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7-2015

Architectures for a Future South: Posthumanism and Ruin in the Novels of Cormac McCarthy

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Architectures for a Future South
Posthumanism and Ruin in the Novels of Cormac McCarthy

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts in English

by

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Sewanee: The University of the South
Bachelor of Arts in English, May 2013

July 2015
University of Arkansas

This thesis is approved for recommendation to the Graduate Council.

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Abstract

In this thesis, I read the novels of Cormac McCarthy as posthuman southern literature to explain why literature from the South after World War II could no longer convey a sense of place during postmodernity: that is, because its culture and economy were transitioning from predominantly humanistic thinking (i.e., believing that humans [and especially southern humans] are supreme beings) to predominantly posthumanistic thinking (i.e., believing that humans are not as supreme as they think they are). I argue that we can trace this ideological change over time via structural shifts in the South's architectural record, which I see in the ruins of McCarthy's novels. I conclude that applying posthuman theory to southern literature affords us an alternative (and non-supremacist, non-exceptionalist) way to read southern literature, as well as a way to understand the American South as a space that is constantly undergoing a broader, transideological movement away from humanism (read: human exceptionalism) and toward posthumanism (read: non-, anti-, or after human exceptionalism).

Acknowledgements

It has been a privilege to work with such compassionate academic mentors as Dr. Lisa Hinrichsen and Dr. John Grammer. I am also full of gratitude for the guidance of my extracurricular mentors, Neil G., Banyon P., and Russel E. I am indebted to all of these wonderful people for their time, encouragement, persistence, and willingness to listen to my questions, ideas, and odd thoughts.

For all of the above plus undying patience, unconditional love, and supportive listening during early descriptions of my work, my obsessive ramblings, as well as superfluous grammar lessons, I thank my parents, Rick and Katrina Jackson, and the beautiful, confident, and sassy Megan Vallowe—the only one I call exceptional.

Dedication

For Pap.

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Introduction: An Archaeology of Southern Letters

The twentieth century southerner found a stubborn sense of comfort in calling himself a

person with a "sense of place"—someone who did not wander, but put down roots. In 1930, this

stubborn comfort was made manifest with the publication of *I'll Take My Stand: The South and

the Agrarian Tradition*, a foundational set of essays written by twelve southerners who defined

themselves and the ideal southerner as self-sufficient farmers. Their essays reinforced the

South's exceptional sense of place in relation to the rest of the United States, i.e., within a region

haunted by the burden of its troubled history, in rural communities built on fertile soil, and on

plots of land where they could "labour in the earth," as the type of farmers they thought Thomas

Jefferson might proudly call "the chosen people of God" (Jefferson).[1]

With this utopian vision put forward during the Great Depression, the Agrarians saw

southern culture and grassroots economics as a last holdout against and potential solution to the

failing industrial economies of the North. Their essays thus defined the U.S. South in terms that

would promote economic and moral cultivation of its citizenry through subsistence farming

rather than manufacturing and the stock market. Such ideas, however, were met with progressive

resistance for what many southern liberals saw in the manifesto's socially conservative, if not

regressive agenda, which, to several of the Agrarians' contemporaries, bordered on fascism.[2]

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[1] None of the Agrarians directly cites Thomas Jefferson's *Notes on the State of Virginia* (1785), but their pastoral vision for the southern farmer certainly aligns with Thomas Jefferson's pastoral vision for the Virginian farmer. Thanks to Dr. Tam Carlson at Sewanee for drawing this connection during the first class I took in Literature of the U.S. South.

[2] See Robert Brinkmeyer's *The Fourth Ghost: White Southern Writers and European Fascism* (2005) for public figures who claimed the group was ideologically fascistic. Brinkmeyer notes multiple instances of Western European racism and classism among the Southern Agrarians, whose "strict opposition between the rural innocence of traditional culture and the *urban evil* of modernity […] unwittingly promoted a traditional way of life that was structured by ideology mirroring that of the modern states they railed against" (Brinkmeyer 97, emphasis added).

Such resistance was accompanied by increased urbanization in the South, which John Egerton would later coin as the "Americanization of Dixie" (Egerton); America's involvement in The Second World War, which James Cobb would later note as a major hinge point when the "New South" became more like a "No South" (Cobb 244); as well as the civil rights movement, which, according to southern historians Matthew Lassiter and Joseph Crespino in *The Myth of Southern Exceptionalism* (2009), signaled the end of another era in southern history (Crispino and Lassiter 14). All of this rapid change during the middle of the twentieth century would lead to the Agrarian movement dying out before the second half of the twentieth century. What remained for the twelve southerners who started it was a refuge in the ruins of southern fiction, which, after the death of William Faulkner and literary modernism, they found in a state of decay and mourning—much like its "Lost Cause" literary ancestor after the Civil War—still telling stories about a South wrestling with the death of an older southern culture.

Fast forward to the turn of the twenty-first century: *South to the Future* (2002). Fred Hobson, a southernist who continues the work of the Twelve Southerners (albeit to tell about a newer south) refers to what's left of older "southern culture" as "almost always plural": i.e., in terms of multiple "southern culture*s*" (3). Meanwhile, Deborah Cohn and Jon Smith broke new ground for southern scholars after publishing a collection of essays titled *Look Away!: The U.S. South in New World Studies* (2004), fashioning a literary critical zeitgeist for global southern studies by examining transnational cultural affinities between the "two Souths" of the United States and Latin America. Such plurality, hybridity, and proliferation of Souths examined by contemporary southernists indicates not only a literary critical sea change (i.e., a "look away" from the monolith of the "American South" and a look toward the shibboleths of "southern

cultures"), but also mirrors the generational multiplicity of the U.S. South in the southern

imagination—a space where it always seems to be getting replaced by newer southern cultures.

