much fit into the community, as he creates a fit in the community. He seems determined to separate himself (he buys new socks every Saturday), yet "he made it to the Green

Fly inn and rocked away with those old boozers to the last man, this affluent son returned upon them bearing no olive branch but hard coin and greenbacks and ushering in an era of prosperity, a Utopia of paid drinks" (29). Sylder's hard coin, though, has its limits, and his inclusion in the community with these "old boozers" is temporal and can only last as long as his coins last. Part of his problem, and his difficulty in creating a permanent place in the old system, is that he cannot survive in the old system. He has tried carpentry and working in a fertilizer plant. Each of these is a primary industry and staple of the Southern economy (McKinney and Bourque 404).

Sylder becomes, then, a man trying to find a compromise between the two systems. If Uncle Ather clearly represents "the primary avatar of traditional mountain values" (Ragan 12), and the government officials in the novel (the constable, humane officer, tank workers, social worker, etc.) "represent the intrusion of institutional and bureaucratic authority upon age-old lifestyles" (Ragan 13), then it seems clear that Sylder is trying to work between these two worlds. A "connection each has that one should be able to live as one chooses--so long as harm is not done to

others-- independent of society's conventions and expectations" connects Sylder to Ownby (Bell, *Achievement* 24). He also has the economic base, earned blockading, to represent the new order. As he tells John Wesley:

You think because he arrested me that throws it off again I reckon? I don't. It's his job. It's what he gets paid for. To arrest people that break the law. And I didn't just break the law, I made a living at it . . . So I been paid. Gifford's been paid. Nobody owes nobody. If it wadn't for Gifford, the law, I wouldn't of had the job I had blockadin and if it wadn't for me blockadin, Gifford wouldn't of had his job arrestin blockaders. Now who owes who? (214)

He knows it is the law, the governmental intrusion upon personal rights, that allows him to make "More money in three hours than a workin man makes in a week" (213). At the same time, though, Sylder is a proponent of traditional agrarian values. He has a wife in a cozy home. More importantly, he aligns himself with Uncle Ather's generation in his hunting. He sets out to teach the boy about hunting, and he accepts responsibility for the boy's welfare. When

they first meet, Sylder has "his hand on the boy's shoulder in an attitude of fatherly counsel" (102).¹¹ Later in the novel, he goes to Gifford's home to protect John Wesley.

Despite his existence in both worlds, Sylder cannot find a compromise, and he is baffled by both worlds. He cannot remain in the community without offering an "era of prosperity" based on economics, and he cannot exist in the new order and fully comprehend it. After Sylder reprimands John Wesley in jail,

He sat up, half rose from the cot, would call him back to say *that's not true what I said. It was a damned lie ever word. He's a rogue and a outlaw hisself and you're welcome to shoot him, burn him down in his bed, any damn thing, because he's a traitor to boot and maybe a man steals from greed or anger but he sells his own neighbors out for money and it's few lie that deep in the pit, that far beyond the pale.* (215)

Sylder directly contradicts his explanation and defense of the new order. Even more telling is his reaction to Uncle Ather's rebellion. Uncle Ather has made his statement against the encroaching new order. He shoots a crude X into

the government tank, and then he resists arrest and shoots four ATU agents.¹² Sylder, in contrast, has waffled and tried to take the best of both worlds. The two times Sylder responds to Ownby's tank shooting, he leaves confused. At four o'clock in the morning, while picking up whiskey to make a run into town, he hears gunshots and he

watched wide-eyed from his retreat in the bushes. He could hear the solid whop of the full cases lamming into the tank and the tank seemed to reel under the impact like a thing alive. There was something ghastly and horrific about it and he had the impression that this gnomish old man had brought with him an inexhaustible supply of shells and would cease his cannonading only when he became too weary to lift the gun. (97-98)

Ownby's attack awes Sylder. The next time he thinks about the tank shooting, he has just beaten Gifford. He goes home, gets in bed and "lay on his back, his hand over hers, the other hand stiffening. Suddenly, he had a bile-sharp foretaste of disaster. Why was that old man shooting holes in the government tank on the mountain?" (168). Sylder has just returned from, symbolically, shooting his own tank.

Gifford represents the new order that Sylder wants to protect John Wesley from, but, whereas Ownby knows why he is attacking the tank, Sylder's act is simply an act of violence on his part. He has no conceptualization of why he does what he does, and his confusion extends to Ownby's act as well.

There are other paradoxes worth examining. Both times Sylder encounters the tank shooting, he is involved in the new order. The first time, he is trying to circumvent the government rules by blockading in order to amass income, a staple of industrialism. (Clearly, McCarthy intends for us to recognize the joke on the government also. Sylder stores his illegal whiskey on the government land.) The second time he thinks of Ownby, he has just made a whiskey run, beaten Gifford in order to protect John Wesley, and he lays with his wife, "his hand over hers." The paradoxes are interesting, but Sylder's confusion is the key. He has tried to play both ends and he cannot figure either one out. He tells John Wesley one thing about the system, (he alternately attacks and defends the system), and he cannot understand true opposition to the system.

If Ownby's day has passed, and Sylder is the next

generation trying to compromise, we should expect John Wesley to be the new South at ease in both worlds. Ragan posits that John Wesley is seeking a compromise between Ownby and Sylder (10). John Wesley represents something much more complex than that though. He is fatherless and must learn from four sources: his mother, Sylder, Ownby, and the community. By novel's end, though, he has made no clear connection to any of his teachers, and in fact, he rejects all of them. Early in the novel, it appears that he will align himself with Ownby. Natalie Grant claims that "McCarthy fleshes out John Wesley's character with inferences of his spiritual kinship with his uncle" (66).¹³ Part two alternates between Ownby and John Wesley, and their connection seems to be solid. After all, just as Ownby "is the watcher of the seasons and their work," John Wesley "smiled at" "the chill in the air and smoke . . . for he was waiting and weathers and seasons were his timepiece now" (65). Both are in-tune with nature, fear sex (66, 89), and are outside the community, yet neither totally rejects it or is rejected totally. Uncle Ather longs to

move to them mountains. I would find me a
clearwater branch and build me a log house with a

fireplace. And my bees would make black mountain
honey. And I wouldn't care for no man.

He started down the steep incline.-- Then I
wouldn't be unneighborly neither, he said. (55)¹⁴

While Ownby does want to remove himself physically from the
community, he remains a spiritual kinsmen who refuses to
reject his fellow man. Ragan aptly points out that

Uncle Ather provides the novel's clearest moral
example: he lives alone, but his isolation is not
the result of alienation from regional standards .
. . or an attempt to circumvent the authority of
the new order . . . Ownby accepts his obligations
to the community, though he places a high premium
on independence. (13)

Ownby's exile is chosen, and it is a physical exile not a
total rejection of the community itself. What he wants, it
seems to me, is to maintain his order, and the only way he
can see to do so is in shooting the tank to stop its
movement. He resists arrest and flees over the mountain,
and, in perhaps the greatest example of his holding on to
his values (ie. agrarian values), Ownby barterers in an age of
money. It is in this matter of economics that John Wesley

separates himself from Uncle Ather. He cannot remain separated economically from the new order, and the "spirit of kinship" he "faces in following the old patterns of life reflect the new economic order" (Ragan 13).

John Wesley is still exiled from the community. In fact, he is probably more exiled than Ownby or Sylder. He and his mother live in a house that "was tall and severe with few windows . . . They paid no tax on it, for it did not exist in the county courthouse records, nor on the land, for they did not own it. They paid no rent on either house or land, as claimants to either or both properties were nonexistent in deed as the house itself" (63). The novel shows quite clearly John Wesley's struggle between the world of Uncle Ather, Sylder, and the new order. He wants desperately to connect to Ownby's world by becoming a trapper. It is interesting, though, that while trying to facilitate his entrance into Ownby's world, he has to reject that world by signing a promissory note for his traps. We should also consider that his trip to the city is marked by his selling the chicken hawk. In essence, to enter Ather's world, he has to participate in the government's intrusion on nature (the chicken hawk bounty) and sign a promissory

note. Economics soil his attempt to get closer to the agrarian tradition.

This incident is not the only one that separates him from Uncle Ather. In many ways, though, it exemplifies the paradox a fourteen year old boy has in the new South. He tries to find a way to meld these two orders and cannot. His inability to compromise these two orders is apparent early in the novel. While he does exhibit some of the same connections to nature Ownby and Sylder do, his connections do him little or no good. He is an ineffective hunter; he catches only one mink, and a housecat ruins the hide. All of his other hunting successes he lives vicariously through other characters because, despite his efforts, "no muskrats struggled in his sets" (87). Instead, what we have is a young man whose passivity grows as he gets older. As a young boy, he lives by nature's timepiece. After he buys his traps and taints his agrarian heritage with economics, he loses any connection he might have had. Ownby attacks the tank, Sylder wrecks, and John Wesley meets Sylder all on the same night. The orders (new and old) become blurred for John Wesley and resemble the side window-glass that "was laced with myriad cracks, shining in the beam like dewed

spiderwebbing" (100). Just like Frost's narrator in "After Apple-Picking" who

cannot rub the strangeness from my sight
 I got from looking through a pane of glass
 I skimmed this morning from the drinking trough
 And held against the world of hoary grass.
 It melted, and I let it fall and break(68),

and Stephen Dedalus's "cracked lookingglass of the servant" (Joyce 6) in *Ulysses*, John Wesley's life has become confused, and he becomes lost between two competing worlds. Whereas Sylder may be the progression from Ownby's age, John Wesley becomes nothing. What we see happening to him is a further removal from activity, and he becomes alienated and unable to act.

One of the earliest examples of John Wesley's stasis is when he meets Uncle Ather for the first time. Ownby tells him and Warn a story while they sit around the stove drinking wine. What is unique about this scene is not Uncle Ather's story telling. Instead, John Wesley's actions, or inactions, speak volumes. He never tells stories; instead, he fills in parts of other people's stories:

I believe you must of fit that there polecat hand

to hand, [Uncle Ather] said.

Can you smell it? Warn said. I cain't smell it my self.

He had to crawl back in a hole to get him out, John Wesley said.

I crawled past where he was at, Warn said . . . I got my rifle turned around and aimed the best way I could and when I shot, it like to busted my eardrums.

We could hear him shoot, John Wesley said. It sounded like a little old popgun up in there or something from on the outside. (146)

Warn goes on to finish the story, and then Uncle Ather tells his story about painters. John Wesley's role is to sit and listen, adding parts of the story without telling a story or being an active participant in a story. Even later in the hunting stories involving the boys, he is a passive participant, at best. On the one hunting trip we do see him go on, he falls into the lake (123). Even more telling is his commune with the old men at the store. We learn from Uncle Ather that Ownby knows things the men who occupy "for endless hours the creaking milkcases, speaking slowly with

conviction" do not know (the painter story). John Wesley tries to be a part of this order also, only to be rejected. Legwater and Gifford come to the store because he "Sure would like to get that car to the rightful owner" (117). This fraternity of old men remains silent, only John Wesley speaks up, and his speech gives him away. Not only does it show his exclusion from the old men, his speech draws attention to himself. Speaking excludes him from the old order, and at the same time, alerts him as enemy to the new order. After Legwater and Gifford leave, "The boy stood uneasily by the meat case. Some of the old men were rolling smokes with brown papery hands. It was very quiet. He went to the door and stood there for a while. Then he left" (118).

John Wesley has one last chance to fit into either world. When he visits Sylder in jail, Sylder tells him to accept the new order for what it is. Instead of doing so, John Wesley tries to revert back to Uncle Ather's world. He goes to visit Ather in the insane asylum to try to reconnect with what he lost. He gives Uncle Ather tobacco and listens while Ather displays his innate knowledge of nature and all that surrounds it. There are two key moments in their

conversation. After discussing things in general, Ather asks John Wesley "What do you figure you'll make?. . . I don't know, he said. Not much of nothin" (228). His response is important because it reinforces his confusion. He cannot find anyone to lead him into something. Sylder is in prison, Uncle Ather is in the insane asylum, and there "Ain't nobody much left around no more" (227). The second scene of note in their conversation occurs at the end. Uncle Ather has already asked him to look after Scout and he has agreed. As he leaves, he says

I'll come again.

No, the old man said.

Yes. I will.

Well.

He stopped again at the door and lifted his hand.

the old man waved him on, and then he was alone again. (231)

Uncle Ather knows, even now, that John Wesley will not return. We can read his response one of two ways. Either Ather says no because he does not want John Wesley to return, or he already knows he will not return. The question is what Ather realizes about a boy who is already

convinced he will do nothing. What we know by the end of the novel is that he does not go back nor does he take care of Uncle Ather's dog. In addition, the end of the quote is interesting because of the unclear pronoun reference. Uncle Ather waved him on (almost telling him to leave), and "then he was alone again." The pronoun is ambiguous. Is Uncle Ather alone again? Reclusion hardly seems worth noting considering his lifestyle. The "he" could refer to John Wesley. He has come to visit partly because there is no one left on the mountain but Gifford and Legwater, parts of the new order. When he leaves Uncle Ather he is alone again, and when he does not return, they both remain alone and outside any community.

Immediately after he visits Uncle Ather, John Wesley "stood in front of the courthouse again" (231). He wants to return himself to the days before he tainted his agrarian kinship with money. Unfortunately, he cannot. At this moment, he also realizes he cannot fit into the new order either. He asks for his hawk, finds out they burn them "And thow people in jail and beat on em . . . And old men in the crazy house" (233). He has no place to fit, and he then leaves. As the novel ends, we see John Wesley's return. He

arrives, visits the house that "was never his house anyway" (244). He "had already gone when they came from Knoxville, seven years after the burial and seven months after the cremation," at least three or four years (234). Although the chronology of the narrative is difficult to follow, we know that John Wesley leaves Red Branch shortly after Uncle Ather is interred and Sylder is imprisoned for 3 years. He returns sometime after 1945 to visit his mother's grave. Appropriately enough, what he remembers standing there is not his mother but the "smell of woodsmoke or the taste of old man's wine" (245).

In this moment, John Wesley's memories are of Sylder and Uncle Ather, not his mother, but those memories do not imply that he has found some compromise between these two worlds. In fact, John Wesley's state at the end of the novel is ambiguous at best and dangerously close to his father at worst. After seeing the house, the narrative tells us:

Young Rattner finished his cigarette and went back out to the road. An aged Negro passed high on the seat of a wagon, dozing to the chop of the half-shod mule-hooves on the buckled asphalt. About

him the tall wheels veered and disked in the erratic parabolas of spun coins unspinning as if not attached to the wagon at all but merely rolling there in that quadratic symmetry by pure chance. He crossed the road to give them leeway and they swung by slowly, laboriously as if under the weight of some singular and unreasonable gravity. The ruined and ragged mule, the wagon, the man . . . shimmered in waves of heat rising from the road, dissolved in a pale and broken image. (244)

As the novel opens, Kenneth Rattner stands by the road as a truck "whipped past and receded into the same liquid shape by which it came" (7). These two images, that of the opening and conclusion, could work together to show the difference between father and son, but, arguably, these two scenes reinforce their similarities. This scene, Young Rattner watching the Negro, is the first and only time in the novel that John Wesley is called by his last name. The people of the village and the narrator call him "the boy," or John Wesley. What we have, then, is a young man following in his father's footsteps. In spite of the tutelage of Uncle Ather

and Sylder, it is likely that Young Rattner will become apathetic to both worlds and reject both the industrial and the agrarian.

Earlier in the novel, Sylder is loading whiskey in his trunk when "He plucked one down [a green apple] and bit into it . . . venomously bitter, drew his mouth like a persimmon . . . Most people he knew could eat them. Didn't take poison ivy either. The boy John Wesley, he was bad about poison ivy. Bad Blood" (183). While Sylder is talking about poison ivy, the sentence structure of the passage bears noting. He thinks specifically of John Wesley, then he creates another sentence to separate "Bad blood" from the rest of the thought. Sylder is the same man who killed Young Rattner's father, a man who makes him feel as if he is in the "presence of evil" (33). Sylder's recognition of Rattner's "blood" before the murder adds credence to his ability to judge a person's bloodlines. The narrator could be playing with words, but in light of John Wesley's exile from the community, and his subsequent return as Young Rattner, we have to wonder.

The novel ends in ambiguous McCarthyesque fashion. John Wesley Rattner leaves, passing "through the gap in the

fence, past the torn iron palings and out to the western road, the rain still mizzling softly and the darkening headlands drawing off the day, heraldic, pennoned in flame, the fleeing minions scattering their shadows in the wake of the sun" (246). His passage west could be positive or negative. Is he headed out west toward the sunset or to a future that booms after the two world wars? His future is undecided; whether he will be like his father or not we do not know. He resembles his father insofar as he is an outcast in the town he grew up in. Marion Sylder returned offering hard currency; Rattner returned to anonymity; and Young Rattner returns to ignored waves (245-46).¹⁵ The temptation is for critics try to force a romantic reading on the text that just is not there. Arguably, John Wesley and the rest of the South are caught in this battle and the battle has left them impotent. The novel ends with John Wesley leaving and "no avatar, no scion, no vestige of that people remains. On the lips of the strange race that now dwells there their names are myth, legend dust" (246). McCarthy keeps his pronouns just ambiguous enough to hide his meaning.

That ambiguity makes a statement. It would be

simplistic to simply return to the agrarian tradition or move wholesale into the industrial age. This early novel from McCarthy does not make a definitive statement and condemn or endorse agrarianism or industrialism. In many ways it is an example of the paradox of progress. Uncle Ather's lifestyle is not only dangerous to the changing community, it is dangerous to himself. John Wesley witnesses the events of Red Branch and what he sees leaves him impotent. While *The Orchard Keeper* prefigures McCarthy's next two published novels with their Southern connection, on an even greater level, this novel foreshadows the ending to *Suttree*. In both novels the main character leaves a region that can no longer exist. What we see, then, in this novel is McCarthy's claim that the agrarian versus industrial battle is irrelevant to post-world-war adults. Either way, the South can no longer hold its young minds, and the West is the direction to travel.

NOTES

1. The Nashville Agrarians supported "a Southern way of life against what may be called the American or prevailing way; and all agree that the best terms in which to represent the distinction are contained in the phrase Agrarian versus Industrial" (ix).
2. See Grimwood, 146-57, for an excellent synopsis of the Southern Renaissance and the influence of the Nashville Agrarians.
3. See, in addition to McKinney and Bourque, Howard Odum, Leonard Reissman, William C. Havard, and John Shelton Reed for excellent sociological discussions of the changing South.
4. See, in addition to Grimwood, George Marion O'Donnell's "Faulkner's Mythology," and Malcolm Cowley's Introduction to the *Portable Faulkner*.
5. See also Gray's *Writing About the South*. Gray's most telling comment is that "The Southerners interviewed in effect associated the national system of values with one quite alien to their own" (226).
6. See Vareen Bell, John Grammar, and David Paul Ragan for critical studies of *The Orchard Keeper*. See Walter Sullivan,

Arthur Edelstein, Orville Prescott, and Granville Hicks for fine book reviews of the novel. See also, Lewis Simpson's *The Dispossessed Garden* for an excellent definition of the Southern pastoral. Grammar aptly establishes that McCarthy utilizes symbols of the South in his work, but he avoids calling him a pastoral writer. Sullivan claims that the novel, and McCarthy, lets us know the "Southern Renaissance is not over" (719).