The rise and fall of southern cultures seems to have captured the imaginations of many

southern writers at the end of the twentieth century, especially Cormac McCarthy, an author who

has distanced himself from the South over the years, but who also lived through, witnessed, and

bridged the transition from modernism to postmodernism in literature of the U.S. South. My

purpose in this thesis is to investigate how Cormac McCarthy's ten novels have made that

transition, and whether or not in so doing, they have helped us enter a period in contemporary

southern literature where writers of the South can abandon their concern for the past and adopt a

concern for the future. To answer these questions, "Architectures for a Future South" contends

that McCarthy's novels illustrate the architectural ruination of several souths—i.e., the Old South

of the antebellum era, the New South of the postbellum era, and the postmodern South of the

post-WWII era—so as to trace the South's transformation from a humanist region that believed

in supremacist myths about southern, western, and human exceptionalism into a posthumanist

region that can recognize itself as no more supreme than the rubble it has been reduced to, time

and time again.

In tracing this change over time in terms of a cultural history, I seek to expand Martyn

Bone's theory of a postsouthern sense of place in contemporary southern fiction. I do so by

positing the "posthuman south"[3] as a way of explaining why southern literature after World War

II possesses what Bone calls a "sense of 'place(lessness)'" (45). That is, I put forward a reason

for why postmodern southern literature could no longer convey a sense of place after the advent

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[3] I do not capitalize the term "posthuman south" throughout this thesis. I intend the lower-case
"s" (at least in my conception of a future South) to represent the idea of a South that no longer
senses itself as exceptional in any way that would have us capitalize a cardinal direction to
denote its speciality.

of postmodernity, which is to say because its culture and economy were transitioning from predominantly humanist thinking (i.e., believing that humans [and especially southern, white, male humans] are superior to all life on earth) to predominantly posthumanist thinking (i.e., believing that humans [and especially southern, white, male humans] are not as superior as they think they are). I argue that we can trace this ideological change over time via structural shifts in the South's architectural record. My approach in the way of southern architecture is inspired by the scholarly work of southern fiction writer, Doris Betts, who, in her contribution to *The Future South: A Historical Perspective for the Twenty-First Century* (1991) excavates the contemporary South's recent history in what she calls "our archaeology of southern letters" (179). The fruits of her excavation are worth quoting at length:

> The satellite dish stands where the outhouse used to lean; after the
> tobacco curing barn gave way to the sharecropper's cabin, that was
> replaced by a rusting trailer, and now by an elaborate furnished
> mobile home that cost $35,000. (178)

The erasure of older structures (such as the outhouse, barn, and sharecropper's cabin) and their replacement by newer structures (such as the satellite dish, rusting trailer, and mobile home) signals the movement from one South to another. These movements appear especially pronounced in Cormac McCarthy's ten novels, where the focus often seems less on character and more on surrounding landscapes, all of which appear resplendent with what K. Wesley Berry observes in the author's prominent "archaeological references" (Berry 61). In focusing on McCarthy's downplay of character development and emphasis on archaeological references, I follow Georg Guilleman's account of McCarthy's representation of nature "beyond anthropocentric terms" (Guilleman 81), John Cant's account of McCarthy's deconstruction of the myth of American exceptionalism, and Matthew Guinn's account of McCarthy's deconstruction of southern mythology altogether. From these critics, I construct a posthumanist reading that

seeks to frame the ruinous architecture of McCarthy's novels as signs of the decline of humanist (read: human exceptionalist or supremacist) ideologies in the U.S. South.

For southern transnational theorist, Martyn Bone, the death of older southern cultures, and specifically those envisioned by the Southern Agrarians, raises the following question: "If 'the South' ceases to be a distinctive socioeconomic geography (i.e. loses its "sense of place"), then what happens to 'southern literature'?" (17). His answer is not affirmative: if "the South" dies, then so does its literature. Bone thus establishes that literature which came out of the South after the failed Agrarian cultural movement is "postsouthern," meaning that it can no longer be defined by the rural "sense of place" envisioned by *I'll Take My Stand*, and is therefore no longer southern with a capital S. The only way literature from the South has remained southern, according to Bone, is in scholars' preservation of a "*literary critical* 'image' of southern 'place' even in the midst of massive *sociospatial* change" (28). So, despite the fact that the region underwent huge cultural changes after World War II, scholars of the American South still taught that southern literature was rooted in a distinctive "sense of place," even though that "sense of place" had no current referent within the South's social reality.

As we will see throughout this thesis, McCarthy's work confounded many scholars who attempted to preserve this "sense of place" because his novels do not represent the South's contemporary social reality as one particular place with one particular culture à la Faulkner's monolithic Yoknapatawpha County. Rather, as critics ranging from Vereen Bell to Werner Herzog have pointed out, McCarthy's powerful language creates a world parallel to our own, one that declines to refer directly to southern issues as William Faulkner did in his time, but bears enough resemblance in style to the southern world represented in literature that it functions as an

indirect reflection, or transliteration of the South.[4] In fashioning this transliteration, McCarthy's

work distances southern literature from its former correspondence with issues such as race

relations, showing us a thoroughly postmodern southern literature that affects little more than a

southern accent, style, or aesthetic to symbolize the trappings of older cultures from the region.

Matthew Guinn notes well how McCarthy uses southern symbols ironically to

"deconstruct the notion of a bygone golden era" (94). He identifies McCarthy's distance from

southern cultural ideologies as an act of defiance, which is in fact, "a direct attack on tradition,"

and he describes this attack as "mythoclasm"—i.e., like iconoclasm, but deconstructive of entire

mythologies instead of mere icons (94). In so doing, Guinn demonstrates that McCarthy does not

paint older southern cultures, their mythology, or their people in a complimentary light. Rather,

McCarthy arranges these cultures to show how their peoples' attachment to the trappings of old

ways of thinking signals the decline and extinction of themselves and their way of life.

To prove the degree of discomfort such attacks forced upon literary scholars and writers

of the South, Guinn cites neo-Agrarian critic Walter Sullivan, who in 1975 called McCarthy's

work "clear evidence of the plane of madness to which our art has finally descended" (92-3).

Such harrumphing was Sullivan's response to McCarthy's latest novel at the time, *Child of God*

(1974), which details the psychosocial decline of a Tennessee farmer turned murderer and

necrophiliac after his land is seized and sold at auction—more on that in Chapter 1. From

Sullivan's neo-Agrarian standpoint, the novel (and McCarthy's work in general) appears like a

sick-joke effigy to the agrarian lifestyle, or as Sullivan harrumphed again, "an affront to decency

on every level" (Guinn 93). To the more contemporary Guinn, however, both the story and

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[4] Werner Herzog has been quoted saying "By dent of declaration, Cormac McCarthy creates a whole landscape that has been unknown to all of us, even though it seems to exist like, let's say, Faulkner and others invented and described the Deep South" ("Connecting Science and Art").

Sullivan's response present the conflict between the modern and the postmodern Souths; for "in [McCarthy's] career—and in Sullivan's reaction to it—we may observe a clearly delineated struggle between modern and postmodern, old and new, in the evolving landscape of southern literature" (92). Thus establishing the method by which McCarthy's work disrupts, questions, attacks, and deconstructs the literary traditions of older southern cultures, Guinn concludes that McCarthy's early work is embroiled in the struggle for southern literature to adapt and evolve in the postmodern South. However, he does not venture further with his idea of the evolution of southern literature into the realm of classifying McCarthy's new species of southern literature nor in tracing its relationship to the author's later (and much more popular) Southwestern novels.

My first chapter seeks to venture further in the direction of classifying McCarthy's specie of southern literature by calling it "posthumanist," as it focuses on how McCarthy writes the passing of the Southern Agrarians' myth of southern exceptionalism into cultural extinction. In addition to Guinn, I read alongside Cormac McCarthy's eco-readers, K. Wesley Berry and Dana Phillips, as well as economic critics like Christine Chollier and Richard Godden, to underpin the accuracy of Martyn Bone's theory of the "post-South," which posits the expiration of southern sense of place in the works of Robert Penn Warren, Walker Percy, Richard Ford, Margaret Mitchell, Flannery O' Connor, and Barbara Kingsolver, to name a few. Extending Bone's list to include Cormac McCarthy, I argue that McCarthy's novels do what Bone says all southern (and even most postsouthern) fiction refuses to do—that is, they refer to *and* represent "the social reality of 'place(lessness)' in a late capitalist post-South" (Bone 45). As I trace the expiration of older southern cultures and economies represented in images of dilapidated, decaying, or otherwise abandoned structures throughout what McCarthy scholars have called the author's

"Southern"[5] works, I intend to illustrate how McCarthy uses the imagery of dereliction to present an architectural record of several souths that have now, historically and economically speaking, gone extinct. I thus survey Cormac McCarthy's first four novels, *The Orchard Keeper* (1965), *Outer Dark* (1968), *Child of God* (1973), and *Suttree* (1979), while noting how artifacts and architectures of the Southern Agrarians' brand of humanism—seen in the remnants of its "tables, chairs, portraits, festivals, and marriage customs" (Rubin xxvi)—dissipate and expire in these novels' southern cosmologies.

McCarthy scholars' hesitancy at the South / Southwest juncture in McCarthy's career is understandable given the ambiguity surrounding the author's transition from Tennessee to Texas in both life and work. Despite such ambiguity, McCarthy's move to Texas and the popularity of his Border Trilogy caused many of his readers to simply divide his work in terms of two distinctly regional genres. These are the "Southern" (i.e. *The Orchard Keeper*, *Outer Dark*, *Child of God*, and *Suttree*) and the "Western" (i.e. *Blood Meridian*, *All the Pretty Horses*, *The Crossing*, *Cities of the Plain*, and *No Country for Old Men*). Critics note varying degrees of overlap between the two genres, but most, like Robert L. Jarrett, regard McCarthy's transition as "a sudden break with the past," which includes a more-or-less clean break from his "career in Southern fiction" (qtd. in Cant 22). Although this sudden break is clearly not a *clean* break (the central character of his first Western novel is from antebellum Tennessee of the 1830s, while countless critics note the persistence of McCarthy's engagement with the southern gothic throughout his career) most criticism published on McCarthy's work straddles his transition from Tennessee to Texas by dealing with his Southern and Western works separately. Dianne Luce