7. See Ragan, page 18, and Bell, page 22 for discussions of the epigraph and the characters who cut the tree down.

8. The point of view in this scene is clearly Rattner's. The active voice implies that the storekeep is doing something wrong; hence, we see are seeing everything from Rattner's eyes. Bell points out, later in the novel, that the switch in point of view reminds him of "Ulysses in 'Wandering Rocks'" (21). The narrative switch resembles what Hugh Kenner calls the Uncle Charles' Principle, in which we, as the audience, not only see what the character sees, we hear the thoughts in language consistent with that character. In other words, we see what Rattner sees and the language of the scene is language that Rattner would use.

9. It seems safe, in Rattner's case anyway, to reject the

sociological explanation that military service changed men when they returned to the South (McKinney and Bourque 411).

10. Among the many differences between Ownby and Sylder are each man's economic transactions. Ownby barter for his goods and leaves no debt behind. Sylder leaves behind debt and clearly focuses on making "More money is three hours than a workin' man makes in a week" (213).

11. In another scene, Sylder offers some boys a ride into town(16). This scene epitomizes Sylder's paradoxical actions. He wants to be a helpful member of the community, but, as he offers the boys a ride, his thoughts are on impressing them with his car (a material possession).

12. Consider, too, that Ownby's loyalty to his dog contrasts Legwater's readiness to shoot strays. While it is true that "The novel's three narratives are linked by John Wesley's and the two adult's shared attachment to coonhounds" (Bell 17), Ownby clearly has the greater love for his dog.

13. Grant errs in assigning kinship between Ather and John Wesley. See page 145 for an explanation of why Ather is called uncle.

14. Grammar points out that Ownby's reflection about going into the mountains paraphrases Yeat's "The Lake Isle of

Innisfree" (21). Grammar's claim is that the "novel offers a positive image of pastoral order" (21). He may be right in some respects, but, at the same time, Uncle Ather is not the most stable man. He fears painters and cats, and the narrative, while making him seem noble, also shows his flaws. Uncle Ather ends up in the insane asylum because he is insane, according to the societal definitions, and in many cases, according to rational ideas.

15. Bell posits that "The scene is moving because we sense a dim kinship to John Wesley's mother and father in these watching, unresponding faces . . .striving naively to bridge the unbridgeable separation in human lives" (31). Grammar wants us to conclude that "The book ends tragically, that is to say affirmatively; we might think of it as an elegy for an older sort of pastoral community, nobly resisting but finally defeated by the gnostic will to deny history" (23).

CHAPTER THREE

OUTER DARK: MCCARTHY'S RE-VISION OF THE SOUTHERN COMMUNITY

One of the primary goals of the Nashville Agrarians was to recapture and revive the close-knit Southern pastoral community that shared common values and ideals. While the ambiguous ending of *The Orchard Keeper* indicates McCarthy's reluctance to enter the Agrarian/industrial debate of the South, his novel does seem to forecast the end of the agrarian based Southern community. John Wesley Rattner does, after all, leave at the end of the novel. More to the point, perhaps, is the collapse of the Green Fly Inn. When one of the community's central meeting places collapses, the men are left standing around outside in the dark. Once outside the comfort of the community, they literally lose their pants and their money to a man who will abandon his wife and child, forcing the community to help support them. In a sense, the novel examines not the death of community but the changing Southern community. McCarthy, in his novels, may

not support or reject the rising industrialism in the South, but he clearly rejects the Nashville Agrarian's utopic vision of the past. McCarthy offers a mockery of both the Southern community and his critical label as heir-to-Faulkner in his third novel, *Outer Dark*.

According to the Agrarians, regaining this Southern pastoral utopia required a return to family, community, and religion, the "staples of traditional southern life and literature" (Hobson 13). Their call for a revolution against the rising industrialism infesting the South was a prescription for the South and a reflection of the South's past. They lamented the lost past because they saw a loss of order in the modern age. In addition to the Agrarians, other Southern writers "maintained a belief in certain cultural values that they absorbed from their region. The two chief values . . . are the community-centeredness and hierarchy" (Spivey 15). These cultural values face each Southern writer when he writes, and the power of the cultural past exceeds the ability of the writer to ignore the issues all together. Critics compound the writer's dilemma. McCarthy, as heir to Faulkner, suffers continual comparison to him. Instead of the communal order the Agrarians wanted and

Faulkner portrayed, McCarthy tells the story of Rinthy and Culla Holme, two siblings who have sired a child. Their incest challenges the ordered Southern community that must deal with their crime against both God and normalcy. McCarthy directly confronts the Southern community of Faulkner's *Light in August*, parodying the people and situations of Faulkner's novel. His Southern community does not help, nurture, or condemn based on preserving the order of the South like Faulkner's community. Instead, McCarthy offers his audience a Southern community willing to condemn merely to condemn, and a community that maintains power via exclusion, and that exclusion leads to chaos and disorder. McCarthy's community contains none of the pathos of the Faulknerian community, again refraining from the stereotypical Southern lament for the past.

William Faulkner defends, and, in some respects trumpets, Agrarian values by creating an ordered society. Yoknapatawpha County may not be perfect, but it relies on order for its survival. The mere creation of an autonomous county that represents the whole of the South speaks of order for Faulkner. These novels open up a new world for his audience, but it is a world replete with familial

relationships, and his audience's knowledge of those genealogies and histories makes the novels better. In other words, Faulkner's dependence on detailed histories bespeaks the necessity for maintaining and creating an ordered universe. His novels do transcend regional issues, but his Yoknapatawpha novels and stories are firmly rooted in the South. Jefferson, Mississippi and the other small communities Faulkner brings to life assume a community centeredness, and the industrial "ogre reached into Mississippi to pick the fleecy staple, of course, but Faulkner preferred to dwell upon the fashion in which the monster devoured the woods" (Williamson 399). Faulkner focuses on how the individuals of the community interact with each other to preserve "its image of itself as a whole, harmonious organism" (Williamson 401). He was, after all, a "Southern nationalist and an heir of the Confederacy" (Cowley xxxii). His Yoknapatawpha novels reflect that heritage, and he creates a community of overlapping characters and shared histories. This Faulknerian community is a fairly conventional Southern community; the townspeople will overlook certain transgressions in favor of past history, and they will also condemn certain people because

of the sins of the fathers. Faulkner, for all his Gothic sensibilities, was a writer of the South and his literature reflects the ideals of the Southern Agrarians.

Of Faulkner's novels, *Light in August*, published just two years after *I'll Take My Stand*, offers the most comprehensive look at the Faulknerian community and is the best example of Faulkner's Southern sensibilities. Lena Grove, Joe Christmas, and Reverend Gail Hightower seem to have little in common, but community and the community's sense of order and justice binds these three characters together. Throughout the novel, each struggles for either community acceptance or help. When *Light in August* opens, Lena's relationship to the community is not obvious. Before we even know she is pregnant and unmarried, therefore an outcast from all that is good and decent, we know of her memories of being twelve years old and hoping to convince people "that she lived in town too" (1). When her parents die and she must move to Doanes Mill to live with her brother, she moves to a "hamlet which at its best day had borne no name listed on Postoffice Department annals would not now even be remembered by hookwormridden heirs-at-large

who pulled buildings down and burned them in cookstoves and winter grates" (2). Doanes Mill, a hamlet of five families and no train depot, is a dying community. Lena's desire to be a part of this community is ironic, and her inability to remain there is almost pathetic. More importantly than our view of Lena's psyche (which I examine later in this chapter) is our view of community. The first five paragraphs discuss Lena's desire to be a part of a town and the subsequent death of a Southern community. In the midst of this death, of course, "the sister-in-law was either lying in or recovering" and Lena "got one so quick" because of the paradoxical fertility surrounding her. The community itself may be dying, but there will not be a problem populating the next hamlet.

Faulkner's inclusion of community issues at the outset establishes the tone for the novel. Lena's journey is marked by help from various individuals. In essence, the whole of the Southern community comes together to facilitate Lena's search for Lucas. Concomitantly, Joe Christmas and Reverend Gail Hightower are distinguished by their isolation from the community.¹ Joe's primary problem is which community, white or black, he belongs too. The community

has rejected Hightower and he exists only as the town pariah. In all three cases, though, the community acts as the yardstick, and there are plenty in the community to judge. *Light in August* has nearly seventy characters, a number far greater than any other Faulkner novel (Pitavy, *Faulkner's Light*, 5). The large cast indicates the need for inclusion in a group. Everywhere these characters travel, they enter a community of some sort, an indication of just how pervasive community is in Faulkner's world. His characters cannot escape the group, and the novel itself ends only after Joe and Hightower come to terms with the community and their isolation from it.²

Cleanth Brooks points out that in Faulkner the community is a "powerful though invisible force that quietly exerts itself" (52). Periodically throughout the novel, the community gathers together to form a visible force. Usually, the occasions are major events-- the capture of Christmas and the burning of Joanna Burden's house. If not for the pastoral quality of the novel as a whole, the community uprisings might seem the norm. Instead, we see a community that helps others and works well together until

their order is disrupted. Even then, the mobs form to restore law and order. The crowds react against those who interrupt family, religion, and community centeredness; yet, they will give way to the appropriate authority figure and follow the rules. Most importantly, perhaps, is that the mobs get the right man. Whatever we think of Joe's motivation, and regardless of any sympathy we might feel at the injustice done to him, he does kill Joanna Burden. For that, the community punishes him. His punishment solves the community's problem, restores order, and reinforces the hierarchy necessary for a peaceful existence.

McCarthy's confrontation with the Agrarian/Faulknerian community appears in his novel, *Outer Dark*. His third novel parodies Faulkner's *Light in August*, and makes a statement about the Southern community in the twentieth century.³ McCarthy examines a community alive and well in the South. It is not, however, a community that rallies around religion and the plantation in order to nurture its sons and daughters in the way of the South;⁴ McCarthy's community rallies around the opportunity for violence and vigilante justice, leaving its victims, innocent and otherwise,

scrambling for some sort of relief from the very body that should offer solace and safety. Just as *Outer Dark* is a darker more hopeless version of *Light in August*, McCarthy's sense of the Southern community is a less romantic, less nurturing version of Faulkner's and the literary tradition. Faulkner's novel, in the final analysis, is hopeful. There is action and that action solves the community's problem and restores order. The essence, after all, of community is as a place of refuge and safety. McCarthy's novel remains consistently dark and static all the way to the end, offering its characters neither rest nor safety. As the novel ends, Culla notices someone who needs help, is cognizant of a need to be filled, and promptly ignores that need. Culla ends the novel without "sign of kin on this earth" (207). He extends his own isolation to the blind man he meets. Instead of reaching out and helping the man, Culla "waited still by the side of the road" (242). His actions in this scene are a microcosm of McCarthy's community. He offers no refuge nor seeks help from others. Faulkner's community rallies around a central Southern ideal, whether just or not. McCarthy offers us insight into

a different community, altogether.

McCarthy's revision of Faulkner's *Light in August* seems clear from the plot and structure of each novel. Faulkner's novel ends much the same way it began. The final chapter opens with a "furniture repairer and dealer" telling his wife about giving Lena and Byron a ride. Faulkner takes them to Tennessee and Lena's last words and the last words of the novel are "My, my. A body does get around. Here we aint been coming from Alabama but two months, and now it's already Tennessee" (378). McCarthy gives us a sparse, bloody, brutal, and exhausting version of *Light in August*. Rinthy and Culla, brother and sister, have a baby. Culla takes the baby to the woods and leaves him for dead. A roaming tinker finds the chap, delivers him to town, and goes about his business. When Rinthy discovers Culla's trick, she sets out to find her boy. Culla, though, has already left their home, such that it is, and the two roam the countryside, never crossing paths and receiving little or no help from those they encounter. Culla spends the bulk of the novel running from the law and mobs for various crimes he does not commit. His journey remains impoverished

and isolated. Rinthy, for her part, seems to genuinely search for her chap. Paradoxically, her quest for her bastard son is an attempt to right the wrong she committed with Culla and begin some semblance of a family. In contrast to Lena, who continues traveling, Rinthy's search confuses her and "she did not know what to make of it. She waited, but no one returned" (237). Our last image of her is sleeping in the glade, ignorant that the charred remains of her son are only feet away. In a perverse sense, she is united with her son and even spends the night with him. Her search is, ironically enough, successful, yet, unfulfilling.

Each novelist establishes his sense of the community from his title. McCarthy's title does have its roots in the Bible, the title parodies the wording of Faulkner's *Light in August*. Faulkner's title is, by and large, positive. Acknowledging that the title puns on Lena as "cow-like" (cows "light" when they give birth), most critics agree that the title is elegiac. Faulkner focuses on a unique aspect of his home state by emphasizing Hightower's obsession with watching the sunset from his window every night (Millgate, Introduction 8). The title is

anticipated in the Quentin section of *The Sound and the Fury* ("Some days in late August at home are like this, and the air this and eager like this, with something in it sad and nostalgic and familiar."), and confirmed by the streaming rays of sunlight on the dust jacket and the title page of the first edition of [the novel] itself, [and alludes] to a particular quality of light that [Faulkner] thought of as unique to his own part of the world. (Millgate 8)

The nostalgia Quentin feels--nostalgia Faulkner evokes through Lena in *Light in August*--is the longing for home and community, a community that, for Quentin, provides both solace and pain. The community, though, calls for him, and it is the loss of that sense of community that will eventually drive him to suicide. Faulkner creates pathos and sentiment for an era gone by where the benefits outweighed the flaws.

McCarthy's title, in contrast, offers no such lament for the past. The outer dark alludes to Matthew 8:5-13 where Jesus is healing the sick. He enters Caper'na-um and a

centurion begs him to heal his servant. The gentile's faith stuns Jesus and he tells

those who followed him, 'Truly, I say to you, not even in Israel have I found such faith. I tell you, many will come from east and west and sit at table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, while the sons of the kingdom will be thrown into the outer darkness; there men will weep and gnash their teeth.'

Whereas Faulkner's title looks to the past for hope and peace, McCarthy's title comes from a passage where Jesus threatens his own people with eternal damnation and banishment from the communion table. McCarthy's characters are those banished into that outer dark. He creates, in this hellish environment, the outer darkness where men are already gnashing their teeth. These children of God have been both abandoned and have abandoned the communion of saints required to be saved, and one gets the sense that if McCarthy's characters ever sat at the table of Jacob and Abraham, they would likely steal the silver.

The light that draws Faulkner's community together is the very same light that McCarthy's characters hover outside.

Each is a communal symbol, and herein lies the primary contrast between the two novels. Those within the community exist in the light, and those outside the community light (fire or lamp) are in the dark. This light/dark symbolism extends to the characters' psyche, as well. The characters in *Light in August* possess a certain self-awareness and they exist, by and large, within a light (after all, Faulkner himself believed in the ability of his characters to endure and prevail).⁵ Even Joe Christmas, a man who seems to belong to no group, has a definitive psychological awareness of who is and is not. He does not lack awareness, he lacks belonging. His confusion and knowledge of who he is not threaten to destroy a community that maintains order by keeping people in their defined places. Rinthy and Culla, on the other hand, "are of such limited self-awareness, not to mention awareness of larger philosophical or religious issues, that whatever philosophical burden" in the novel is provided by the reader of the story (Shelton 71). In essence, the characters of *Outer Dark* are in the dark, strangers wandering aimlessly within a short distance of their homes. Their psychological and spiritual blindness

hampers any real relationships. The light in August that attracts Faulkner's characters allows them to interact with each other, forming a bond. Concomitantly, the darkness that McCarthy's characters slink around in keeps them separated and confused. Darkness pervades the land and hinders safe travel, keeping people apart and isolated, both communally and psychologically.

The most obvious comparison between the two novels is Rinthy, Lena, and each one's relationship with the community. Critics have made much of Lena's status as an earth mother.⁶ She exudes fertility, dangerously so according to the women in the novel who help her. Her journey has a definitive reason. She seems in no real hurry sometimes and the distance she travels outweighs the destination. Through it all, though, she remains true to her search. She asks for Lucas Burch at every opportunity. Lena "knows where she is going . . . She walks like it" (Faulkner 5). Rinthy's life is somewhat similar. Like Lena, her father is dead, and she must live with her brother. Concomitantly, her incestuous act, a blatant attack against the community mores and order, occurs before the book begins.⁷ The similarities end there. Lena's

journey, in more ways than one, attempts to correct her error. She "reckon[s] a family ought to all be together when a chap comes. Specially the first one. I reckon the Lord will see to that" (14). Rinthy, regardless of how long she searches, can never right the wrong. No matter what she does, her chap will always be born out of wedlock and his uncle will be his father. Lena, at least, has a chance to find Lucas and marry him.

Faulkner, in delaying Lena's birth, offers her a chance to find Lucas and earn the community's redemption. Lena's motherhood is obvious; she is in a state of preparation and growth before birth. To the community, her need for help is as obvious as the sin she has committed. McCarthy does not afford Rinthy the same luxury. She has already given birth and shows no outward signs of her crime.⁸ Unlike Lena's birth, which comes in August at the end of the novel, Rinthy has her chap in March. This early spring birth rejects the notion of spring as a season of rebirth. Instead, we have the coming of summer: hot, dry, and dead. Culla's actions, by abandoning the baby, give Rinthy a chance to "light out" in search of her chap. Where Lena knows exactly who she is looking for, Rinthy looks for "Just somebody. This feller"

(111). Her search for a tinker with nary any cocoa is comical and pathetic partly because she meanders here and there. McCarthy adds to this hazy, dreamlike sense by keeping the setting and time period unknown. While the time and location of the novel is abstract, we do know that Rinthy and Culla are neither one too far away from each other. In fact, it becomes pretty clear that at times they talk to the same people. True to form, though, they remain isolated from each other. Whereas the Faulknerian neighborhood nurtures Lena almost in spite of itself, McCarthy's community offers water and helps Rinthy survive, but it never helps her find her chap.

The community's response to these two women differs almost as much as the characters themselves. When Lena lights out to find Lucas, she never doubts the help she will receive. She sits on the roadside "with unflagging and tranquil faith and peopled with kind and nameless voices"

(4). Her faith is so great, she

thinks of herself as already moving, riding again,
thinking then it will be as if I were riding for a
half a mile before I even got into the wagon,
before the wagon even got to where I was waiting,

*and that when the wagon is empty of me again it
will go on for a half mile with me still in it.*

(5)

Lena straddles the fine line between presumption and faith. Her ability to visualize that help is directly proportionate to the amount of help she has already received on her trip. What is most notable about the help is its effectiveness. At no point is she misled or sent the wrong direction. Even when people do not know Lucas, they help her move toward her goal, as if helping her find her mate were an innate and shared value of the strangers she meets. They agree that order in the family, hence the community, depends on Lena finding the father of her baby.