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[5] When referring to the two terms that scholars of McCarthy's work use to divide his novels (i.e., "Southern" and "Western"), I place scare quotes around them to denote that I am challenging this critical distinction in favor of regarding all McCarthy's novels as different stages on a continuum that moves away from the South and toward the post- and posthuman souths.

does this with *Reading the World* (2009), which deals only with what she terms McCarthy's

"Tennessee Period." Most noticeably, Wade Hall and Rick Wallach divide the author's work

between two short books of critical essays dedicated respectively to "Cormac McCarthy's

Appalachian Works" and "Cormac McCarthy's Western Novels" in their anthology, *Sacred*

Violence (1995). Such fine distinctions raise issues for British critic John Cant, who points out

"[h]ow complete this break with 'Southern fiction' has been is a matter for debate," a debate

which hinges largely on answering the question of "how far 'the Southwest' is distinct from 'the

South'," or put another way: how "Southern" are McCarthy's "Western" works? (Cant 22-23).

My second chapter offers an answer to Cant's question by arguing essentially that

McCarthy's "Western" works are as "Southern" as his "Southern" works are "Western." That is,

because the landscape of his border novels—i.e., *Blood Meridian* (1985), *All the Pretty Horses*

(1992), *The Crossing* (1994), *Cities of the Plain* (1998), and *No Country for Old Men* (2005)—is

metonymically "Southern" and "Western," McCarthy explores the Southwestern as another

postsouthern space, wherein the regionally dominant cultures and economies from both the

South and the West (i.e., Christianity and capitalism) stand for globally dominant ideologies of

human exceptionalism. Using Deborah Cohn's work on the relationship between American

Southern and Mexican American literature, I connect the South and West of McCarthy's works,

in Cohn's terms, as regions that "share a history […] of dispossession, of socioeconomic

hardship, of political and cultural conflict, and of the export of resources to support the

development of a 'North'" (Cohn 5-6). During McCarthy's exploration of this shared history, I

argue, he uncovers how those who harbor beliefs in human exceptionalism have laid waste to the

landscape and reduced the region to ruins in very much the same way late capitalism does to the

South of his previous novels. In these later novels, however, McCarthy's scope broadens, and he

pans out to see that not only have humanist architectures of the Old and New Souths come to pass, but so have humanist architectures of the nineteenth century Old West, the early-twentieth century Southwest, and the late-twentieth-century post-South.

My final chapter follows *The Road* (2006), McCarthy's most popular novel, on its southward journey through the ruins of contemporary southeastern America, and it serves as the capstone to my thesis that McCarthy uses all his novels to guide us through ruins of the Old South of the nineteenth century, the New South of early the twentieth century, and the post-South of the late-twentieth century. In this final chapter, I argue that *The Road* presents us with what I call a "posthuman south" of the twenty-first century, using the architectural record of the Old South, New South, and post-South presented by all his previous novels to illustrate that in a future South, every form of exceptionalism, every culture, every economy, every human being in the western world shall pass. The affect of this passing, I conclude, is neither dystopian (as it would be for a conservative generation of southerner) nor utopian (as it might be for a progressive generation of southerner), but instead ecotopian, which is to say, peaceful and serene when viewed through the lens of a futurist, posthuman reader from an environmental angle.

Throughout this thesis, I use the word "posthumanism" in its literal sense to mean "after humanism," or after the waning of a belief-system that places humans at the apex of cosmic significance.[6] To this end, I appeal to Matthew Taylor's recent analysis of American posthuman cosmologies, *Universes Without Us* (2013), which he derives from works written by Edgar Allan Poe, Charles Chesnutt, and Zora Neale Hurston. I include Cormac McCarthy among this grouping—all of which have been canonized as "Southern" at one point or another—to conclude

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[6] See the "Great Chain of Being," a system devised by Renaissance humanists that placed all matter and all life on Earth into distinct tiers of a hierarchy. Humans appear directly below God and Angelic Beings on this religious pecking order, but also above Animals, Plants, and Minerals, i.e., at the highest tier of all life on Earth.

that his ruined architectures envision a posthuman cosmology in the South: i.e., a posthuman

south. Speculating on this vision's implications will afford us alternative ways to read and teach

southern literature in the future. In fact, framing McCarthy's work in terms of the critical

architecture outlined above will allow us to view global southern literature through a new

cultural-historical lens, one which does not impose Americanized notions of the South on

literature that does not claim to be southern or American. Instead, adopting a posthuman view of

the South permits us to zoom out and take in southern literature as part of a broader,

transideological movement away from the prideful view that humans are supreme and into the

more humble view that we are not as special as we think we are.