On her way into Jefferson, though, her meeting with Mrs. Armstid is the epitome of community nurturing. Mrs. Armstid's anger is a sign of the community responsibility she feels. To maintain order and an orderly community, the community cannot completely ignore Lena. Regardless of what she has done and the moral abhorrence of her actions, she is still a member of the group. The Armstid's treatment of her reflects that idea. Mr. Armstid picks her up and carries her home. His greatest concern is his wife's reaction,

which he clearly misjudges. Mrs. Armstid's directs her most vociferous anger at "You men . . . you durn men," and men's penchant for getting a woman in trouble in the first place. Mrs. Armstid "clashes the metal lids and handles the sticks of wood with the abrupt savageness of a man" (11), angry at Lena for letting herself get fooled into thinking Lucas awaits her not necessarily for her pregnancy. She gruffly orders Lena to "stay were you are. I been doing this three times a day for thirty years now. The time when I needed help with it is done passed" (11-12). Mrs. Armstid wants to help Lena. She "jerks off one shoe and strikes the china bank a single shattering blow" (15). By offering her "eggmoney," Mrs. Armstid gives Lena the most valuable thing the community has left to offer--money. Lena cannot be a part of the inner community (she cannot live in the house with respectable folk), but the community reserves the right to help her on the sly. Even Byron knows she cannot stay in Jefferson, but he also knows the community will not begrudge her a "nigger" shack out at Joanna Burden's because denying her creates disorder.⁹ Lena searches for order, and the people she meets respect that search.

In contrast to Lena, the community in *Outer Dark* does not

accept Rinthy as part of its responsibility.¹⁰ From the outset of the novel, she is alone. She and Culla live in a "remote" place rarely visited. Exacerbating the matter, during her pregnancy, Culla chases everyone away. Her isolation does not begin with her pregnancy, though. More importantly, perhaps, is that there is never much society to become a part of. Rinthy declares that "They ain't a soul in this world but what is a stranger to me" (29). The bleak isolation of these two seems odd only until we read on. During Rinthy's search, she does not encounter any crowds or groups of people. In each case, she meets individuals or individual families. Her journey, then, is from isolation to further isolation, excluding her from the order of community. Even her family life is a mockery of the community. She and Culla live as man and wife, sleeping in the same bed, oblivious to the damage their crime can have on the order of the communal system.

As if to emphasize her contrast to Lena Grove and to contrast the community response to these two, McCarthy includes a scene in his novel that revises Lena's scene with the Armstids. After various encounters on her trip, all equally ineffective, Rinthy gets caught stealing turnips.

The man who catches her sends her inside for lunch. This is the only married couple without children Rinthy meets, just as Lena only meets one married couple on her search. Lena, though, is fortunate. Mrs. Armstid recognizes the community's responsibility and culpability for Lena. The woman Rinthy meets

looked the young woman up and down. It's half a hour til dinner, she said. You would expect somebody to know what time dinner was after nineteen year now wouldn't ye?

Yes mam, she said, looking down.

It's when I ring it, that's when it is.

I didn't know, she said.

Him, not you. Where's he at?

He went to water.

Did he? She clapped her mold absently. Funny the way a man's day gets shorter and a woman's longer.

And you're here for dinner are ye? (103)

Rinthy is there for dinner, but she does not eat. Instead, the scene epitomizes the breakdown of the family that sits at the heart of McCarthy's South. This couple's children are dead, and the man accuses his wife, the "flaptongued

bat," of neglecting her children, implying that her poor mothering skills caused their deaths. Despite the initial offer of help, Rinthy receives no help and, in fact, "She eased her way along the wall to the door and got the handle under her fingers, turned it, backing carefully out as it opened. She saw the man smile. The last thing she saw before she turned and ran was the board of butter aloft" (108). The wife that Rinthy meets does not feel any responsibility for Lena, nor does she get mad at men in general. She directs her anger at her husband. Rinthy witnesses, on a small scale, the problem in the McCarthy community. This family is itself a miniature community, and the stability of that microcosm reflects upon the community at large. Mrs. Armstid gets angry, but she takes a much more global view of the matter. She does not attack her husband. Instead, she sees Lena's problem as a community problem. In *Outer Dark*, Rinthy's problem is irrelevant to the community. The woman's anger is selfish and turns violent. The violence of this scene is reflective of the community as a whole in McCarthy's novel. The Faulknerian neighborhood can be violent and bloody, but in the final analysis it will also nurture and help.

McCarthy's community, in contrast, will offer help individually, but in the end, misdirected violence is the tie that binds them together. Ironically, the two ministers, men of God, provide the segue into the differences in the communities' actions. Hightower sits in his window at dusk obsessed with his father's and grandfather's roles in the War between the States. His lighted window often acts as a beacon to attract Byron Bunch to come by and talk. He sits, every night, in "the final copper light of afternoon" thinking (347). Light connects these two ministers, as does life and death. McCarthy's revision of Hightower, and the his sense of community itself, begins by parodying the light Hightower sits watching. The minister and his boys

crested out on the bluff in the late afternoon sun with their shadows long on the sawgrass and the burnt sedge, moving single file slowly high above the river and with something of its own implacability, pausing and grouping for a moment and going on again strung out in silhouette against the sun and then dropping under the crest of the hill into a fold of blue shadow with light

touching them about the head in spurious sanctity
until they had gone on for such a time as saw the
sun down altogether and they moved in shadow
altogether which suited them very well. When they
reached the river it was full dark and they made
camp and a small fire. (4)

Their world is outside the light and beyond the pale.
Interestingly enough, it is the small light they make that
attracts Culla. And, in a bizarre twist from *Light in
August*, while at their campfire, the minister counsels Culla
that "Everything don't need a name," and that the "name dies
with namers" (174, 236). This advice in favor of anonymity
ends when "a dark smile erupted on the child's throat and
went all broken down the front of it" (236). Hightower has
his faults, but his counsel is pure and in Byron's best
interest. McCarthy's minister serves as town antagonist,
not pariah, and his advice will kill the soul as well as the
body.

Regardless of his epiphany in the penultimate chapter,
Hightower has affected Jefferson by bringing them together
for a common cause.¹¹ From the outset, he impresses upon

the townspeople not his desire to serve, but something else.

He descends from the train excited, but

they listened to him with something cold and astonished and dubious, since he sounded like it was the town he desired to live in and not the church and the people who composed the church, that he wanted to serve. As if he did not care about the people, the living people, about whether they wanted him here or not. (44)

The inevitable outgrowth of Hightower's selfishness is banishment from the community. The community asks him to leave "for his own sake as well as the town's, the church's" (42). Faulkner's sentence says much. The community envisions the individual and the town together as equal parts of one whole. The missing comma between his sake and town's connects the two entities. The church remains separate and secondary. The community, then, nurtures the individual in order to maintain the whole. Eventually, of course, the town must sacrifice Hightower to maintain order. He is "Done Damned. Gail Hightower Done Damned in Jefferson anyway" (43). That banishment comes in dramatic fashion as the church and community, as a whole, recognize and respect

Hightower's status as town pariah.

McCarthy's minister binds the community in a much different way. Faulkner's community comes together to protect itself by rejecting the infesting presence of Hightower. By the end of the novel, Hightower comes to recognize the justice of the banishment. In the final analysis, then, Faulkner's community is effective. They set out to help Hightower and themselves. It might take twenty-five years, but it works. In *Outer Dark*, the community's reaction is less effective. This mysterious minister, introduced as a pronoun with no antecedent, nameless, bearded and horrific, does bring the community together. The difference between the Faulknerian neighborhood and the McCarthy community is in the complete and total ineffectiveness of the community's actions. McCarthy's community forms a posse "for findin the man that done it," (95), and they leave men hanged because "It's kindly good advertisin for the public peace just now. Ain't it?" (141). Yet, we know the men hanged are not the guilty party. Culla, like Rinthy, moves from isolation to further isolation. The people he stops to talk to are alone and outside of town. When he does go to town, he almost always

leaves "walking very fast and after a while he was running again" (146). The community is ready and willing to blame anyone for the crimes of the minister and Culla provides a convenient target.

The minister, a man no one meets and survives except Culla, plagues this community, but the community's reaction to the minister's crimes separates this novel from Faulkner's.¹² Hightower causes his wife's death, and for that he is banished. The minister in McCarthy kills no fewer than four people, including one child, and the community never punishes him. Instead, Culla continually gets chased, attacked, and jailed for crimes he does not commit.¹³ The best the community can do is leave men hanging in a tree as advertising. To further compound the irony of community action versus community effectiveness, even Culla, the man they falsely accuse, escapes. The novel opens with the minister as the first character, even though he is not identified until page 129. Culla's dream, peopled by "A delegation of human ruin" and a prophet promising salvation, further connects the minister to Rinthy and Culla. This false prophet, a man who promises that "all these souls would be cured of their afflictions before" the

sun reappears, fails (5). "The sun did not return," and "The crowd grew seething and more mutinous and [Culla] tried to hide among them but they knew him even in that pit of hopeless dark and fell upon him with howls of outrage" (6). The prophet's failed promise results in the dream community's violent reaction against Culla just as the real minister's actions result in violence against him.¹⁴

McCarthy's version of the Southern community is not hopeful nor is it an image of some pastoral memory worth recapturing. With *Outer Dark*, McCarthy shows he is not afraid to revise the literary tradition; yet, he is also not necessarily rejecting that past. McCarthy is a Southern writer occupying a unique niche in the tradition. He reserves the right to criticize without leaving, at least, not yet. The literary tradition the Agrarians trumpeted and Faulkner reflected influences not just the writers that come out of the South, it affects the audience as well. Critics have tabbed McCarthy as Faulkner protege, and he lives up to that claim. He has the literary talent to warrant the comparison, but McCarthy clearly sees a different set of people occupying those small Southern towns. These good country people, concerned about maintaining some order after

the War between the States and the encroaching modernism, do not exist in some soft August light. Instead, McCarthy seems to say, the Southern community lives in complete disarray, coming together as an ineffectual body. These blind inhabitants offer a "dark parody" of progress, moving from swamp to spectral wastes that "reared . . . like figures in a landscape of the damned" (242). In his other novels, McCarthy implies that moving westward is at least an option. In this, his mockery of the Faulknerian community, the characters survive as aimless wanderers.

Despite the bleakness of the Southern landscape, McCarthy's next novel, *Suttree*, is his attempt to recapture the South and the Southern community. By the 1950's the South was in the city, not on the farm. The Southern pastoral aristocracy still existed, and so did the poor farmers. In the city, though, they were indigent drunkards walking the concrete streets and living in houseboats, not shacks in the woods. This violent community McCarthy outlines in *Outer Dark* reappears in *Suttree*. This violence, in many respects, eventually drives him from the South.

NOTES

1. *Light in August*, then, taps into what might be the dominant theme of contemporary literature: "the plight of the isolated individual cut off from any community of values" (Brooks, *Yoknapatawpha Country*, 54).
2. See Brooks, *William Faulkner: Yoknapatawpha Country*, for a discussion of Hightower's final act as a reentrance into the community. See Alexander Welsh, page 134+, for the opposing view. He sees Hightower's final act as a minimal effort that is as "useless as it is feeble." See also R.G. Collins, "The Other Competitors for the Cross: Joanna Burden and Gail Hightower."
3. Bell points out that

Outer Dark, in short, is as brutally nihilistic as any serious novel written in this century in this nihilistic country. Faulkner's influence upon McCarthy is pervasive, and *Outer Dark* is conducted audaciously in (or perhaps as) the very shadow of *Light in August*; but McCarthy is, if anything, even less sentimental about deliverance than Faulkner was. (*Achievement* 34).

McCarthy's world may be dark, but there is order and there are rules. McCarthy's differences with Faulkner extend well beyond mere examinations of sentimentality. His community believes in rules and laws; they just misapply their rules. Grammar also claims that *Outer Dark* is a darker version of *Light in August*. Grammar goes on to posit that McCarthy is signaling the "doomed pastoral community" (26). This community hardly seems doomed. It may be violent and deadly, but it is an active community.

4. See Fred C. Hobson for a discussion of the Southern writer and trends of the last five years. See also Lewis P. Simpson, *The Dispossessed Garden*, Louis D. Rubin, Jr., *The History of Southern Literature*, W.J. Cash, *The Mind of the South*, and Ted R. Spivey, *Revival: The Southern Writer in the Modern City*. The unifying idea each writer attempts to make is that Southerners feel that community equals order.

5. See Doreen Fowler for a discussion of the light and dark images in *Light in August*. Fowler posits that light and dark work as dual images but that each character is clearly associated with one or the other.

6. For a discussion of Lena as an earth goddess, see Vickery

p. 80, and Millgate's *The Achievement of William Faulkner* p. 125-26. Recent feminist criticism of Faulkner, and Lena, has called this view into question. See Wittenberg p. 115 for a discussion of some problems with this view of Lena.

7. Both pregnancies are crimes against the community: Lena's because she has no husband; Rinthy's because she has no husband and because Culla is the father. Rinthy's cannot be erased and poses the greatest threat to the community.

8. Rinthy has given birth, but has no life to prove it, and "One of the bleak jokes of [the novel] is . . . the plight of Rinthy Holme, filled with milk that goes unused as she searches for her banished baby" (Witek 139). Lena gives birth to a healthy baby that travels with her; Rinthy gives birth to a "puny" boy that Culla buries. The two birth scenes contrast as well: Lena's is clean and problem free; Rinthy's is bloody and graphically depicted. The difference could be McCarthy's penchant for explicit description, but it could also be the symbolic difficulty Rinthy has giving birth versus Lena, who, after all, seems built to reproduce. We expect Lena to have a flawless birth. Rinthy's incestuous pregnancy, forced or not, leaves little doubt as to the eventual fate of her child.

9. In many ways, Faulkner contrasts the community's treatment of Lena and Joe. They reject Joe, make him an outsider, and the chaos he causes is perhaps a statement of their treatment of him. The community politely accepts Lena, and she passes through Jefferson without ever really threatening the social order. Lena's life force balances the death that seems to surround Christmas.

10. The community in *Outer Dark* does seem to want to help. Unfortunately, they are completely ineffective. The response of the community reflects Rinthy's lack of direction. She does not know where she is going or where she is from. The community's response is one of mistrust. See page 57 for a scene indicative of her lack of information. Both Bell and Grammar contend that Lena's search is honest and heartfelt. It may be, in spite of her ignorance, but her search seems less important than the response to her search.

11. When Hightower moves to Jefferson, he sees "the faces of old men naturally dubious of his youth and jealous of the church which they were putting into his hands almost as a father surrenders a bride" (362). Yet, Hightower recognizes that "they did their part; they played by the rules. . . . I

was the one who failed, who infringed. Perhaps that is the greatest social sin of all; ay, perhaps moral sin" (362). In this penultimate chapter of the novel, Hightower recognizes that he is his "dead grandfather" and that the life he led has been a travesty at the community's expense. He "took [his wife] as a means toward [his] own selfishness. As an instrument to be called to Jefferson; not for My ends, but for [his] own" (364). Hightower recognizes his own selfishness.

12. Grammar contends these "avengers, apparently summoned by the community, and particularly Culla and Rinthy's sins, end by killing their child, and perhaps more heartlessly, sparing the incestuous parents" (26). Grammar seems to be equating the minister and his friends with the Greek Furies. We could read *Outer Dark* as a tragedy if Culla's request for his son is heartfelt and honest.

13. The pig herder scene is one of the more comic in McCarthy's oeuvre. John Ditsky points out that "McCarthy parallels some of Faulkner's great horse scenes with what must inevitably remind the reader of the Biblical account of the Gadarene swine; the herd of hogs being driven by in *Outer Dark* can carry men along with them" (6). Here again,

Culla is falsely accused of causing the hogs to stampede. This scene also is indicative of McCarthy's ability to parody the pastoral. These shepherds are definitely not writing poetry and living the pure life. The only love going on here is between man and pig.

14. Bell contends that Culla does not bring "any of the particular misfortunes on himself" (39). The community does misjudge Culla's guilt for specific crimes. However, Culla is guilty of two major crimes for which he is never really punished: incest and infanticide.

CHAPTER FOUR

ALMOST ANOTHER NAT'RAL BORN DURN'D FOOL:

MCCARTHY'S OWN SUT LOVINGOOD

While McCarthy was writing and publishing his first three novels, *The Orchard Keeper*, *Outer Dark*, and *Child of God* (1973), he was writing *Suttree* and creating "Cormac's cretins" (Winchell 295). *The Orchard Keeper* shows his break from the agrarian tradition; *Outer Dark* offers a revision of the Faulknerian neighborhood; and *Suttree* puts the exclamation point not only on his literal exit from the South but on his artistic farewell, also. His work, to this point, has combined the literary myth with the social reality of the South, to examine both the South of tradition and the South ignored. McCarthy has attempted, in many ways, to reinvent the New South, a South not of Faulkner and the Agrarians, but a South of individuals and marginalized characters. These outsiders have shaped a Southern myth distinct and unique, confronting the stereotypical South critics expect and define. McCarthy challenges the accepted

myth by reaching back to the literary past of the South. He shows that the oppressive literary history of the South hampers change and progress in a region content to remember and rely on the past. Cornelius Suttree is the tired Southern hero, unable to muster the strength and energy necessary to exist in the South.

In *Suttree*, McCarthy reaches back to one of the founders of the literary South in order to examine the community of Knoxville. Both the title of the novel and the central characters's name allude to George Washington Harris' *Sut Lovingood*.¹ *Suttree* is McCarthy's attempt to remain in the South. *Sut Lovingood* reformed his social scene and worked to repair the order disrupted by outsiders. McCarthy's *Suttree* fails miserably in his attempts to act like *Sut* and reform a Southern community beset by disorder. His failure symbolizes McCarthy's own abandonment of a South he finds too burdensome to hold on to. When *Suttree* leaves Knoxville, McCarthy leaves "the sad purlieus of the dead immured with the bones of friends and forebears" (471).

When McCarthy writes a novel set in Tennessee titled *Suttree*, he automatically taps into the *Sut Lovingood*

tradition. We expect him to allude to Sut's qualities as an active country boy whose wit exceeds all our expectations. Sut is, after all, "an illiterate hill-country fellow of East Tennessee who, in spite of his calling himself a fool, has culled enough wisdom from experience to make him discriminate in his choice of men" (Howell 312), as well as "the ironic hero . . . the anti-hero, his father is the anti-father, so the Lovingood home is . . . the anti-home" (Rickels 47-48).² That influence is clear, but the reason and conclusions we should draw from the connections are less clear. Sut Lovingood worked to reform. If McCarthy was reaching back into the past to tap into a character's reputation in order to call for a Southern Renaissance or revolt against outside forces impinging on the rights of Tennessee, he chose wisely. However, McCarthy creates a character who just may be the most passive protagonist in American literature. Cornelius Suttree encounters many of the same type of people and situations Sut Lovingood encountered, but Buddy stands by and lets the river carry him away. The 'tree' part of McCarthy's title, then, becomes not the implication of "reaching towards life and sunshine" (Marius 4), but a tree that has rotted and floated away with

all the other fecal waste and miasmatic river stench. Suttree leaves because an epoch of the South's history is dead and he learns, that despite his best efforts, he can not revive that Southern past.

When Harris wrote the Sut Lovingood yarns, he participated in an American tradition. He created a character that Twain, Stephen Longstreet, Robert Penn Warren, and Flannery O'Connor enjoyed. William Faulkner went so far as to discuss Harris' creation in an interview about his favorite writers and characters.³ What Faulkner and others liked about Sut, as is clear from their work, is "Harris's special legacy to American literature . . . He lets Sut do virtually all the talking, moving the authority of a reported tale away from the educated frame to the rustic himself not some sophisticated and stuffy traveler from the east" (Ross 280). Sut becomes "another example of the creature who tended to become an obsession with the humorists, the primitive or natural man, who stands on the periphery of conventional society and yet can still offer significant comments on it" (Gray 9).

Sut did represent the south for Harris. He was anti-establishment and an active reformer of the contemporary

scene. But, he "is not a rebel against institutions. Rather, he is a conservative, like his creator, lamenting the falling off from the standards of the past" (Howell 318).

When Sut evolved in the yarns as the wise fool, Harris placed Sut squarely within one of the most persistent European literary traditions used for the artistic criticism of contemporary societies and human nature, when the funny fellow in the motley dress and cap and bells . . . passed out of existence and into a symbolic figure who inspired a great body of imaginative literature, tradition granted him in exchange for his lack of normal wit a divinely inspired higher wisdom . . . Sut is a whole ship of fools, compressed into one individual with his feet firmly planted on American soil. (Inge 22)⁴

Sut's antics are brutal, hard-hearted and he is, in the words of Edmund Wilson, "a peasant squatting in his own filth" (150). Sut does act, though. He sees the "threats to his liberty as organized religion and organized society, represented by the church on the one hand by the sheriff on the other" (Rickels 52). His pranks, then, attack those

institutions. Circuit riders, itinerant preachers, and small town sheriffs have no chance in the face of Sut's ire. He shows that "one's fate is determined by how one conducts himself at the moment of action" (Rickels 98). Sut's Preface to his yarns testifies to his desire to act. He tells his readers that

Ef eny poor misfortinit devil hu's heart is onder a millstone, hu's ragged children am hungry, an' no bread in the dresser, hu is down in the mud, an' the lucky ones a-trippin him every time he stuggils tu his all fours, hu hes fed the famishin an' is now hungry hissef, hu misfortins foller fas' an' foller faster, hu is so foot-sore an' weak that he wishes he wer at the ferry--ef sich a noe kin fine a laugh as is remembered wif his keerless boyhood, atwixt these yere kivers--then, I'll thank God that I hes made a book, an' feel that I hev got my pay in full. (26)

The altruistic speech comes toward the end of the Preface, after he has already claimed that "I dusn't 'speck this yere perduckshun will sit purfeckly quiet ontu the stomicks ove sum pussons--them hu hes a holesum fear ove the devil, an'

orter hev hit, by geminy" (25). His yarns bear that claim up. As the narrator of his own yarns, we hear it straight from the horse's mouth, as it were, thus lending credibility to the tale. The group Sut wants to bind together is his fellow hill-country citizens. He sees the troubles caused by those on the outside, ministers and sheriffs, imposing laws on him and his neighbors. His yarns expose that oppression and show active reformation.

In choosing to name his character and novel after Sut, McCarthy compels us to compare the two characters. We discover that Suttree is not Sut Lovingood, even if he wants to be. He has dropped out of his privileged life to live "in a houseboat or something" along the river (15). If there is a city equivalent to backwoods Appalachia, and all that implies, McNally Flats is it. The populace is illiterate, crude, and sorely lacking in upward mobility. His father, tells Suttree,

that the world is run by those willing to take the responsibility for the running of it. If it is life that you feel you are missing I can tell you where to find it. In the law courts, in business, in government. There is nothing occurring in the

streets. Nothing but a dumbshow composed of the helpless and impotent. (13-14)

According to his father, Suttree simply squanders his life away amongst the denizens of the city; however, it seems simplistic to assume that he moves to McNally Flats just to spite his father. Shortly after Suttree tells us about his father's letter, Uncle John visits. During their conversation, Suttree attacks his father's privilege and sounds like a modern Sut Lovingood. Both Sut and Suttree abhor the privileged and seem committed to helping average people battle the system. Suttree points to his father's feelings of superiority and his assumed benevolence. He thinks of his wife as "a housekeeper. He has no real belief even in her goodness. Cant you guess that he sees in her traces of the same sorriness he sees in you? . . . he probably believes that only his own benevolent guidance kept her out of the whorehouse" (20). His diatribe attacks not only on his father but also on Uncle John who thinks his "father and his kind are a race apart. You can laugh at their pretensions, but you never question their right to the way of life they maintain" (19). Suttree seems to be in McNally Flats to help the poor and to reform the system.

However, Uncle John leaves unconvinced that anything in the social system is awry. Suttree's appeal falls on deaf ears, and he fails to reform even the members of his own family.

Consistently throughout the novel, Suttree tries to recapture the magic of Sut Lovingood. Each time, he fails, but the epitome of his failure comes late in the novel when he abandons all and heads for the hills. Suttree, by now, realizes he can not become the Sut Lovingood of McNally Flats so he returns to the birth place of Sut. Suttree's journey, at times resembling some native American hallucinogen ritual, reveals to him that

some doublegoer, some othersuttree eluded him in these woods and he feared that should that figure fail to rise and steal away and were therefore to come to himself in this obscure wood he'd be neither mended nor made whole but rather set mindless to dodder drooling with his ghostly clone from sun to sun across a hostile hemisphere forever. (287)

Suttree, the college educated, son of aristocrats, meets the illiterate Tennessee hillbilly, his othersuttree, out poaching a little meat. The hunter he meets is a much truer

version of Sut, and he recognizes at once that Suttree is "loony as a didapper" (288). Suttree

wafted up the hem of his blanket and gestured at the hunter with it. Begone, he said.

The hunter recoiled and brought his crossbow up again.

Begone I say, said Suttree, shucking the tattered blanket at him.

Why you dipshit idjit if anybody begones anywhere it'll be you with a arrowbolt up your skinny ass.

(288-89)

Suttree's journey among the denizens of Knoxville culminates in this moment. He has repeatedly faced opportunities to rebel and reform, and in each case, he does not follow through with his efforts.⁵ In the hills of Appalachia, he meets a direct descendent of Sut, and he is not up to the task. More importantly, when "Sut" sees Suttree, he not only rejects him, he threatens to shoot him. Not only can Suttree not recapture the past, the past does not want him to recapture it.

Suttree's journey to this meeting in the mountains is a long and arduous journey for him, but for McCarthy, and the

reader, the comparison between Sut and Suttree begins early in the novel. If McCarthy's epigraph to the novel intrigues us and we do not abandon this "Encampment of the damned," the form of the story itself seems to fit into the Southern folk tradition by telling yarns.⁶ The net effect of this style creates a novel we could begin to read at just about any given point, much like Sut's yarns which are autonomous tales. We could start the novel on page 300 or page 3. (McCarthy himself begins the novel out of chronological order.)⁷ In opposition to Sut Lovingood, who narrates and stars in his tales, Suttree neither narrates nor participates in the action of the tale. Directly after Suttree's Uncle John leaves the houseboat, Suttree walks to Front Street and down to Ab Jones'. To this point Suttree has talked with three men: Joe, the Ragpicker, and Uncle John. Joe calls him Suttree; the Ragpicker calls him nothing; and Uncle John addresses him as Buddy. The story seems fairly traditional in form, so far. Suttree has run his lines, slept, and visited. At Ab Jones', though, we have our first foray into the folk tale, and our first intertextual allusion to Sut Lovingood. Suttree walks back, and a man asks, "What'll you have, Sut" (21). For the next

five pages we have a tale involving "Early times," or "Early tombs is more like it" (24). Sut's name introduces the yarn, but the similarities stop there. Sut offers order through chaos. McCarthy's tales usually end in a drunken stupor, symbolic of the state of confusion Suttree himself is in at the time.

This novel is more than a collection of yarns, though. Suttree's aloof and passive inclusion in these tales indicates his paradoxical desire to be Sut Lovingood's Southern heir. Suttree abandons his past life to search for a simplicity he feels exists among the riff-raff.⁸ He has notions of helping those in need, but consistently, Suttree prefers to be acted upon rather than to act. Even though Suttree associates with these reprobates, he watches their actions "with something like amusement" (73). He is not entirely amused, nor is he entirely alive. During a drunken escapade beginning with a tale involving a fart that has "settled in" the characters' hair (71), Suttree passes out, enters a room, and urges himself to "Appear plausible" (77). Even he knows his existence here is perilous. He is trying to play the role of the hill-billy trickster and he keeps failing. Those around him fulfill their roles, only Suttree

keeps passing out. He may be "hell when he's well" (299), but the rest of the time "He'd often stood along the edges of the crowd for some stray scrap of news from beyond the pale" (66).

For Suttree to deserve his name, then, he needs to overcome his passivity and maintain Sut's tradition of attacking the educated and the overtly religious. Their confidence in their superiority is pompous, and Sut works hard to bring them back to reality. Despite his efforts to emulate Sut, certain facts about Suttree's life do not allow him to succeed. Obviously, Suttree's education and position at birth contrast with Sut's. Suttree is a city-boy in contrast to Sut's "illiterate hill-country fellow." Suttree's father, we assume, is a lawyer, business man, or holder of some other prominent position in Knoxville, and perhaps even Tennessee.⁹ He never had to "act a mule" like Lovingood's father. Their primary differences are probably in their education. Sut is a "nat'ral born durn'd fool" (83); Suttree has a college education and he sprinkles his thoughts with Latinate phrases. Early in the novel, in a scene in the workhouse, Callahan asks to borrow the newspaper,

Suttree folded the paper and tried to remember how you tucked them in for throwing.

Goddam Suttree, was you not ever a paperboy?

No.

I guess you was on a allowance.

The man had turned out of his cot and come up the hall.

I used to know how to roll them but I've forgotten.

Here. Let me have it. Fuckin educated pisswillies.

He goes to college but he cant roll a newspaper.

What do you think of that little buddy? (46-47)

Callahan asks Gene, but he could be asking us. Suttree's education, while superior to Sut's, is useless outside of the classroom. When faced with real world problems, even ones as small as rolling a newspaper, Suttree's wit and Latin do not help. Callahan's comment sounds eerily familiar to Sut's comments to George in his Preface: "fur ove all the fools the worild hes tu contend wif, the edicated wuns am the worst" (25).

While these two opinions seem to draw Suttree and Sut together, Suttree's education taints him. He moves to a

world in which animal instinct translates into survival and to a world where deep thinking leads to floor buffers bouncing off one's head. Instead acting and reacting naturally to any given situation like Sut, his "wisdom" impedes his ability to act.¹⁰ After another night of drunken debauchery, one in which Suttree gets urinated on and one in which he is, to repeat Wilson, "squatting in his own [and other's] filth," Suttree meets two policemen who ask what is all over him:

He looked down. When he raised his head again he fixed his eyes across the cruiser's roof upon the bleak row of old houses with their cloven hanging clapboards and their cardboard window panes. A few blackened trees stood withering in the heat and in this obscure purgatory a thrush was singing.

Mavis. Turdus Musicus. The lyrical shitbird.

I spilled something on me, he said. (83)

"The educated wuns am the worst." Suttree does nothing to fight the "sheriffs." Instead of acting, he falls back on his education. While his response is witty, it does nothing but land him in jail.

It is, though, Suttree's family position that truly

separates him from Sut. If Suttree was following in Sut's footsteps, he would reject the aristocracy of his father in order to return to some pastoral era of the old South. Sut becomes the natural man, untouched, unspoiled, and uninhibited by the city-life. His position as the outsider gives him insight and his fool's cap is really that of the wise fool. Sut, and by virtue of his disaffected rejection and rebellion from the order of society, "symbolize[s] . . . the old South's vigor and fertility" (Current-Garcia 129).¹¹ Suttree does have a chance to revisit a pastoral past and symbolize the "vigor and fertility" of the Tennessee past. After he leaves Clayton and Aunt Martha's, where he has just revisited his family's past through photographs, "He came out on the bluff and went on up the hill toward the house" (134). The article in front of house denotes a specific house, and one Suttree seems to know. Earlier he had passed "the old mansion" (121). These two homes seem to be the same place and they appear to be his ancestral home. Located outside the city where Gene earlier had "A vision of bleak pastoral that at length turned him back toward the city" (99), Suttree finds a house in a state of advanced disrepair. The "ruined plaster, the buckled wainscot, the

wallpaper hanging in great deciduous fronds. Small mounds of human stool with stained shreds of newsprint" (135).

The house, symbol of the southern pastoral, has literally gone to shit. Suttree, even if he were fighting to return to that past, could not get it. There is no "clemency" for what has "happened here" (135). Suttree remembers his grandfather telling him "that they had witnessed a thing against which time would not prevail" (136).¹² This "thing" is not a world Suttree wants to retain anymore, though. As he leaves, he goes

out through the kitchen and through the ruined garden to the old road. Reprobate scion of doomed Saxon clans, out of a rainy day dream surmised. Old paint on an old sign said dimly to keep out. Someone must have turned it around because it posted the outer world. He went on anyway. He said that he was only passing through. (136)

Suttree leaves via the servant's entrance (the kitchen) through the ruined sustenance for the house (the garden). He leaves the sign in place. In a prophetic moment, the past warns us to stay out, in doing so, the past forewarns the present to not look back. The sign itself attacks just

about everything the decayed South stands for. Suttree does not turn the sign around; he simply passes through and leaves the warning in place.

When Suttree leaves his ancestral home behind, he leaves the Southern Pastoral and all that it symbolizes. One of the central tenets of the Pastoral is its dependence on religion. Suttree exits his home and leaves religion, a further sign of his status as a "lapsed Catholic" (Bell, *Achievement* 69). Bell's comment does not go far enough, though. Suttree is beyond "lapsed." He has totally abandoned the church. By contrast, Sut Lovingood believes the church is a good, upright institution that itinerant preachers have corrupted. In "Parson John Bullen's Lizards" he wearies of the ministers' hypocrisy and places lizards in his clothes. The ensuing riot, caused by the naked exit by the minister, symbolizes the chaos necessary to reform the church.¹³ Suttree's disaffection from the church matches Sut's; however, Sut uses these camp meetings as an opportunity to act. Suttree simply leaves, claiming the church is "not God's home" (255).¹⁴

While Suttree's passivity is a general malady, his religious sensibility is challenged throughout the novel.

As the novel opens, our first image of him is as a fisherman, or as Frank W. Shelton so aptly states, "an impotent Fisher King" (74). As fisher King, he should lead men and reform the unjust. He reacts to his anointed vocation just as passively as he does to the world around him. He runs trot-lines in a river of "sluggard ooze." The novel opens with him

Peering down into the water where the morning sun fashioned wheels of light, coronets fanwise in which lay trapped each twig, each grain of sediment, long flakes and blades of light in the dusty water sliding away like optic strokes where motes sifted and spun. A hand trails over the gunwale and he lies athwart the skiff, the toe of one sneaker plucking periodic dimples in the river with the boat's slight cradling, drifting down beneath the bridge and slowly past the mud stained stanchions. (7)

Even the style of the passage implies languid relaxation. There are only two sentences detailing every action, or inaction of the ride. The narrative linguistically emphasizes the slowness of the river's flow as Suttree

floats down the river. The repeated 's' of sun, sediment, sliding, strokes, sifted, spun, skiff, sneaker, slowly, stained, stanchions, not to mention the words that end with 's' clearly indicate the speed, or lack thereof, we should see here. Concomitantly, in a profession that already requires little activity, this "prone figure" epitomizes inactivity as the novel opens. His inactivity is immediately contrasted by the "old blacks . . . with their canes bobbing and their arms lifting dark and random into the air" (8). Suttree's slow wave adds to our perception of his lack of motion, and directly contrasts Sut, who consistently reminds George that "thar's nun ove 'em fas' enuf tu ketch me, nither is thar hosses" (51).

After Suttree finishes his work for the day, he lies down and "He said that he might have been a fisher of men in another time but these fish now seemed task enough for him" (14). In the context of what he has been thinking about, it seems that he openly rejects a religious call for a life that will involve as little work as possible. We could read his claim and assume he was destined for the priesthood or that he was fated to be a Fisher King and destiny worked against him. McCarthy's story contains all those

possibilities. Suttree's life is by no means simple, regardless of his attempt to make it so. But, the text also tweaks our noses. Immediately after Suttree's initial description and his comment about fishing for men, we see the city of Knoxville's fishers of men. In other words, as "Suttree placed one arm across his eyes," he could be mocking himself and his former religion. He has, after all, just watched the worker "trying to pry the grapnel loose . . . he was sweating and working at the hook. Finally, he set his shoe against the dead man's skull and wrenched the hook with both hands until it came away trailing a string piece of blanched flesh" (9). This sounds eerily similar to the "leached and tattered gobbets of flesh" and "hefting" the fish into the boat that Suttree does right before he witnesses this scene (7). Of course, Suttree has the luxury of leaving the hook in his catch's mouth until later, which he does. These little fish are enough for him. He has to heft them in the boat. If he uses all that energy to drag a catfish into his boat, he would never have gotten a man out of the water, nor would he have gotten the hook out. The order of these two events, then, tempts us to take Suttree's claim literally. He really could not fish for men, and he

has no desire to help other men overcome their need to be fished. Suttree responds by sleeping and thinking.

Suttree's abstract rejection of Sut's reformatory actions becomes much more concrete later in the novel. Refusing to become the Fisher King is hardly worth blame. Suttree's true religious failing comes later in the work. When he goes to repay Clayton and Aunt Martha the \$20 bail money, he sees a "biblecamp bus" and talks to two old men watching the baptism of a girl who "had nothing on beneath her thin dress and it clung wet and lascivious across her cold nipples and across her belly and thighs" (122). The tenor of the conversation clearly shows Suttree's mistrust of the religious system these people have accepted, but instead of becoming the minister like Sut Lovingood, Suttree "turned his back to these malingerers and went on" (125).¹⁵

By the end of the novel it is obvious that Suttree will never be heir to Sut Lovingood's name. Throughout the novel, Suttree searches for the othersuttree. He finds a possible one in the woods, but it is a hostile other, and Suttree understands "the mathematical certainty of his own death" (295). Suttree has rejected his own father to search for "some alien Suttree" (291). Arguably, in addition to

his search to find meaning in his own life, Suttree also searches for an heir. He is the heir to the southwestern humorist's name, Sut Lovingood, and all the baggage that implies. His dual search to give meaning to his own name fails because Suttree has no one to pass that name down to. All the babies he knows, plus a few he does not, die in the novel. Concomitantly, the wasteland imagery used to describe Knoxville extends to his relationships with Wanda and Joyce. They never get pregnant, and Knoxville itself is awash in used condoms (107). What we have, then, is the end of the line for Sut Lovingood and his ilk.