Chapter 1 | This Too, Shall Pass: The Myth of Southern Exceptionalism in Cormac McCarthy's "Southern" Novels

In 1962, Louis Rubin wrote that the Southern Agrarians preached "the gospel of religious humanism" (Rubin xvi). By this apt and colorful turn of phrase, he meant the Agrarians were concerned with persuading southerners and Americans of the 1930s to place their faith in human labor rather than manufacturing and the modern dogma they dubiously called "Progress" ("A Critique of the Philosophy of Progress" 122-154). Under the gun of none other than agrarian patriarch Donald Davidson for focusing too closely "upon the poetic 'image'" of *I'll Take My Stand* "rather than its 'literal and specific program'," Rubin later clarified "the book's real importance: its assertion of the values of humanism and its rebuke of materialism" (qtd. in Bone 31). The irony in this rebuke is that while the Agrarians criticized industrialism for selling itself as superior to humans in terms of labor output, they also defined their own ideology and lifestyle as superior to those that attended modern industry. That is, as humanists, they regarded the human, and especially the southern (white, male) human, as an exceptional being. Polarizing themselves from the modern ideologies of scientific and economic progress, they went so far as to claim that "*genuine humanism* was rooted in the agrarian life of the older South and of other parts of the country that shared such a tradition" (Rubin xxvi, emphasis added).

Circa 1930, this claim to a "genuine humanism" (i.e., one that presided over the philosophy in its previous forms, such as Renaissance and the Enlightenment humanism) served as a sounding board for postmodernists' later rejection of the ideology in all of its forms.[7] And

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[7] Deconstructionists as a whole (and Michel Foucault in particular) would later tear down the construct altogether, pulling the rug out from under "Renaissance humanism" and "Classical rationalism" for only being able "to allot human beings a privileged position in the order of the world," yet being unable "to conceive of man," or in other words, to define human nature while also accounting for changes in its definition over time (Foucault 318).

yet the Agrarians—a group whose "religious humanism" (Rubin, xvi) derives especially from the Christian tradition of Renaissance humanism—constructed a mythos of southern supremacism that re-elevated human nature to an even more prestigious position than their humanist forefathers. Indeed, they defined their cause explicitly in terms that would make themselves appear like a righteous minority: "Genuine" humanists would never accept the tenants of "the Cult of Science," "industrialism," nor their "evil dispensation" as majority rule; no, they would instead preserve the "moral, social, and economic autonomy" of "The South"—"a minority section" with a "minority right to live its own kind of life" (Rubin xx-xxx). Pitting their special southerners as minority victims of an "evil" majority rule, the Agrarians denounced modernization in the North as "the common or American industrial ideal," which if younger southerners followed suit, would lead to the South becoming "an undistinguished replica of the usual industrial community" (xx-xxi).

With this last-ditch effort to recruit the next generation of southerner to their lost cause, the Southern Agrarians repurposed the term humanism to mean adhering to "a definite social tradition." By invoking this tradition, they established a discipleship that would follow "concrete" social traditions from the Old South rather than fall victim to what they termed the "abstract system" of modern "'Humanists'" (xxvi, scare quotes in the original) with its economy built by machines processing "soft material poured in from the top" instead of by humans laying a firm foundation from the bottom. This imagery of construction and craftsmanship speaks for the Agrarians' privileging of concrete cultural artifacts made by human hands—e.g. tables, chairs, and portraits—artifacts, which, like the Confederate Battle Flag, came to stand for a heightened sense of southern pride.

The Agrarian myth of southern exceptionalism thus sells an hubristic brand of humanism, one that held on to architectures and artifacts of the once-glorious past, almost as if doing so would cause the South to rise again. Scholars of southern studies like Howard Odum, Bethany Johnson, Fred Hobson, Matthew Guinn, Martyn Bone, Richard Brinkmeyer and countless others have collectively noted that the Agrarians sympathized with the Lost Cause of the Confederacy, mourned the loss of the plantation class, as well as worked to preserve the infrastructure of the Old South because of their sense of the region's exceptionality. However, these scholars have not yet connected the ideology of humanism (nor its counterpart, posthumanism) to the Agrarians' sense of southern pride, nor noted the way in which authors like Cormac McCarthy have written the passing of that pride—along with the trappings of its artifacts, architectures, and attendant humans—into ruin.

In filling that gap in scholarship, this chapter concludes that we can read McCarthy's first four novels from a posthumanist angle, which is to say, from an angle that views the U.S. South as a region where the southerner (and by extension, the human) can no longer lay claim to a place of privilege in the world. I do not intend the term posthumanism to connote the ideology of technology referred to as transhumanism. I do hope, however, that my reading will provide a springboard for those who, like myself, have an interest in examining the role of technology in altering southern history, literature, and culture. A dissertation would better serve such an interest. My goal as a posthumanist in this chapter is simply to provide an alternative take on fiction that deals with the cultural-historical shift from the humanist ideology of the Old South— a place in time that prided itself for once inhabiting the privileged sphere of what Matthew Taylor would call "the apex of cosmic meaning" (Taylor 11)—to the more posthumanist south of

contemporary America. In this space, the Agrarian vision of southern supremacism has become,

in the last words of *The Orchard Keeper*, "myth, legend, dust" (246).

McCarthy's first four novels depict the decline of agrarian cultures in the U.S. South

between the late nineteenth and mid-twentieth centuries. The central characters of all four novels

personify southern agrarian ways of life during that time frame, as they take stands against

industrially progressive people and institutions that stand for industrialism and late capitalism.

The Southern Agrarians would have classified these characters among those rugged

individualists who till the Earth as the chosen people of God. Indeed, Arthur Ownby, the titular

orchard keeper, labors as a self-sustaining farmer in Northeast Tennessee of the mid-1930s, or at

least he does until the state arrests him for shooting the TVA's new water tower, along with

several of its employees. Culla Holme of *Outer Dark* labors as an itinerant farmhand in an

anonymous yet ostensibly southern rural area around the turn of the twentieth century, working

on various farms as he looks for his abandoned son until three unnamed men who wander the

countryside and murder farm owners also murder his son. Lester Ballard of *Child of God* labors

as a farm owner in northeast Tennessee during the 1960s, keeping up his late father's property

until state and local officials auction it off to a man who shoots Lester at the end of the novel.