Suttree's exit from Knoxville is more than just his personal break from his home city; it is McCarthy's goodbye to the South. Suttree has spent the novel living down to his namesake. He finally acts at the end of the novel, but his action is not one of reform, it is one of abandonment. Suttree's searches for his literary twin, and he looks in the right places. If Sut Lovingood were to ever go to Knoxville, he would live in McNally Flats. What Suttree finds is death and chaos far too great for him to handle. His discovery overwhelms him and he becomes a passive resident of the city. His exit puts the final touches on

McCarthy's goodbye to the Southern novel. After telling
Trippin Through the Dew goodbye,

He lifted a hand and turned and went on. He had
divested himself of the little cloaked godlet and
his other amulets in a place where they would not
be found in his lifetime and he'd taken for
talisman the simple human heart within him.
Walking down the little street for the last time
he felt everything fall away from him. Until there
was nothing left to shed. It was all gone. No
trail, no track. The spoor petered out down there
on Front Street where things he'd been lay like
paper shadows, a few here, they thin out. After
that nothing. A few rumors. Idle word on the wind.
Old news years in traveling that you could not put
stock in. (468-69)

He has cast off the unreachable Southern past.

Beyond the parody and farewell to the southern novel and
the south, *Suttree* provides a bridge to McCarthy's next
novels. We see in *Suttree* a novel grounded in a specific
time and place. His novel is a travelogue of sorts (if

anyone had the courage to tour a place like McNally Flats) and anomalous in that respect. McCarthy's first three novels, while clearly set in Tennessee, take place in approximate times. *Suttree* covers five years in the life of Cornelius Suttree, son of Grace. We know his past and his family. We know the city. McCarthy begins here to write the history not just of Suttree, but the history of those residents of Knoxville dead and long forgotten. McCarthy sets the stage for his Southwestern novels that interest themselves in the history of that region. In his Southern novels, McCarthy creates fictional characters living on the fringes of society. Just as *Suttree* is increasingly specific, McCarthy's next novels utilize precise historical data in order to create a fiction entangled with myth and reality. *Blood Meridian* (1985), McCarthy's next novel, and his first foray into the Southwest, challenges accepted interpretations of history by appealing to the fringes of accepted history. In this novel, he further entangles history and literature to create an even more "grim personal aesthetic" that focuses on seemingly marginal historical figures and events.¹⁶

NOTES

1. Critics have noted Suttree's literary ancestry. Most notably, Nell Sullivan writes

With their violent natures, these characters seem to have walked out of southwestern humorist's tale. Indeed, Buddy Suttree's friends often call him Sut, invoking his literary predecessor, Sut Lovingood, the hero of George Washington Harris' frontier tales. (63)

Other critics point out that "The riverfront world is the homeland of Cornelius Suttree, a name that combines associations of Roman Stoicism and nineteenth-century East Tennessee humorous Sut Lovingoods" (Marius 4). Neither critic carries the connection any further.

2. Sut's name bears looking at also. According to Lynn, Sut is an ugly contraction of South (137). Inge claims that Sut is a common name among backwoods farmers. Either way, Sut's name is a product of his environment. Suttree's name is a strange hybrid of backwoods Tennessee and Rome.

3. See *Lion in the Garden: Interviews with William Faulkner, 1926-1962*, page 251. According to Wilson, Sut "is an ancestor of Faulkner's Snopes" (157).

4. See Enid Welsford's *The Fool, His Social and Literary History* (1935) for a discussion of the fool's role as social critic.

5. The only time Suttree does follow through and attack the system is when he drives the police car off into the lake.

6. Yarns often work together. In "Blown up with Soda" Sut is on the wrong side of the prank. Sicily Burns teases him sexually, and then offers him a "new sensashun" (72). This sensation is baking soda in a cup of water. The effect leaves Sut foaming at the mouth, thinking his insides are coming up his throat. He retaliates at her wedding, though, and bedevils one of her bulls until he stampedes into the house after running through beehives. The bees and bull disrupt her wedding. Sut's solution to the mess is for Sicily to offer "'em a mess of sody" (82). The next story, "Old Burn's Bull-Ride" continues this yarn. It is interesting, in light of Suttree's Catholicism, that Sicily is marrying a circuit rider who "spread the Catholic doctrin" (74). Sut has as little regard for him as any other circuit rider. Varen Bell notes that Suttree's form is comprised of "rich episodes [that] follow upon one another with chaotic improvidence, the time spans between

them-- their temporal relationships unmarked" ("Ambiguous Nihilism" 34).

7. As opposed to Sut as the single narrator of his tales, McCarthy's early novels seem polyphonic, and we can see the seams in the stories, but "The later novels reveal a subtler approach to them as McCarthy moves perhaps consciously away from his southern heritage toward a postmodern play" (Nell Sullivan 117). While Sullivan's claim opens up some interesting points not to be discussed here, her recognition of the "seams" in McCarthy's novels is important. These seams, often caused by the polyphonic nature of the texts, sew together various tales that make up the novel.

8. There are varying interpretations for Suttree's life in McNally Flats. I earlier discuss the possibility of his rebellion against his father. Louis H. Palmer III echoes this idea, adding that Suttree attempts to live an outcast life. Bell believes it is a novel about transcending death (*Achievement* 69). Various critics contend it is an existential novel (Bell, Shelton, Marius). Consistent among the reviews and critics is the sense that Suttree wants to escape from his former life to a simpler world. Why he leaves and whether he succeeds is the matter for debate.

9. Late in the novel, "he accosted a ragged gentleman going by in an air of preoccupation" (366). Dr. Neal, "Who'd been chief counsel for Scopes," the narrative tells us, was a friend of Suttree's father and grandfather. Neal, former Dean of the University of Tennessee Law School, was in fact Scopes' first lawyer after he had been arrested. A man of caliber and principle, well respected by his colleagues, he was overshadowed in the case by Darrow and Bryan. Neal is another in the long line of McCarthy historical references who are important figures with little written about them. Neal's place in the discussion could be his desire to reform Tennessee law. Of course, after a life of service, he is a ragged gentleman. See *D-Days at Dayton: Reflections on the Scopes Trial* for more information on Dr. Neal.

10. In many ways, Suttree's views about education seem to agree with the sheriff who runs him out of town after his son's funeral. He tells him that he's "opened my eyes. I've got two daughters, oldest fourteen, and I'd see them both in hell fore I'd send them up to that university. I'm damned if I wouldnt" (158). The sheriff's thoughts could also reflect McCarthy's ideas about education. See Wallace, 134-39.

11. Wilson aptly states that "All that was worst in the

worst of the South found expression in Harris' book, and the book is needed, perhaps, to balance the idylls of the old regime, the chivalrous idealism" of the novels of the same time period (157).

12. See Grammar for a discussion of the house Suttree visits. Grammar took this quote for the title of his article.

13. In the yarn, Sut has "ontied my bag ove reptiles, put the mouf ove hit onder the bottim ove his britches-laig, an' sot intu pinchin thar tails" (54). The lizards climb up Parson Bullen's trousers and into his clothes. His striptease at the pulpit scares part of the congregation, but Sut also points out that some of the women were "lookin' arter ole Bullin" (57). These curious ones and the narration of the pure excitement caused by the nude minister demonstrate the sensual nature of these Bible Camps.

14. In this scene, Suttree has fallen asleep in the church. When the priest tells him that God's house is not the place to sleep, Suttree responds by telling him that the it is "not God's home."

15. Attacking backwoods preachers is nothing new to Southern literature. Twain, Johnson Jones Hooper, Harris,

as well as numerous others have shown the inherent hypocrisy behind the emotional meetings. In these tales, the protagonist profits from the parody of the preacher, or, as with Sut Lovingood, in "Parson Bullen's Lizards," inflicts bodily harm. But, in all these tales, someone acts, and, in doing so, emerges as admirable "because only he acknowledges the unavoidable chaos that destroys all hope for a civilized life" (Estes 64). Thus, when Sut, or these others, attends a camp meeting, "he becomes the true pastor because he alone teaches the flock" (Estes 64).

16. I have borrowed, with his consent, the phrase in quotes from Professor Tim Parrish.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE KID THE FATHER OF THE MAN: THE NEW AMERICAN ADAM IN *BLOOD MERIDIAN*

Unlike many other Southern writers, when McCarthy moved, he quit writing about the South.¹ *Blood Meridian* (1985), his first novel outside of Tennessee, is a distinctly western novel, and, in contrast to his Southern novels, there is little or no depiction of community. Frederick Jackson Turner, in his seminal "The Significance of the Frontier," defines the West as the region in which democracy creates and defines itself. Thus, "The frontier is the product of individualism" (220). While McCarthy has created individual characters worthy of study and attention in his Southern novels, *Blood Meridian* is his first novel in which the individuals exist without concern for the community, and these individuals draw us to McCarthy's novel.² In *Blood Meridian*, McCarthy balances the metaphors and myths of the Wild West with the history of the people who moved there. His re-creation of historical characters like John Joel

Glanton, Holden, Reverend Green, Captain White, and others is his witness of the events and growth of the West. However, *Blood Meridian* is not merely a historical chronicle of Western expansion. Instead, McCarthy focuses on the Edenic myth of the frontier, and how we created the myth not just of Adam in the new Garden, but of America as the New Adam rightfully inhabiting the new Paradise of the West.

In the South, history dominates the myth making process. When McCarthy moves West, he moves to a land Wallace Stegner describes as "a new country and that new country had no history: History was something applied to other places . . . Time reached back only a few years, to the pre-homestead period of big cattle ranches" (*Wolf Willow*, 28). McCarthy trades the oppressive historical Southern tradition for the wide-open spaces and history of the West. His move to a land with "neither location nor time, geography nor history" (Stegner 28) propels him into a world that creates its myth as it also occupies the land. He moves to the new Garden, occupied by both Adam and the serpent. The very essence of myth includes stories that "define common social experience . . . a myth is a message from society to its members,

suggesting appropriate behavior and response" (Kittredge 6). Myths define a culture's identity and self, and our knowledge of that myth gives us a group to belong to and establishes an opposing other. No myth in American culture has become such a dominant part of the Nation's identity as the myth of the Frontier. In *Blood Meridian*, McCarthy confronts the myth of western expansion that rationalizes and justifies the actions of those who settled the west. McCarthy confronts this myth by giving us a new anti-myth. We do not see the pride of progress; instead, we see the post-expansion generations left as "wanderers in search of bones . . . mov[ing] haltingly in the light" (337).³ Adam is not the myth-maker in McCarthy's world; instead, the serpent creates the myth of the American west.

Both the frontier myth and the Garden myth are myths of creation and re-creation. God creates Adam only to have him sin and force God to re-create Adam as mortal. The frontier is continually reborn, creating a mythical phoenix. Each move westward opens up new territory, until, finally, we move past the one hundredth meridian and the sea puts an end to expansion. John Joel Glanton, Holden, Tobin, and others are the forefathers of the western myth. McCarthy's use of

these historical characters in his fictional novel is his contribution to the western myth. Sepich has pointed out that "a glance at the historical record from which McCarthy draws for settings and characters . . . can provide context needed for a reader's appreciation of the novel" ("What kind of indians" 93).⁴ Despite his historical characters, McCarthy's novel is not a conventional historical novel. He re-creates these men and turns them into fictional characters that he controls. McCarthy has the power to include or exclude any and all facts from his novel, and his re-creation, and consequently the rebirth of these men as fictional characters, is the myth of the west. Their rebirth and re-creation, though, are not at the center of McCarthy's challenge of the myth. These are men of experience, already fallen when they come into the virgin land. In opposition to the fallen men, McCarthy presents the kid, divested of all he has been and innocent. Through the kid, McCarthy dramatizes the creation and fall of the new garden of the west.⁵

McCarthy's re-creation of men like Glanton and Holden establishes the thematic basis for the novel. Just as McCarthy must create and re-create in order to produce this

work of art, the men in the novel must create and re-create in order to exist. Each man arrives into the virgin land of the Wild West in an attempt to erase what he was and to create a new existence in a new land. At the center of this re-creation is Judge Holden and the kid. Holden is the consummate storyteller, writing a new reality into his notebook at every chance and destroying that which exists around him. He yearns to control the narrative of existence, opposed by the kid who enacts the most basic myth of American literature. He is the Frontier's Adam. He enters the land divested of all he has been, unsoiled by literature and learning, only to encounter, to be defeated, and finally to fall to his opposite: the crafty New American Serpent-- Judge Holden. His fall, and the unquenchable blood-lust of the novel, allows post-frontier America to prosper not only without compunction but with pride. The evidence of the past must be destroyed and re-created because the history of Western expansion involves the eradication of Native-Americans, the Mexicans (a hybrid race of Indians and Spaniards), and, finally, the first Anglo-settlers, sacrificed for others to follow. This violence is the conflagration which pollinated the explosive growth of the

150 years that follow the kid's death.

With his death, and the judge's victory, McCarthy offers us *Felix culpa*, western style. The kid falls prey to the notebook of the Judge's history. "The last of the true. The last of the true. I'd say they're all gone under now saving me and thee. Would you not?" the judge asks the kid. The same night the kid meets up with the judge after twenty-eight years, the Judge will kill the kid because the kid can stand witness against what the Judge has written.⁶ In order for the myth to survive as it has, the Judge has to be the storyteller, the one to make war the God. The kid is incapable and unwilling to make that myth, so the judge and history must destroy him. The kid's witness, and his purity of vision, would destroy America's Christian ethos and the moral certitude of the myth of Western expansion. The move west offered progress, and progress is good. Those who helped expand the frontier became heroes regardless of behavior because harsh land calls for harsh action. If we allow the kid to call into question our heroes, we must question also our history, a history in which

winning the west amounted to no less than winning the world. It could be finally and decisively

'won' only by rationalizing (Americanizing, Westernizing, Modernizing) the world, and that meant conquering the land beyond, banishing mystery, and negating or extirpating other peoples, so the whole would be subject to the regimented reason of one settlement culture with its professedly self-evident middle-class values. (Drinnon 465)

What the kid learns and what he becomes after coming West must itself be eradicated so that one history, and one history alone can survive.' Adam can pass along the sins of the father, but he can not pass along the guilt that naturally flows from his error. The rationalization behind the fall of Adam and the frontier predetermines that we ignore our guilt because we will be saved. If the kid survives to tell his story and dispute the judge's conclusions, our notions of Manifest Destiny become vastly different. No longer is America freeing and conquering the frontier in the name of God; we, instead, have followed the serpent and our myth teaches us something vastly different about our identity.

If the myth of the west is the myth of progress, then the

Adamic myth offers a fortunate fall, our progression to eternal life. Adam sins. As a consequence, he must toil, procreate, and die. His death is his humanity. The frontier myth taps into the same idea. Progression is bloody, brutal, and a chore, but we progress and pro-create new lands. That is the myth of our existence. Our death, and the death we inflict, is our humanity, our progress, and our elevation. The Adamic myth, replayed as each new frontier falls, fails in the West. The kid spends the bulk of the novel unfallen, and he can neither gather experience nor suspicion from those around him. He implicitly trusts the judge and others without fear. He lacks self-protective suspicion, and he is, in this way, akin to Billy Budd. The kid, though, learns. His knowledge poses an even greater threat to the Judge than his innocence. The kid dies, not for redemption, but because he threatens our sense of who we are. The kid carries with him guilt associated with his actions, and that guilt leads him to hint at a different version of the myth than the Judge offers. The Judge's truth, a confusing blend of Heidegger, gnosticism, and nihilism, simply justifies his actions by attaching blame. Adam's death should offer the hope for eternal life. The kid dies, though, not for some

eternal truth or even redemption, but for a lie that justifies our need for progress. Adam does not fall so that we can be redeemed; he falls so that we can continue respecting the myth of our existence.⁶

Epic in scope, *Blood Meridian* moves McCarthy squarely into the new West. "The Scalphunters" (1980) seems the classic Western story of Cowboys and Indians. From that short story, McCarthy created his mythical novel. In the introduction to the 1980 issue of *TriQuarterly* that McCarthy's story is published in, and an issue dedicated to "Writers of the New West," William Kittredge writes that

The current status of Western writing is similar to that of southern American writing in the early 1930's when a major regional voice, in the persons of such authors as William Faulkner, Robert Penn Warren, Eudora Welty, Andrew Lyttle, and Katherine Ann Porter, was beginning to be heard. Just as the old south was gone, the old west is gone. (13)

Nine years earlier in the Spring 1971 *South Dakota Review*, Louis Hudson wrote that Wallace Stegner was "charged with the double burden of dispelling myth and then building

fiction on the fact they must first insist upon" (6). When McCarthy moves to El Paso and begins the task of crafting a novel set in the Wild West, he has to face these self-same issues. This myth, seemingly not that complex, evolves from Michael Wigglesworth's "waste and howling wilderness" (83,84) in 1662 to Frederick Jackson Turner's image of the west as the frontier that furnishes "a new field of opportunity, a gate of escape from the bondage of the past; the freshness, and confidence, and scorn of older society, impatience of its restraints and its ideas, and indifference to its lessons" (229).⁹

As noted earlier, Turner's "The Significance of the Frontier" defines the image of the west for future generations. His article traces the "recurrence of a process of evolution in each Western area reached in the process of expansion" (187). This expansion is a "perennial rebirth" (187). In *Virgin Land*, Henry Nash Smith extends Turner's thesis by contending the myth of the frontier has gone beyond just politics, and into the mind set of the country, causing people to mythologize the West. Richard Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation*, brings these two ideas together in his

examination of the frontier myth in twentieth century

America:

In each stage of its development, the myth of the Frontier relates the achievement of 'progress' to a particular form or scenario of violent action. 'Progress' itself was defined in different ways: the Puritan colonists emphasized the achievement of spiritual regeneration through frontier adventure; Jeffersonians (and, later, the disciples of Turner's 'Frontier Thesis') saw the frontier settlement as a re-enactment and democratic renewal of the original 'social contract'; while Jacksonian Americans saw the conquest of the Frontier as a means to regeneration of personal fortunes and/or of patriotic vigor and virtue. But in each case the myth represented the redemption of American spirit or fortune as something to be achieved by playing through a scenario of separation, temporary regression to a more primitive or 'natural' state, and *regeneration through violence*. (11)

The West, as with the East before it, is the new garden,

waiting for someone to cultivate and conquer it. Popular culture has offered the noble cowboy, Shane, who rides in as the knight in shining armor to save the day.¹⁰

Traditionally, "the hero of this myth-historical quest must therefore be 'men (or women) who know Indians' . . . for these heroes . . . win by learning to discipline or suppress the savage or 'dark' side of their own human nature"

(Slotkin 14). McCarthy offers us a different character. He, instead, turns the gunfighter (who kills without apology or explanation) into the "authentic American as figure of heroic innocence and vast potentialities, poised at the start of a new history" (Lewis 1).