And finally, Suttree of *Suttree* labors as a fisherman on the Tennessee River throughout the

1950s, until various and unfortunate events—including the death of his son, the death of several

friends, his own near-death experience with typhoid fever, and the razing of his neighborhood—

force him out of Knoxville.

The novels thus illustrate the steady decline of these characters' agrarian ways of life

over the course of the region's change over time. However, rather than only showing the process

of that decline without the punctuation of an ending—such as William Faulkner does with the

imagery of receding forests in *Go Down Moses* (1942), which only suggests the end of an era—

McCarthy explicitly states the inevitable conclusion of such a regression, sounding a kind of

death knell to the cultural ideology of agrarianism via the iconography of its architectural ruin.

For all the novels' characters, the arc of this transition results in homelessness and wandering

over the ruined infrastructures of increasingly desolate rural areas, which demonstrate the

obsolescence of buildings that once reinforced the myth of southern exceptionalism. These

buildings' disappearance allows us to view empty spaces in which we are made to feel what

Martyn Bone has called a postsouthern sense of "place(lessness)" (44). Like viewing large,

empty spaces in the strata of a geologic cross-section, these architectural layers of erasure and

replacement appear to delineate the South's passage from the Old South to the New South, and

from the New South to the post-South in McCarthy's first four novels.

After tracing this change over time and noting the increasing role of late capitalism in

manufacturing the transition from one southern era to the next, I note how the end of *Suttree* lays

the foundation for envisioning a future southern era that I conceptualize as the "posthuman

south." I define this concept as an era wherein accepting change over time and cultural extinction

supersede conservative elegies about the loss of older southern cultures as well as progressive

celebrations about the change from the Old South to New South. This future south appears on the

horizon at the end of *Suttree*, where McCarthy moves beyond both elegy and celebration and

toward something resembling transcendence. Indeed, when we see the figure of Suttree moving

west upon his realization that "[T]here is one Suttree and one Suttree only," and "Nothing ever

stops moving" (461), we view a postmodern southerner who has come to grips with the passage

of time and achieved a sense of serenity and humility in facing a twenty-first century South—

that space where the southerner (and ultimately the human) has been forced to acknowledge his

lack of exceptionality, insignificance, and inevitable extinction.

Throughout *The Orchard Keeper*, *Outer* Dark, and *Child of God*, we see the decline of

what the Southern Agrarians referred to as "The Agrarian Tradition" and the rise of industrial

capitalism in images of old and new architecture. In *The Orchard Keeper*, we witness the

collapse of the Green Fly Inn, a local watering hole and cornerstone of agrarian living in the

fictional Red Branch, Tennessee, where the structure collapses into the Tennessee Valley. After

this collapse, the Tennessee Valley Authority replaces the Inn with a new water tower. Each

structure's description speaks for its place within a different cultural era of the South, as The

Green Fly maintains architecture from the antebellum era with its "two Doric columns of white

marble set in either end of the bar," which support the Inn's otherwise "plain construction" (13).

These still-in-use pillars of the Old South fall when the rest of the Inn catches fire and slides off

the mountain into the valley, where

> [I]t continued to burn, generating such heat that the hoard of glass beneath
> it ran molten and fused in a crisp and blackened rubble, murrhined with
> bottlecaps. It is there yet, the last remnant of that landmark, flowing down
> the sharp fold of the valley like some imponderable archaeological
> phenomenon. (47-8)

Like those "murrhined" bottlecaps, the Doric columns become fossils of the old, southern

agrarian culture of its regulars: farmers, hunters, and moonshiners who continually demonstrate

the hubris of the Agrarian Tradition by continuing to visit the bar while its falls apart beneath

them. From its remnants frozen in stone, we can infer that the inn's constituent pieces are

artifacts of an "archaeological phenomenon," relics whose fossilized layers delineate the region's

departure from the humanist, agrarian era of the Old South and its arrival at an industrial era in

the New South. The town's new water tower imposes an industrial, postbellum architecture upon

the agrarian landscape with its "high legs" and "a fence around it with red signs," all of which portend the rising power and pervasiveness of the Tennessee Valley Authority (51). The novel's TVA men later personify this power and pervasiveness by opposing the orchard keeper, Arthur Ownby, who stands to protect the old, weak, and dying agrarian way of life. Arthur takes his stand by shooting the TVA water tower in a gesture of defiance against its presence on his property, scaring a nearby whiskey runner into driving his car off a bridge and causing an investigation that leads to his arrest. As these government officials transfer Arthur from car, to jail, to prison, to mental health facility, the orchard loses its keeper, its rotting trees decompose more quickly without his care, and the layered walls of governmental bureaucracy that support industrial capitalism both confine and extinguish the last vestige of Southern Agrarianism that resides in Arthur Ownby.