While this is a novel with its share of violence, McCarthy focuses on the creation of the western myth, not the conquering of the west. The kid is poised at the start of a new world. After the kid gets on the boat going to Texas,

Only now is the child finally divested of all that he has been. His origins are become remote as is his destiny and not again in all the world's turning will there be terrains so wild and barbarous to try whether the stuff of creation may

be shaped to man's will or whether his own heart
is not another kind of clay. (4)

Adam, according to Lewis, enters the last virgin land, "the first, the archetypal, man. His moral position was prior to experience, and in his very newness he was fundamentally innocent. The world and history lay before him" (Lewis 5). This barbarous world lies before the kid, and his journey becomes our journey and our history. The record of this journey and the subsequent battles of the novel will pass on to the generations to come; yet these battles are not between indians and scalphunters, or even the judge and Tobin, the expriest. The judge and the kid battle over storytelling rights; they battle over who gets to tell--or create--history. Adam is "the poet par excellence, creating language itself by naming the elements of the scene about him" (Lewis 5). When the kid enters the virgin land, he enters the judge's domain. Only the kid's presence and power threaten the judge's notebook.

McCarthy's artistic creation, the novel itself, challenges the Judge's version. The judge's artistic creation, his notebook, constitutes our history book. When the kid enters Texas, he enters what Turner calls the

"meeting point between savagery and civilization" (187).

Vareen Bell claims that "As a novel about the American West, *Blood Meridian* presses the psychology of the frontier theory to its logical, appalling extreme" (*The Achievement* 119).¹¹

The frontier theory the novel "presses" is exactly what the novel challenges. In other words, McCarthy does not press the theory, he presses the creation of the theory. His kid arrives in time to witness the creation of the theory, and the novel details the war in which the judge represses the kid's witness.

McCarthy establishes the kid's role as witness and potential recorder of events from the very start of the novel.¹² The opening line and chapter establish the kid's ties to Romantic Nineteenth-Century America. The "child the father of the man" harkens back to both Wordsworth's "My Heart Leaps Up" and the epigraph to "Ode to Intimations of Immortality." This child who "can neither read nor write and in him broods already a taste for mindless violence" represents innocence and closeness to divinity in the Romantic matrix. He is father of the man because he will become the future. Actually, though, McCarthy is

establishing the kid as a potential father of our country's history. He is born in a shower of fire, and "All history present in that visage, the child father of the man" (3).¹³ McCarthy conjoins two dependent clauses in what, even for him, is an awkward construction. Our focus is clearly on the child. McCarthy opens the novel with an implied second person, ordering us to "See the child" (3). He ends the third paragraph telling us not just that the child is father of the man, but that all history is present in that child. From the beginning, then, he has the potential to be our storyteller. To become the man, he must take what he sees and create something from it. Then, and only then, can he become a man and a father. Until he articulates what he sees, he will remain a kid, existing only as potential father, setting forth to encounter the history from which he must father the man.

Hence, the kid's most important Adamic trait is his potential to be the "poet par excellence." Unlike Adam, though, the kid only has the potential. Adam has the blessings of a benevolent God. The kid enters a land with people. His potential rests, then, with what he learns. He must take that knowledge and create a cogent story of

himself and the move west, a move that coincides with a massive exodus to the west. He enters Texas as the gold rush of 1849 rages west. The war with Mexico is recently won, and Texas has become a land of greater and greater opportunity. Unlike Adam, he is not born in Eden; he must travel there. Concomitantly, the serpent has already conquered the garden. Although the kid goes to Texas when the history is being written, he enters with all history present in his visage.

Despite entering the land divested of all he has been, and "His origins are become as remote as is his destiny" (4), he cannot escape his destiny as father of the man. He must re-create himself, and, in doing so, will re-create his visage of history. We see, early in the novel, his inexperience. After the kid witnesses the judge's story about Reverend Green, fights with Toadvine,¹⁴ and receives his first instruction into the mores of the new world, he meets with a hermit:

I take it ye lost your way, said the hermit.

No, I went right to it.

He waved quickly with his hand, the old man. No, no, he said. I mean ye was lost to of come here.

Was they a sandstorm? Did ye drift off the road in

the night? Did thieves beset ye?

The kid pondered this. Yes, he said We got off the road someways or another. (17-18)

In typical McCarthy ambiguity, the hermit's question fools the kid. Despite the narrative's early claim that the kid is divested of all, the kid has some knowledge of his destination. He is going straight to it, he tells the hermit. "It" must be the hermit's cave. Again, he receives instruction. Toadvine has already taught the kid how to fight; the hermit will lecture on the human heart. Knowledge of the heart seems to be wrapped up in the powers of creation:

God made this world, but he didnt make it to suit everybody, did he?

I dont believe he much had me in mind.

Aye, said the old man. But where does a man come by his notions. What world's he see that he liked better?

I can think of better places and better ways.

Can ye make it be?

No.

The hermit follows with his truth about the evilness of the

human heart, a theory the kid will have ample opportunity to learn with Captain White and Glanton. At this point, though, the kid is still innocent of the evilness of the human heart. He can not tell his story and leaves with what seems only a passing understanding of the hermit's words.

This early scene prefigures the kid's relationship with his final two teachers: the judge and Tobin. The ex-priest and the judge are both accomplished story tellers. When the judge accuses the kid of harboring "a flawed place in the fabric of [his] heart. . . You alone reserved in your soul some corner of clemency for the heathen" (299), he pinpoints the kid's failure to write the history of the west. The kid's inability to look into the human heart keeps him from seeing to a truth of storytelling. Throughout the novel, the kid passively hears stories without creating his own. In the hermit's cave (18) and later in Chihuahua (77), the kid tells a story. In both instances, the story receives little attention in the narrative. At the hermit's cave, the kid's story consists of an ambiguous response to a question and counts as a story only because the truth is not self-evident to the hermit. In Chihuahua "he told them of the encounter with the Comanche and they chewed and listened and nodded"

(77). He does not create: he repeats a story we already know and have read about.

By the end of the novel, his destiny as storyteller seems solidified. He has shown a penchant for surviving the battles and brutal life of a filibuster. At one point, he rises "wondrously from among the new slain dead . . . stained and stinking like some reeking issue of the incarnate dam of war herself" (55). This reborn Adam survives often because of nature's own fickleness and his destiny. He has clearly seen enough of western expansion to challenge the Judge's glorifying of war. There is nothing glorious about killing your own men in the name of progress, and the lyrical beauty of McCarthy's novel offers both paradox and irony. The language hides the body count and rhetorically blinds the audience to the carnage and brutality of death and dying that occurs on virtually every page. Late in the novel, when the kid refuses to kill Shelby and an attack by Elias' men leave him alone and wandering, he sees

a lone tree burning in the desert. A heraldic tree that the passing storm had left afire. The solitary pilgrim drawn up before it had traveled

far to be here and he knelt in the hot sand and held his numbed hands out while all about in that circle attended companies of lesser auxiliaries routed forth into the inordinate day. (215)

Adam, long failed in his destiny to reveal a truth, comes upon the burning bush that he "had traveled far to be" near. Just as with the hermit, this burning bush is the kid's destiny. He needs the truth revealed to him as Moses did in Exodus 3:1-15. The kid, though, leaves without knowing truth. As Adam, the poet par excellence, his lessons seem to fail him because he can not enter the common lot of man. In an evil land, he holds out for some Godly truth, a truth of creation, that he can tell. Like Moses, the kid must deliver words of truth to offset the worship of the golden calf. Unlike Moses, the kid fails to hear the voice of truth and he will not return with the ten laws of God. Instead, he sits "tailorwise in the eye of that cratered waste" and then he "rose and made his way to the edge of the pan and up the dry arroyo, following the small demonic tracks of javelinas until he came upon them drinking at a standing pool of water" (215).

The kid tells a total of four stories in the novel. Two

of them occur after the judge's accusation about his flawed heart. After the kid survives the desert, he is arrested. The judge visits and further explains why the kid failed in his role as poet and creator:

You came forward, he said, to take part in a work. But you were a witness against yourself. You sat in judgement of your own deeds. You put your own allowances before the judgements of history and you broke with the body of which you were pledged a part and poisoned it in all its enterprise. Hear me, man. I spoke in the desert for you and you only and you turned a deaf ear to me. If war is not holy man is nothing but antic clay. Even the cretin acted in good faith according to his parts. For it was required of no man to give more than he possessed nor was any man's share compared to another's. Only each was called upon to empty out his heart into the common and one did not. Can you tell me who that one was? (307)

The kid failed to embrace the evilness of humanity and he alone did not participate fully in the murder and mayhem of the gangs he rode with. His clemency works against the

progress of the west. If Glanton's gang represents the movement west, standing in the way of that progress hinders history, or, at the least, contends that another history might exist.¹⁵

The Judge has no such qualms about entering his heart in to the common lot. The kid finds it difficult to tell stories because stories are not truths, they are fictions controlled by a narrator who may or may not have his audience's best interests at heart. The new American serpent already lives in the garden, and from the beginning, we are aware that he has supplanted Adam as the storyteller in Eden. From his entrance in the novel, destroying a missionary preacher, the Judge displays both his strength and his weakness: the ability to identify good, to understand it, and to destroy it, but not the ability to create it. He validates the existence of God by being so talented at negating His work by telling stories, creating lies not truths. In addition to Holden's admitted lie about Reverend Green, seemingly for the simple pleasure of creating chaos, later in the novel, Holden will hold court with the new recruits to Glanton's gang. After a lesson on paleontology,

he let it [a femur] fall in the sand and closed his book.

There is no mystery to it, he said.

The recruits blinked dully.

Your heart's desire to be told some mystery. The mystery is that there is no mystery.

He rose and moved away into the darkness beyond the fire. Aye, said the expriest watching, his pipe cold in his teeth. And no mystery. As if he were no mystery himself, the bloody old hoodwinker. (252)¹⁶

The Judge teaches this lesson to the men, "answering them with care, amplifying their own questions for them, as if they might be apprentice scholars," but he does not teach, he obfuscates. The men leave just as confused, if not more so, than when the lesson began. At every turn, the Judge controls the dialogue and creates not understanding and clarity, but confusion and puzzlement. He is a mystery, a riddle with no answer.

As the new American serpent who yearns to control the myth of the west, the Judge is the meeting point between "savagery and civilization." The Judge has the knowledge of

experience and the cultivation to apply that knowledge. His savagery puts him into the common lot of man. The creator of the anti-myth is also the prototypical anti-epic hero. Holden's role extends beyond just crafting lies and deception. He must command the respect of those around him and demand others follow. The serpent needs an audience. Holden has the ability to capture all men in his complex web. Tobin tells the kid that the Judge is

the greatest fiddler I ever heard and that's an end on it. The greatest. He can cut a trail, shoot a rifle, ride a horse, track a deer. He's been all over the world. Him and the governor they sat up till breakfast an it was Paris this and London that in five languages, you'd have give something to of heard them. The governor's a learned man himself he is, but the judge . . . (123)

The judge's knowledge is truly without question. His motivation, on the other hand, clearly deserves questioning. He admittedly lies about Green. He admits that which "exists without" his knowledge "exists without his consent" (198). Interestingly enough, the judge knows even Toadvine's name, "Louis," but not the kid's (282). He calls him "Young

Blasarius" (94), but as Sepich has pointed out, that is simply an obscure law term for incendiary (114). Yet, for all his savagery and civilization, the Judge is not Judge of truth and law. His knowledge of jurisprudence belies the fact that it is the "false moneyer with his gravers and burins who seeks favor with the judge" (310). Savagery and civilization are compilations of detractions from what already exists, not creations of new truths. The Judge's very talents cloud his ability to offer something other than a piece of "slag brute . . . that will pass" (310).

His other worldly knowledge is equaled only by his seeming immortality. The Judge is not Satan. The serpent of the American West survives because we are afraid to kill it. The kid has three opportunities in the desert to destroy the Judge and his notebook, but he refuses to do so. That is the flawed place in the kid's heart. He has learned only that he cannot destroy that which has the power and capacity to record men's story. The Judge recognizes the potential danger the kid poses to his suzerain reign. That is why he tries to kill him in the desert. The kid does "not have the heart of a common assassin" (299). An assassin is a master in the art of deception, refusing a face to face battle for

an ambush. An assassin can tell stories that are fictional, and the kid lacks that capacity for deception--for storytelling. The clemency for the heathen is a touch of humanity, a love for truth and justice. The Judge is not bothered by such trifling larger truths. His insistence on jurisprudence, the minutiae of law, and the destruction of all that is free and outside his knowledge signal his willingness to act as assassin to any truth but his own.¹⁷ The kid, however, cannot deceive, nor ambush the judge. His flaw is his innocence, and only if he has falls can he kill without impunity and tell stories.

There can only be one myth-maker. Just as with *Moby Dick*, the *Iliad*, and the *Inferno*, the hero's talent is not just his ability to survive the ordeal; he must be able to relate it and give it significance. There can be only one survivor of the ordeal for it to remain cohesive and for it to support one lesson or "truth." Ishmael cannot have some sailor questioning his veracity, just as the Judge must eliminate the possibility of the kid, or any other character, from questioning the morality of the war god. The hero consumes all and controls the narrative. The

significance of his story is directly proportionate to his ability to tell what he wants to tell. If someone survives to complain, the narrative is troubled by polyphonic possibilities. Too many voices create too many stories, and the audience is faced with many truths instead of one truth. When that happens, history is unstable and there is no law, historical or otherwise. The Judge's desire to control the story by recording and destroying is his attempt to dictate myth, that truth passed from one generation to another. He does so by destroying all those who might question his truth.

Throughout the novel, the kid poses little threat to the Judge. Only in the desert does the judge try to kill the kid, and even then, his efforts are not sustained. He sees in the kid a possible companion, someone to verify his truth and his myth. The kid's obvious innocence points to a soul that the Judge can mold. He did love him "like a son" (306), but the kid rejected his entreaties. After the kid and Tobin survive the desert, the kid wanders about town, receives treatment for his wound and winds up in jail. Holden visits, mocks the kid's predicament, and leaves. When the Judge leaves him in jail, the kid finally opens his heart

into the "common" (307) by lying to the guard about hidden treasure. Clearly, the kid's story to the guard does not earn him his release. The "corporal had set the candle on the floor between them and he watched him as one might watch a glib and lying child" (308). He has finally entered the common with his story of lost gold, echoing Brown's earlier story to Petit, the guard he convinced, betrayed, and killed (269). The kid fails, but he still gets his release. (The fact of the story is irrelevant. The only logical explanation is that the Judge, who lied to have him imprisoned, lied to get his release.) What is most important, though, is that the kid lies. He finally tells a story and begins to craft his-story. At this moment, the kid opens his heart to the evilness the hermit tells him about at the opening of the novel. In this state he finally discovers that the Judge is judge of falsifiers and contrivers. The kid's delirium allows him to see into the human heart. The Judge can afford to release the kid after he tells his story. The kid is no longer the last holdout and he seems to pose no threat to the Judge's construction of the myth because he has now joined the Judge as a falsifier. They now tell similar stories; truth no longer

hampers the kid's development. However, the kid's momentary lapse falters. He has become a man prepared to father the future, but it is a future replete with guilt.

In the penultimate chapter, the kid sees a "company of penitents . . . hacked and butchered" (315). Still a kid, he sees "an old woman kneeling in the faded rebozo with her eyes cast down." He goes to her, and

He spoke to her in a low voice. He told her that he was an American and that he was a long way from the country of his birth and that he had no family and that he had traveled much and seen many things and had been at war and endured hardships. He told her that he would convey her to a safe place, some party of her countrypeople who would welcome her and that she should join them for he could not leave her in this place she would surely die.

(315)

The kid finally tells his story, and it is a story of compassion and accountability. Not only does he offer to help her, he indicts America for its intrusion in lands far from his birth. Unlike his earlier attempts, the kid seems to offer a sustained narrative that explains his presence

and his existence. Significantly, the kid becomes a man after this story. After he realizes that the old woman is "just a dried shell" he rides on. When we join him twenty-eight years later, he is "a man" (321). This passage from childhood to adulthood should mark the child's ability to sire the father. He has, after all, just told his story, a story that severely contrasts the judge's truth that "Moral law is an invention of mankind for the disenfranchisement of the powerful in favor of the weak. Historical law subverts it at every turn. A moral view can never be proven right or wrong by any ultimate test" (250). Holden offers justification for violence and brutality, not a truth to live by. His crafty conundrum belies any refutation, and he synthesizes the logic behind Manifest Destiny. The kid's story explains the havoc wreaked upon the penitents and the rest of their countrymen. The Judge's comment confuses law for truth. The kid offers a truth of the disaster visited upon the woman, and he has just accepted culpability and heeded moral truth for his actions. His offer attempts to subvert the law of war, a historical construct, by taking this woman from a place of war to a place of peace. His story falls on dead ears, though, because he tells it to

those destroyed by the opposing myth. The woman and her people know the truth of expansion. The kid needs to tell his story to the people expanding, those men who listen to Holden's lessons on paleontology. The attempt, though, to tell the story moves the kid to manhood, and that manhood and the message the kid carries makes him an enemy of the judge. The man is no longer the sole witness against himself. Adam has fallen and he has the potential to serve witness against the serpent's story.

When the judge kills the kid, so dies the Western Adam. The Judge exerts final editorial control over his notebook and the myth of the West. He tells the man that "Men's memories are uncertain and the past that was differs little from the past that was not" (330). The Judge speaks truer than he knows. The battle for control of that history is not just a matter of factual information. The motivations and ideas of progress are contained within the myth created and passed along as history. The kid's emergence as man has placed him in a position of challenging the Judge because it is not just "each man's destiny" that "contains all opposites," but history that contains all opposites, as well.

That the kid would die at the hands of the Judge was never in doubt. In a novel about the myth of the West, McCarthy writes to an audience already well versed in the myth of both the West and the men who tamed it. The Judge represents the savagery and civilization necessary to pave the way for others to follow, and he has the ability to survive and excel in the West and the power and willingness to tell us about it. His story is our story, McCarthy seems to say, and we reap the benefits of the Judge's actions because we are like the Judge. He is our hero. Our attachment to the myth of historical law supersedes the ability of Adam to recapture it. The kid dies largely because the myth is already established, and to accept the Adamic version calls into question who we are. McCarthy's creation and re-creation of the historical men that make the myth only serves to reinforce the myth that we have already accepted. The Judge may be evil, but the kid/Adam does not have the power to create myth. Only because of the serpent's intervention do we have a fall, hence a myth. The definition of who we are presupposes an evil presence, and it is only that evil presence that allows us to tell stories. Adam and Eve can only tell God a lie after they have sinned. The kid

can tell his story only after he has entered the common. McCarthy's novel points to our acceptance of the Judge's myth and the eventual failure of innocence.