Neo-Agrarian scholars like Walter Sullivan argue that in tracing the decline of the Agrarian Tradition within *The Orchard Keeper*, McCarthy, like Faulkner before him, elegizes these cultures sympathetically in a way that mourns their loss (Sullivan 70). Postmodern scholars such as Matthew Guinn, however, argue that McCarthy unsympathetically dismantles and buries these cultures in a way that celebrates their loss (Guinn 92). The wistful tone of McCarthy's prose in passages surrounding Arthur Ownby may suggest that, at least for the novel's other protagonist—a young boy whom Ownby mentors named John Wesley Rattner—the old man's passing intimates an elegy. Still others could argue that the bitter tone of McCarthy's prose in passages about Ownby may suggest that for the novel's TVA men, the passing of Ownby intimates a cause for celebration. I contend, however, that for readers of the architectural iconography surrounding the old man's passing, the narrator neither mourns nor celebrates the loss of these older southern cultures. Instead, he spreads these cultures' remains across the

landscape as ruins so as to engender a sense of serenity in knowing that, like the barns and

houses maintained by the Agrarians, like "the dead sheathed in the earth's crust […] their bones

brindled with mold and the celled marrow going to frail stone" (244-45), and like ourselves—

this way of life, too, shall pass.

The novel's final scene reinforces the architectural imagery of southern cultural

extinction, as the boy whom Ownby mentored (now grown up) returns to find his former

Tennessee hometown transformed into a ghost town, the roof of his mother's house overgrown,

"deep-green with moss, or gaping black where patches had caved through," and everyone he

knows disappeared:

> They are gone now. Fled, banished in death or exile, lost, undone
> […] 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)

One could argue that this passage mounts a scathing critique against the New South that brought

these cultures to ruin, or even marks an elegy to an older South's passing. However, the passage

links back to the Green Fly Inn's collapse and transformation into an historical artifact, as the

town itself becomes an "archaeological phenomenon" that demarcates the end of an older

southern era. Indeed, K. Wesley Berry reads the vegetation on the house and tombstone of the

boy's mother in this scene as emblematic of "the archaeological references so prominent in

McCarthy's fiction" and as evocative of "the building up of millions of years of life on earth,"

that speaks for "the revolution of life and death," which "moves on, regardless of human

striving" (Berry 61). This environmental reading agrees with Dana Phillips's natural historical

reading of McCarthy, which posits that without fully developed characters, plots, or even a

narrative consciousness, "[o]nly natural history, which regards neither nature nor man as

symbolic, is left" (Phillips 448). Like Vereen Bell, Phillips here interprets McCarthy's work as a

"'critique of our culture's anthropocentrism'"(qtd. in Phillips 443), a critique for which, as

Richard Brinkmeyer puts it, "the human is not privileged over the nonhuman" and "all existence

stands equally on the same continuum" (Brinkmeyer 44). K. Wesley Berry's conclusion that

images of death and architecture combine in McCarthy's South "to project an eerie prophecy of

the next great extinction," extends Bell's, Brinkmeyer's, and Phillips's natural historical readings

of McCarthy's works to their logical conclusion, as layers of biological and architectural growth

and decay accumulate to catalogue the process of southern cultures' change over time. From this

perspective, we might see that, just as with the decline of the dinosaurs and the rise of humans,

one lifeform's decline gives way to another lifeform's rise. Indeed at the end of *The Orchard*

Keeper, the rise of a "strange race" has replaced "that people" who came before—people who,

like Arthur Ownby, experienced the transition from Old South to New South, and whose way of

life has declined into extinction. In this sense, McCarthy uses the weight of southern history to

demonstrate with geologic and architectural precision that everything in the natural order of

things—everything that the Agrarians hold dear, including themselves and the human race—

shall pass.

  The Orchard Keeper thus illustrates that the Old South has altogether passed and given

way, quite literally, to the New South. The Green Fly Inn's collapse, Arthur Ownby's

confinement, and the ruins of the ghost town all signify the decline of an older southern

ideology, i.e., that of the Green Fly Inn's regulars: farmers, hunters, and moonshiners of southern

agrarianism. As Matthew Guinn has noted, McCarthy's novels violently counteract the southern

agrarians and their ideologies with acts of "mythoclasm" engineered to dismantle modernist

myths and make room for southern literature in the postmodern South (Guinn 94). Direct attacks

on tradition such as these appear present but subdued in *The Orchard Keeper*, as the novel's final

scene merely illustrates the passage of time from one cultural era to the next, so that McCarthy—

at times more like southern historians C. Van Woodward, W.J. Cash, Fred Hobson, or James

Cobb than southern novelist William Faulkner—describes the fallout of the transition from Old

South to New South with accounts of crumbling architecture, effectually reporting what

Woodward called the South's slow "Industrial Evolution" by telling the region's cultural and

economic story with its architectural record (Woodward 107). In terms of this architectural

record, the construction of the water tank signifies the rise of a new cultural and economic era in

the New South, i.e. that of the TVA man, government workers, and capitalist businessmen. The

sleek, metal architecture of the water tank in this way replaces the rustic, wooden architecture of

the Green Fly Inn's bar in much the same way that free market capitalism replaces southern

agrarianism and establishes itself as the dominant economic model in the post-South.

  In this postsouthern space, Martyn Bone theorizes—and McCarthy verifies—the South

has lost the structures that provided it with an Old South sense of place and developed instead a

culture and economy that would be conducive to the growth of late capitalism (Bone 17). *The

Orchard Keeper* in this way prefigures how the post-South will evolve out of the late New South

shown in McCarthy's next two novels, and it lays the foundation for a cultural change over time

that McCarthy's "Southern" works could be said to construct—a change over time whose

overarching structure illustrates the transition from Old South to New South, from New South to

post-South, and from post-South to posthuman south.