This myth leaves the future "progressing over the plain by means of holes which he is making in the ground" (337). The rest of us follow behind, "the wanderers in search of bones." The movement is slow, but a steady progression in which the land is captured, fenced, and controlled. The bone pickers remove the evidence of the past "and they appear restrained by a prudence or reflectiveness which has no inner reality and they cross in their progress one by one that track of holes" (337). They follow blindly, without inner retrospection about what they follow. Those who pick the bones, and those who don't are equally oblivious to what and why they follow. McCarthy's re-creation details our desire to follow the man without knowing the human heart. To know that heart is to accept the possibilities and responsibilities inherent therein. We follow, instead, the Judge as he and his myth move us forward because our very existence is proof of our moral justification. Knowing our heart would leave us culpable and guilty for the sins of the fathers, unable to revel in our contemporary progress. The

Judge's historical law has given us the peace of mind to define our existence by his version of the story while allowing us to ignore those destroyed or marginalized. The exclusionary development of the myth of the West preserves American independence and American mythos.

McCarthy's examination of the creation of the frontier myth and our desire to follow that myth blindly leads to his next novel, *All the Pretty Horses*. In his first installment in the Border Trilogy, McCarthy again reaches into the history books and challenges that which we thought was true. McCarthy's re-visioning of the Madero brothers and the lost Mexican history points to a re-creation of history in Mexico during the early years of the Twentieth-Century.¹⁸

NOTES

1. See Walter Sullivan, "About any Kind of Meanness You Can Name." His view that the novel is Southern because the kid is from Tennessee is more or less representative of early reviews of the novel. Sepich, while not claiming it a Southern novel, points out that "eight of its characters are named after Tennesseans" and claims that "No other state, in fact, is as well represented in this novel of the opening years of the American Southwest" ("What kind of indians", ft. 107).
2. See Witek, "Reeds and Hides: Cormac McCarthy's Domestic Spaces," for a discussion of Glanton's men as destroyers of communities. Parrish contends the kid seeks a community of violence (37-38).
3. The myth of the frontier has long been associated with the Garden of Eden. See Henry Nash Smith, *Virgin Land*; Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation*; Stegner, *Wolf Willow*. Novelists have also pointed to the garden myth. Bryan Wooley, *Time and Place*, captures the sentiment. His young protagonist reflects on the beauty of the land before barbed wire: "The old ones had heard it from their grandfathers and fathers and passed on their tales to the children, as Adam must have

described Eden to Cain and Abel" (118). Western writers, though, have primarily treated the frontier as an opportunity for coming of age novels, not an examination of the Adamic myth. See contemporary writers McMurtry, Wooley, Americo Paredes, and even McCarthy's *All the Pretty Horses*. They portray the myth from the eyes of the Twentieth-Century.

4. John Joel Glanton experienced a revival of sorts in the 1980's. In addition to McCarthy, see Larry McMurty, *Dead Man's Walk* and George MacDonald Fraser, *Flashman and the Redskins*. Glanton serves as the classic villain in these novels. Each novelist points to him as what was truly evil about western expansion.

5. There are too many historical events that McCarthy ignores, it seems, to call this a historical novel. Milan Kundera claims that

If a writer considers a historical situation a fresh and revealing possibility of the human world, he will want to describe it as it is. Still, fidelity to historical reality is a secondary matter as regards the value of the novel. The novelist is neither historian nor

prophet: he is an explorer of existence. (44)

Despite the historical particulars, McCarthy is the creator here, and his novel

examines not reality but existence. And existence is not what has occurred, existence is the realm of human possibilities, everything that man can become, everything he's capable of. Novelists draw up the *map of existence* by discovering this or that human possibility. But again, to exist means: 'being-in-the-world.' Thus both the character and his world must be understood as possibilities. (Kundera 42)

The historical particulars are important and interesting, but McCarthy seems to be aiming at some truth of the novel itself and some point about creation, not historical document.

6. Denis Donoghue makes a similar point. See "Dream Work," 6-10.

7. Rick Wallach, "Judge Holden, *Blood Meridian's* Evil Archon," makes a similar point in his conclusion:

The American dream, which posits our collective social being, has been a nightmare of genocidal

appropriation involving the effacement of oral cultures, a process which the judge allegorizes in detail. It is doubtful whether any society, having chosen to pretend to a Christian ethos, could sustain the crushing burden of guilt such behavior must entail without inscribing delusional histories to censor and repress its racist dream. Like all repression, ours is permeable, and some of our nightmares always break through. Whatever else he may be, Holden in his daemonic whiteness is a figuration of that breakthrough. (135)

While Wallach makes a fine point, Holden's history and his stories ennoble violence. He is, in many ways, the developer of the Western myth. "War is god," he says without guilt. This statement of fact justifies the violence necessary to eradicate those in our way, and Holden's social Darwinism mirrors Theodore Roosevelt's. Slotkin argues that it is precisely the violence of Western expansion, the regeneration through violence, that Americans seem to take pride in. The kid must die because his compassion contrasts the accepted myth of the West.

8. Tim Parrish claims that the judge sacrifices the kid "not

in the name of redemption, but *in the name of unending violence*" (37). He posits, essentially, that violence is "the expression, as opposed to the preservation, of self" (27). I would add, though, that the kid must die for the myth of that violence, not for violence itself.

9. The full text of Wigglesworth's poem:

A waste and howling wilderness,

Where none inhabited

But fiends, and brutish men

That devils worshiped. (83,84)

10. In addition to Slotkin's book and a slew of popular movies, see Jane Kramer's 1981 American Book Award winner *The Last Cowboy*: "The movies Henry loved had told him that a good cowboy was a hero. They told him that a cowboy lived by codes, not rules--codes of calm, solitude, and honor--and that a cowboy had a special arrangement with nature and, with his horse under him and the range spread out around him, knew a truth and a freedom and a satisfaction that ordinary men did not" (4). Ironically, Kramer seems to say, the very man of myth has now become a believer in the myth and his life is shaped by the very same myth.

11. See also Witek, "Reeds and Hides"; Wallach, "Judge

Holden, *Blood Meridian's* Evil Archon"; Parrish, "The Killer Wears the Halo"; Shaviro, "The Very Life of Darkness"; and Shopen, "They Rode On." Each offers an explanation about the eventual "moral" of the novel and the kid's death.

Shaviro contends that "we fool ourselves if we think that we can derive from it [the novel] and profits of catharsis or redemption" (115), even though he begins his article comparing the kid to Ishmael and the judge to Ahab. The novel, he says, explodes the American dream of manifest destiny.

12. The kid joins various other literary characters as the American Adam: Natty Bumppo, Billy Budd, Holden Caulfield, Isaac McCaslin. See, obviously, *The American Adam*, R.B. Lewis.

13. See Sepich, *Notes on Blood Meridian*, 57-61 for a discussion of the Leonids and the reaction of those who saw it.

14. Toadvine instructs the kid in ferreting out an enemy, beating him, and arson. See, in particular, 13 where Toadvine instructs the kid to not only kick him, but tells him where to kick him. He then coaches the kid's form by mocking him.

15. The kid's kindness occurs periodically. In his first, and only, battle with White, the kid "would have reached for the bloody hoop-iron point but then he saw that the man" was dead (53). When he meets Sporule, he offers to look at his infected arm (61). While with Glanton, the kid wades out to help an injured Mexican (157). Shortly thereafter, the kid "cut away the bloody point deftly and handed it up" (162). The kid's kindness has seemed out of place, but during this scene the expreist "leaned to him and hissed at his ear. For, he said. God will not love ye forever. The kid turned to look at him. Dont you know he'd of took you with him? He'd of took you boy. Like a bride to the altar" (163). The kid's kindness becomes magnanimous because helping is a life hazard.

16. The judge's place as story-teller needs little discussion. He enters the story telling an admitted lie about Green. Later the judge is "declaiming in the epic mode" (118); "he told them another story" (142); in the desert, he looks "like some egregious saltland bard" (219); and a short while later, "He'd given a short disquisition on the history of architecture" (224).

17. The Judge might be the American serpent, but I hesitate

to call him Satan. The Serpent of the west is the actual lie of the myth. The judge does have some similarities to Satan, though. He does live forever and seemingly travels at will. In addition, he tempts the kid three times in the desert. Arguably, the novel is a revision of the Biblical battle between Satan and St. Michael, with the opposite result. While in the desert, the judge also resembles the Pacing White Steed of the Prairies, a mustang that was uncatchable and seemed to live forever. See J. Frank Dobie, *Mustangs and Cow Horses*. In *Moby Dick* chapter XLII, Melville has a mighty passage associated with the Steed in relation to the whale. See Henry Nash Smith, 79, for a more complete discussion.

18. I would like to thank John Gosselink for his invaluable help with this chapter. I shamelessly borrowed (with his consent) various phrases. More importantly, our correspondence served as a launching board for some of the more complex ideas of the chapter.

CHAPTER SIX

HISTORY, FICTION AND ECONOMICS IN

*ALL THE PRETTY HORSES*¹

The epilogue of *Blood Meridian* shows a man setting fence posts as he moves west, foreshadowing the forthcoming fenced ranches and land-grabbing in the West. The novel's epilogue also provides a transition to his next novel, *All the Pretty Horses* (1992).² McCarthy's first installment of the Border Trilogy (the Southwestern border between America and Mexico), tells the story of a sixteen year old boy driven off his family ranch by his grandfather's death and a mother concerned about the profitability of running a cattle ranch in West Texas. He travels to Mexico in search of the Big Rock Candy Mountain-- a ranch where he can work as a cowboy. Mexico attracts him because it represents, for him, a haven from a world where "not everybody thinks that life on a cattle ranch in west Texas is the second best thing to dyin and goin to heaven" (17). He discovers, instead, a world vastly different from the one he imagined. The

economic condition of the peasants he meets mirrors his own poverty and powerlessness at home, and, unlike *Blood Meridian*, the history of Mexico and the Southwest, in general, and the history of Francisco I. Madero, in particular, he learns late in the novel offers him a glimpse into the surly economics of his paradise. Duena Alfonso's history redefines Cole's interpretation of life South of the border, and in her story he finds something "to tell him about the way the world was or was becoming" (21). Similar to *Blood Meridian*, though, McCarthy's fictional rendering complicates the boundaries between fiction and non-fiction, but more importantly to Cole, McCarthy's historical contribution points to a universal class system designed to defeat progress and oppress the individual. Cole, unwittingly and unconsciously, stumbles into the realization that his plight differs only in nationality from the plight of the Mexicans his "family's been practicing medicine on" for a hundred years (278).

McCarthy's novel "is everywhere informed by McCarthy's mastery of the history, geology, botany, cultural anthropology, language--all the physical and human textures

of the region" (Luce, "The Gardener's Son" 51).³

Consistently throughout the novel, McCarthy focuses on the minute details that make up the landscape of Mexico. His attention to detail extends to the people who inhabit the land, and his prose accords with the land he writes about. As John Grady Cole travels through Mexico, he encounters the Mexican countryside and witnesses the life of the Mexican people. The people and country-side seem to fit his preconceived ideas about Mexico: the peasants are noble, hard-working, and polite. However, intermingled with his story, the narrative of *All the Pretty Horses* tells us a history of Mexico that history books and popular culture often ignore or have willfully forgotten, a history that has allowed Cole to form his opinions of the Mexican countryside.⁴ McCarthy's history contrasts that of archived historians by focusing on Francisco I. Madero, a seemingly marginal historical figure.

When John Grady Cole learns about the failed presidency of Francisco Madero, the poverty and powerlessness of the Mexican people he meets makes more sense. After he survives the prison in Saltillo and returns to the Hacienda de Nuestra Senora de la Purisima Concepcion, Duena Alfonso

takes the time to tell him her life's story "because among other reasons" she thinks "we should know who our enemies are" (241). Her story extends beyond a mere explanation of generational, cultural, or philosophical differences, though. She gives a detailed account of Francisco and Gustavo Madero, two brothers educated in America and Europe. Earlier, her brother, Don Hector, had mentioned the Maderos to Cole, but he simply dismissed the Maderos and "these ideas" they learned in Europe with a flippant wave claiming that they would never work because "One country is not another country. Mexico is not Europe" (145).

Duena Alfonsa does not dismiss these two men so lightly. In telling Cole, and ostensibly us, about their story, Alfonsa discusses two men who held power for only fifteen months (Nov. 1911-Feb. 1913) and whose presidency failed to bring about the social changes Francisco envisioned. Her narrative contrasts with that of historians who tend to focus on General Victoriana Huerta, the man who overthrew Madero and had him and his brother assassinated; General Reyes, a revolutionary whose threatened conspiracy kept the Madero's occupied with protecting the presidency; and the famous folk hero Francisco "Pancho" Villa. In doing

so, she relegates the men who actually gained and sustained power to secondary status and privileges the loser. By telling Cole about a failed president, she explains what did not happen in Mexico. The implications of her story reach beyond revisionist history: her narrative contends that the "absent" history, what did not happen, has as great an effect as the history that did occur. John Grady Cole discovers that the Mexico he expected and the Big Rock Candy Mountain he went in search of do not exist. Instead, he enters a country beset by economic and governmental problems. Duena Alfonso's story offers an explanation for not only Cole's troubles but an explanation for the troubles of Mexico and the Mexican people.

The information Duena Alfonsa tells John Grady Cole about Francisco Madero is historically accurate.⁵ Her story reinforces the archived history's perspective. She tells Cole that Francisco set "up schools for the poor . . . dispensed medicines . . . [and fed] hundreds of people from his own kitchen" (233).⁶ Her dates, places, and names of acquaintances are accurate, as well. Her narrative about him, though, introduces much more into the novel. By introducing his name into the story, she creates a climate

where Madero's cultural influence becomes relevant. Our knowledge of the archived history informs our reading of her "fictional" history, and both help shape our interpretation of the novel. Once Madero's name has entered the novel, his personal history reacts intertextually with the narrative, creating a web of history and fiction. To begin to understand the text, we have to have an idea about what images the Madero name creates according to Ross, et al and the authorized histories. Only then can we begin to understand the full implications of Duena Alfonsa's history given as fiction but drawn as real. Alfonsa stresses the economic reforms Madero proposes, contrasting the historical emphasis on Madero's defeats. Her story becomes, then, an explanation to Cole of the economic oppression that he has just experienced in the Mexican prison.

During the time of Francisco Madero's childhood, Duena Alfonsa tells Cole the

poverty in this country was very terrible. What you see today cannot even suggest it. And I was very affected by this. In the towns there were tiendas which rented clothes to the peasants when they would come to market. Because they had no

clothes of their own and they would rent them for the day and return home at night in their blankets and rags. They had nothing. Every centavo they could scrape together went for funerals. The average family owned nothing machine-made except for a kitchen knife. Nothing. Not a pin or a plate or a pot or a button. Nothing. Ever. In the towns you'd see them trying to sell things which had no value. A bolt fallen from a truck picked up in the road or some wornout part of a truck picked up in the road or some wornout part of a machine that no one could even know the use of. Such things as that. Pathetic things. (232)

Mexico's wars with America further drained the country's resources. Madero grew up in Mexico after the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, and after Santa Anna's final defeat. The peasants still feel the effect of Mexico's expansionist policies, though. Wealth and land is concentrated in the hands of a few men like Don Hector who control the lives of all those around him.

Madero spent his childhood witnessing the degradation and endemic poverty of the Mexican people. When Madero

returned from his education in Europe and America, he had intellectualized the ideas of Marxism and social reconstruction, but politically "his earliest efforts were the result of his belief that he, like other citizens, had a sacred obligation to cooperate in the practice of democracy" (Ross 34).⁷ He was not a revolutionary until he learned that, under the Porforio Diaz regime, change via democracy was not possible. After Francisco established the Anti-Reelection campaign and published his book, *La sucesion presidencial en 1910*, he became an important name in contemporary Mexican politics.⁸ His activities also led him to fear for his life and forced him into exile twice. Each time he remained active in the politics of his country, and each time he grew more revolutionary. During his exiles, Madero corresponded with his supporters and continually reassured them of his belief in working for the common people. In one such correspondence, Madero tells his supporters that

the government should be concerned with the improvement of the situation of the workers . . . ; and the national lands, instead of passing into

the hands of a few favorites of the government who do not exploit them properly or . . . who dispose of them to foreign companies, should be divided among small proprietors. (qtd. in Ross 92)

As Madero became more involved politically, he saw clearly the exploitation of the worker by those in power, and he wanted to reverse the trend of the pre-1900 capitalism that "shunned the masses" (Meyer 483).⁹

Even though Madero had previously rejected a revolution, after his second exile, he concluded that if he wanted to achieve his desire that "the people should choose its government according to law," he would have to lead a rebellion (Ross 115).¹⁰ Once the revolution began, "when Madero's forces captured Ciudad Juarez, working-class crowds filled the streets of Mexico City, surrounded the president's palace, demanding his resignation and rioted" (Hart 356). The support of the working class population was enough to gain him the presidency but not enough to sustain power. Unfortunately for Madero, he was a much better ideologue than administrator.¹¹

Lending power to his opposition was the fact that Madero had to contend with an unfriendly Texas and United

States government.¹² Texas Governor Oscar B. Colquitt's close friendship with Amador Sanchez, a land owner in Mexico, superseded any support the Governor might offer (Harris III 33). Colquitt was, in fact, "quite energetic in attempting to suppress the earlier Madero revolution" (Harris III 29). Robert J. Casey sums up the United States' and Texas' response by claiming that "Madero wasn't popular with the United States" (375). Casey's flippant treatment of Madero in *The Texas Border* (1950) speaks volumes about the way Texans reacted to Madero and his European ideas. Casey's dislike, and the Texan's distrust, of Madero was dual: Madero as socialist and Madero as Mexican. Paredes summarizes the Anglo-Texans "set of attitudes and beliefs about the Mexican" (15). His "half a dozen points" captures the essence of Casey's unstated, but clearly implied, beliefs. In addition to Madero as Mexican, his success spelled doom for cheap labor in Texas border towns. Casey and the Texas government had only to look at the Cananea, Sonora strike of June 1906 to see what might happen if the Mexican worker felt empowered. They rightfully feared Madero's empowerment of the people because

while the Mexican exile community produced no

social prophets of the stature of Karl Marx, Louis Blanc, or Mihkail Bakunin, the liberal leaders in exile had immersed themselves in European social thought and had begun to apply the lessons to Mexican reality as they understood it. (Meyer 488)

Madero's application of these ideas gained him support among the working classes and cost him the support of men like Don Hector. He offered "industrial workers the right to organize freely and peasants the opportunity to reclaim usurped lands" (Hart 12). In applying these principles of European social thought, Madero tried to remove the "castelike ethnic limitations on vertical social mobility" (Hart 365).

Doing these things, understandably, endeared Madero to the people. When Cole and Rawlins are in the mountains with Luis, who had fought in revolutionary battles at Torreon, San Pedro, and later Zacatecas, Luis tells them that he "despised Victoriano Huerta above all other men and the deeds of Huerta above all other evils" (110). Huerta had been a soldier with the Madero revolution. Luis compares him with Judas because he used his position with Madero's government to facilitate his own eventual coup. Huerta had

Gustavo Madero (Francisco's brother and his Minister of the Treasury) murdered, and he had Francisco and Pino Suarez (Minister of Justice) executed.¹³ The major effect of this overthrow was to accentuate the class and political divisions in Mexico, increasing both the animosity and powerlessness of the peasants and lower classes. Henry Lane Wilson, the United States Ambassador to Mexico, understood clearly the implications of a non-Madero government. When he sent a telegram to President Taft to make him aware of the latest coup, he told him that in Mexico City, "amongst the upper classes and especially in business circles there is a feeling of relief . . . the capital's well-to-do, who had denied Madero their 'cordial and frank support' readily accorded it to Huerta" (Knight 1). "Serious misgivings among the lower classes" matched the relief of the "better elements" of Mexico City (Knight 2).

These misgivings were justified. After the revolution, there was a "decline in working-class militancy" (Knight 517). The workers lost whatever progress Madero had gained for them. Madero wanted to elevate the worker and create a system that removed the oppressive state from a dictatorship. His failure was the failure of the common

people in Mexico, and his assassination, "to the simple man, . . . represented simply a return to military dictatorship, to the rule of hated jefes politicos and venal magistrates" (Knight 2).¹⁴ More importantly, though, Mexico lost "the one truly honest friend of the lower classes" (Knight 2). After the revolution, "low level factional cacique violence remained a staple feature of rural politics" (Knight 521). It is not until the 1940's that these local political bosses (caciques), a residue of the Huerta and Diaz dictatorships, were forced to flee. Even with this slight freedom, the workers John Grady Cole encounters have gained little. Between 1946 and 1952, the amount of government corruption remained steadily high and the division of the classes grew as more millionaires than ever before were created. Even after Madero, "the little man had been shunted aside" (Meyer 644).

The implications of Duena Alfonsa's story to John Grady Cole extend much farther than simply a history lesson, though. The facts of her story reflect the standard bias of history, but her history refocuses our attention on what has not taken place in Mexico because of Madero's failed presidency. The working class lost power and was once again

relegated to second class citizenship. In essence, her narrative is as much a prescription as a description. Historians have treated Francisco much as Don Hector does; they flippantly wave him aside assuming that his ideas "were quite radical" (144). Duena Alfonsa refuses to accept that explanation, and her story creates a new history of Francisco that demonstrates that these radical ideas were in the best interest of the majority of Mexico, and, in the final analysis, in the best interest of John Grady Cole. In essence, the troubles besetting Mexico are the same troubles plaguing Cole.

When Cole and Rawlins prepare to leave Texas and cross the border the first time, neither Madero nor Mexican history is part of their consciousness. When they look at a map of the region, they look at a map that has "roads and rivers and towns on the American side of the map as far South as the Rio Grande and beyond that all was white", and Rawlins exclaims that "There aint shit down there" (34). Cole seeks "freedom from the old well-marked Texas spaces in the possibilities of an undiscovered country" and that a mapped territory "means having a past, both personal and historical" (Cheuse 141). This interpretation raises some

interesting questions. If it is correct, then Cole and Rawlins are searching for a new identity for themselves in a place that has no identity. The implication is that people living in this uncharted territory have no past; thus, they have no basis to explain their existence, and no history equals no power.¹⁵ Alfonsa begins to give these people a history. Madero was the leader of the common man. If she can provide his story, she can create their story. The narrative of the text reinforces her story by continually showing how Madero did and did not affect Mexico.

The narrative explicitly mentions the existing poverty in its descriptions of the houses and the appearance of the natives. At Cole's, Rawlins', and Blevins' first stop, they ride into Reforma, a town of "Half a dozen low houses with walls of mud brick slumping into ruins" (49). (The town's name, although real, is ironic in light of what has not occurred in Mexico.) This is a town where "There aint no electricity" (51). A girl, comic book reading age, works the bar, and her parents, if they even live, do not make an appearance. As the boys ride on, they stop for the night at an estancia where the family feeds them and offers shelter. The man refuses payment for the food, and his actions speak

of nobility and a comfortable existence. The narrative subverts this read. The family generously offers food, but that testifies to their goodness and nobility more so than their financial situation. This is still a family scratching and clawing to live in a mud house with no electricity and "with old calendars and magazine pictures" as decoration. More importantly, though, when Cole asks him about "work in this part of the country", the man sends them "yon side of the Sierra del Carmen. About three hundred kilometers. He made that country sound like the Big Rock Candy Mountains" (55). The reference to the Big Rock Candy Mountains could be a reminder of the age of these two young men. Rawlins' examination of his wallet, and the hole in Betty Wards' "schooldays picture" reminds us that these are two teenage boys who have not yet seen enough of life to know how harsh it can be.¹⁶ Arguably though, the reference to a mythical land farther south reinforces the possibility that the land this man sends them to does not exist. He sends them south so that they can ply their trade.¹⁷ This farmer sends him to a mythical place with "lakes and runnin water and grass to the stirrups" (55). If Madero's reforms had worked, perhaps this place might exist. Then again, if

Madero had succeeded, the farmer would not have to send Cole searching farther south for work.¹⁸

All of the working class citizens Cole encounters carry themselves with dignity, but they also exist in abject poverty. Without money, the common person is at the mercy of those in power. On the Sunday before he is arrested, Cole asks Antonio "Cual es lo peor: Que soy pobre o que soy americano?" Antonio "shook his head. Una llave de oro abre cualquier puerta" (147).¹⁹ Antonio's reply is prophetic and applies not only to Cole but to Mexicans and Americans alike. Concomitantly, if one key of gold opens any door, not having a golden key keeps the door locked. Shortly after this conversation, Cole and Rawlins are taken back to Encantada and incarcerated with an old man the jefes politicos have arrested, and the old man, Orlando, "didn't know what crime he had been accused of. He'd been told he could go when he signed the papers but he couldn't read the papers and no one would read them to him. He didn't know how long he'd been here. Since sometime in the winter" (170). Orlando lacks the power to contest his imprisonment, and he must suffer indefinite jail time, being handled by men "accustomed to caring for livestock" (170). His lack of

power robs him of not only his freedom, but also of his humanity.

As Antonio's reply to Cole's question suggests, poverty and the lack of power inherent in poverty transcends nationalities. In many ways, the three Americans, Cole, Rawlins, and Blevins, must suffer even greater indignities than Orlando. Orlando's age protects him from any harm other than imprisonment. The guards do not abuse him because "He said there was no sustenance in it for them. An old man's dry moans" (172). The young Americans are not so lucky. The captain takes Rawlins "to the shower room" where he "keeps a white coat" (169). Blevin's life goes to the "man who had paid money that certain arrangements be made" (179). In other words, in a country that has "no death here for criminals", money buys and determines the law (180). Cole's and Rawlins' experiences in prison reinforce the importance of money. Having money circumvents the law, truth, and justice; not having it determines those three things. Keeping these two in prison is simply a matter of choosing a crime "without owners . . . Like picking the proper suit in a store" (193). Their conversation with the papazote reflects this idea, and in many ways mirrors

Antonio's earlier statement to Cole about money.

If you dont have no money how can you be release
from your confinements?

You tell us.

But there is nothing to tell. Without money you
can do nothing.

Only after Cole empowers himself by buying a knife can he survive in prison, and only after Duena Alfonsa buys their freedom can they leave. Mexico has remained a system where money matters more than anything else, a clear contradiction of Madero's intentions.²⁰

The system treats Cole, Rawlins, and Blevins exactly like Orlando. All four lack the resources to buy justice; thus, they suffer. Even Blevin's claim that he is "an American" does him no good (45). The captain, a jefe politicos, reflects the dictatorial power Madero fought against. When Madero lost, these caciques continued to dominate their small towns, just as Huerta dominated the country. The government, not the people, "Can make truth. Or we can lose it" (168). The goodness or quality of the person is irrelevant. When Cole leaves the prison,

The commandante opened his desk drawer and took

out an envelope and handed it across the desk.

This is you, he said. (207)

Granted the commandante is not a native speaker of English, but the missing preposition speaks volumes. He equates Cole with the money in the envelope. The antecedent for "This" is the money. "You" renames "This." In essence, the commandante says the money is you. Metonymically, the commandante robs Cole not only of his identity, he also creates a status for Cole below humans. Cole can be passed back and forth in an envelope whose contents are so fluid that the commandante has already requisitioned his share. What does not exist here is Madero's sense of equality. Only those who can be identified with money count. If Cole is the money, when he has no money, he has no existence.

John Grady Cole's experiences supplement and authorize Duena Alfonsa's story. She gives Cole and us the history of the loser. Madero lost and the people of Mexico lost. By losing power, they lost control of the flow of information. They could not tell their story. Duena Alfonsa does. She gives a capable, intelligent history of Francisco Madero. Cole's encounters and experiences make her narrative of his story more powerful because we see, in the Mexican

characters, the effects of Madero's failure. *All the Pretty Horses* works not just as a fictional novel, but as a history of 20th century Mexican politics. In the final analysis, then, the novel, through Duena Alfonsa, questions the accuracy of "archived" history. Duena Alfonsa's narrative may parallel what historians will later authorize as important information, but her story also adds to that history. The resultant fiction she creates as history becomes validated by the experiences of John Grady Cole. His search for a Big Rock Candy Mountain ends in defeat as he rides "Passed and paled into the darkening land, the world to come" (301).

NOTES

1. A variation of this chapter is forthcoming in *Southern Quarterly*.
2. Edwin T. Arnold makes a similar point ("Mosaic" 18). see also Leo Daugherty, "Gravers False and True: Blood Meridian as Gnostic Tragedy." He offers an ingenious reading of both the novel and the epilogue.
3. See Woodward and Arnold for discussions of McCarthy's first installment of the Border trilogy as coming of age stories. See also Tom Pilkington's article where he claims that the surface plot "appears a variation on a story that has been told often in western literature. A wandering cowboy and his sidekick ride innocently into hostile territory" (318). Pilkington posits, also, "that the individual is alone in a cold, indifferent universe-- appears to be the sum of John Grady's experiences in the novel" (314). See also Nancy Kreml; Linda Townley Woodson; and Dianne C. Luce "'When You Wake': John Grady Cole's Heroism."
4. McCarthy's knowledge of history is vast. He consistently shows an ability to weave that history into his fiction. See Chapter 5 for a more in depth discussion. In Richard B.

Woodward's interview with McCarthy, McCarthy tells us that not only does he not "write about places he hasn't visited" (28), he claims that the novel can "encompass all the various disciplines and interests of humanity" (30).

5. In effect, her narrative is just as much Madero's history as are "standard" histories of him, such as Stanley R. Ross' *Francisco Madero: Apostle of Mexican Democracy*; Alan Knight's *The Mexican Revolution*; and Gene Z. Hanrahan's *Counter Revolution Along the Border*.

6. See Ross (8-13) for a discussion of Francisco Madero's altruism and his desire to "love our brothers as Jesus taught" (9). Ross also discusses Madero's promotion "among the wealthier inhabitants [of his town] the idea of establishing a public dining room to provide food for those in need" (13).

7. Ross does not call Madero a Marxist, but he clearly implies that he leans that direction. Knight disagrees and builds a solid case that Madero was a social liberal, but he did not necessarily want to rid the country of the economic gains made under Diaz (512-13). Interestingly enough, Don Hector agrees with Ross. He contends that "The political views of that family [Madero] were quite radical" (144). He

does not define radical, though, and we must wonder if his bias does not inform his judgement of the Madero family politics.

8. Madero's book might have worried Diaz, but it should not have. It called for little in the way of radical change. Even Don Hector admits that "the book contained nothing so terrible" (145).

9. Ironically, Madero's revolution, and the others that followed

aggravated the country's long-standing economic problems, which meant low productivity, food shortages, inflation, and unending poverty. Such conditions drove hundreds of thousands of Mexicans northward to the border in search of peace and economic opportunity. (Martinez 308)

10. Madero had previously rejected a violent overthrow of power. He believed he could organize a peaceful election overthrow. To that end, he rejected the Flores Magon revolution and established the Anti-Reelection campaign. See Meyer, *The Course of Mexican History* 484-88, and Harris III and Sadler, *The Border Revolution* for information about the Magon rebellion and the Texas reaction to that

rebellion.

11. Once again, Duena Alfonsa's narrative agrees with the historical narrative. She claims that Francisco "was never suited to be president of Mexico. He was hardly suited to be Mexican" (238). See Hanrahan's introduction where he posits that the cause of Madero's downfall was his inability as an administrator. See also Hart 364.
12. See Harris III, 29 for Colquitt's hypocritical approach to the various revolutions led from Texas. See also Casey, 375. His flippant treatment of Madero speaks volumes about the way Texans reacted to Madero and his European ideas. Historians have well documented the U.S. government's role in Madero's downfall. See Knight for a well researched and documented account of Henry Lane Wilson's correspondence with Taft during Huerta's overthrow of Madero. Wilson clearly disliked Madero and his politics. He even refused to properly protect Madero after he resigned his presidency. See also Paredes *With His Pistol in His Hand* and George Washington Gomez (1990); Jose E. Limon, *Dancing with the Devil* (1994); Jovita Gonzalez and Eve Raleigh, *Caballero* (1996); Walter Prescott Webb, *Texas Rangers* (1935). Each of these works discusses the blending of Texan and Mexican

cultures as well as their separation caused by the many revolutions along the border.

13. Alfonsa's narrative is remarkably accurate in its description of Gustavo's murder. See Ross 312-13 for an almost exact replica of the event.

14. See Meyer, *Huerta: A Political Portrait*, for a detailed account of Madero's assassination.

15. In many ways I am relying on Gerda Lerner's idea in *Creation of the Patriarchy*. She argues that people with no history lack power because they have no base or history to draw from. If they have no history, they have no stories or myths that give them direction and truth to follow.

Although her study discusses women and gender issues, her thesis is germane to this topic, as well.

16. At this stage of the journey, John Grady and Rawlins probably do still believe in the Big Rock Candy Mountain. Later in the novel, Cole meets a proprietor of a cafe who tells him "that it was good that God kept the truths of life from the young as they were starting out or else they'd have no heart to start at all" (286). Cole and Rawlins do not know the truths they will encounter shortly. If so, they would know that traveling three hundred kilometers would not

place them at the Big Rock Candy Mountain.

17. In one way, Cole left Texas because he lost his ability to sell his "labour-power" (Marx 186). When Cole's mother refuses to let him run the ranch, she takes his ability to sell his commodity from him. Arguably, this novel is his search for a place to offer his "labour-power" for sale. In many ways Madero's goal was to create a country that allowed for that possibility. What exists in Mexico is vastly different. Marx envisioned a system where "buyer" and "seller" were both "equal in the eyes of the law" (186). We can pick any worker/owner situation in the novel and see that equality does not exist.

18. Cole's reference to Big Rock Candy Mountain calls forth more than one signified: Wallace Stegner's novel, the song, and the child's idea to name a few. Each of these informs the rhetoric of the text, and each one helps shape our interpretation. Stegner's novel seems particularly appropriate considering the protagonist continually searches for life on easy street. This reference works as a subtle foreshadowing to what Cole will not find as he travels farther south.

19. Cole and Antonio have been discussing Cole's earlier

conversations with both Don Hector and Duena Alfonsa about Alejandra. He asks, "Which is worse: That I am poor or that I am American?" Antonio responds: "One key of gold opens any door." Antonio's statement reinforces the importance of money in the novel.

20. A papazote is a "big shot." In the prison, the papazote, Emilio Perez, is a "prisoner of means" who "lived like an exiled satrap complete with cook and bodyguard" (184). The prison "was no more than a small walled village and within it occurred a seethe of barter and exchange" (182). The wealthy prisoners control the yard and can offer protection. Here, like outside the walls, the wealthy rule in a dictatorial manner. Power, granted by money, decides control and life or death. Even within the prison walls where crime and incarceration should equalize everyone, money and economics dominates. This is not a healthy system.

CHAPTER SEVEN

CONCLUSION

The second installment of McCarthy's Border Trilogy, *The Crossing* (1994), does not continue the story of John Grady Cole. Instead, McCarthy tells a new story about Billy and Boyd Parham, two boys from New Mexico who have their own adventures in Mexico. In many respects, McCarthy's apparent reluctance to continue with the same story, thereby creating a trilogy with three distinct parts, supports the defining thesis behind my dissertation. I have studiously avoided attaching a dominant theme to McCarthy's works, nor have I chosen to approach McCarthy's works theoretically. Outside of claiming that McCarthy writes both Southern and Western novels, I have treated each novel autonomously. In an age of literary categorization, I contend that McCarthy resists easy placement within a theory or thematic genre, and that each story demands to stand on its own. McCarthy is not creating another Yoknapatawpha county. Even though his Southern novels take place within a hundred miles of each

other, any intratextuality comes via our perception. Culla Holme never meets Lester Ballard, even though they are both "A child of God" and virtual next door neighbors. I do not argue that McCarthy's Southern novels do not have certain similarities. McCarthy's confrontation with the Southern traditions, both literary and cultural, requires alluding to those self-same traditions; however, each novel explores a different aspect of the Southern past.

I do not want to imply, though, that McCarthy is a historical novelist or a revisionist historian. While there are elements of both in his works, focusing exclusively on the obscure historical figures can bog us down in a search for particulars. The temptation when reading McCarthy, I think, is to marvel at his breadth of knowledge and then try to uncover the connection between each historical event or person he mentions in his texts. McCarthy's map of existence consists of both the myth of who we are and the myth of who we did not become. While uncovering these historic particulars is important, McCarthy's works, and our criticism of his novels, should focus on the story that grows from the memory (which creates history) that becomes the myth of our existence. McCarthy's novels superimpose one

map of existence on the other, confusing and confronting both existences. His artistic cartography creates not new myths but the possibilities for an endless number of myths, depending on who is telling the story and whose story we chose to accept. Concentrating on each individual story from McCarthy, allows us, I contend, to see the mosaic of McCarthy's works.

Neither modernist or postmodernist, McCarthy stands alone among American novelists today. His decision to not continue with John Grady Cole's story indicates his own sense that even though "all tales are one" (*Crossing* 143), each telling is a new creation that deserves its own examination. Because McCarthy has divided his own career regionally already, critics can easily classify his works, bunch them together, and then examine them within a certain construct. As the age of postmodernism either comes to a close, or redefines itself (if it can, by definition, do either), McCarthy's novels stand paradoxically inside and outside the current literary discussion. Treating each tale as a part, both independent from and dependent on, the larger tale allows McCarthy to transcend discussions that leave him trapped as regionalist, either Southern or Western. His works explore,

confront, and challenge those histories, myths, and traditions that define both regional and national culture. Each of McCarthy's novels stands alone defining a different aspect of that culture, and each novel redefines his previous novel. All tales might very well be one, but of the telling there is no end because "Men's memories are uncertain and the past that was differs little from the past that was not" (*Blood Meridian* 330).

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