  Extending the cultural progression outlined above to understand McCarthy's next two

novels, it may be argued that *Outer Dark* (1968) and *Child of God* (1973) trace the transition

from New South to post-South, as the dilapidation of New South architecture and the

infringement of the culture of late capitalism (e.g., mass-manufactured products, traveling

salesmen, and real-estate developers) become more prominent in each of these novels. Indeed in

both narratives, salesmen dog the central characters in the form of tinkers and real estate

auctioneers, both of which purchase and purvey artifacts of older southern cultures (e.g., farms,

barns, and land), while also selling mass-produced materials from an industrialized,

Americanized, and New South era. Like Arthur Ownby, the central character of each novel takes

his stand against such commercial advances, resisting the progress of capitalism by attempting to

retreat into structures that stand as monuments to an earlier southern agrarian lifestyle. However,

instead of these structures representing the Old South in the form of Doric columns and

nineteenth century ghost towns as *The Orchard Keeper* does, *Outer Dark* and *Child of God*

present us with abandoned frontier cabins, which are adorned more noticeably with artifacts from

the industrialized but poverty-stricken New South. In fact, the remains of these cabins' present us

with the ruins of the New South: another southern culture erased (and soon-to-be replaced) by

the newer southern culture of the post-South, where, without the structures of past Souths to fall

back upon, southerners' sense of place has dissolved. We see the ultimate extinction of place in

the final scenes of each novel, where the imagery of natural ruin—i.e., *Outer Dark*'s bog

described as "a landscape of the damned […] a faintly smoking garden of the dead" (242) as well

as *Child of God*'s collapsed cave described as a "mausoleum" (196)—render the rural South into

an anti-pastoral landscape, wherein the potential for an agrarian way of life rooted in sense of

place is no longer tenable.

Set at an unnamed place and time around the turn of the twentieth century in the rural

South, *Outer Dark*'s central narrative opens with a tinker approaching the "ruined shack" of a

man named Culla Holme (8). The ashamed father of his sister's child, Culla exits the shack to

turn the tinker away, refusing to buy the salesman's popular products of early New South

industry: i.e., "Dupont's powder," "bonnets," "coffee and tea for when the preacher comes,"

"corn whiskey," and a pornographic chapbook (7). After refusing to buy, Culla further demurs

on the tinker's offer to "make a trade" or sell anything of his own, stating he does not possess

anything of value (7). This refusal to trade frustrates the tinker, who, instead of buying and

selling his labor like every other itinerant character of the novel, works as an entrepreneur,

advertising his products and behaving as though he can persuade Culla to at least sell something.

However, Culla demonstrates to the tinker that this entrepreneurial spirit does not abide in him:

the poor, rural southerner of the New South, who, after being presented with the gross symbol of

mass-production and material culture that is the tinker's pornographic chapbook, recoils, firmly

stating "Naw. I don't want nothin" (7). Perceiving Culla's revulsion at a product that most of his

customers would view as an object of desire, the tinker's demeanor visibly changes, "the

cupidity on his face gone to a small anger," as he realizes upon Culla's retreat into a ruined shack

that this potential customer cannot be swayed to buy or sell.

      Culla's reaction to the chapbook and retreat from the tinker suggest that he does not want

to truck with the mass culture and market economy of the early New South. Indeed, his reclusive

withdrawal from products that signify social progress in a new southern economy—one where

objects of desire (e.g., bonnets, coffee, tea, whiskey, and pornography) have achieved a higher

rate of supply and demand than objects of necessity (i.e., farm tools)—suggests that products of

economic progress literally throw him off balance, destabilize his sense of place, and force him

back into the structure of southern cultural ruin that is his decaying shack. *Outer Dark*'s opening

trade scene thus sets up the central narrative to address issues of economic valuation and loss of

southern sense of place in the early New South. Indeed, its juxtaposition of new cultural artifacts

with the old, ruined architectures of abandoned cabins will be repeated throughout the novel, as

Culla refuses to take part in a new market economy, opting instead to participate in the older

economic model of itinerant farm labor. This regressive choice continually demonstrates how

resistance to cultural and economic change has become unsustainable in a New South that

demands engagement with a free market economy, which comes knocking at every door.

    Child of God begins with a similar scene of economic valuation and loss of sense of

place, when a real estate auctioneer not only comes knocking on, but actually selling the

farmhouse door of Lester Ballard. Listing the selling points of Lester's farm to a crowd of

potential buyers, the auctioneer puts on an entrepreneurial air similar to *Outer Dark*'s tinker, but

with a more noticeably mid-twentieth century brand of late capitalist salesmanship:

> Friends, six year ago when my uncle bought the Prater place down
> here everbody tried to talk him out of it. He give nineteen-five for
> that farm […] And you all know what happent down there. Yessir.
> Sold for thirty-eight thousand. A piece of land like this…Now it
> needs some improvin. It's rough. Yes it is. But friends you can
> double your money on it. A piece of real estate, and particular in
> this valley, is the soundest investment you can make. Sound as a
> dollar. And I'm very sincere when I say that. (6)

Speaking in the terms of "capitalist land speculation and real-estate development"—the two

harbingers of agrarian ruin Bone cites as key players in "the creative destruction" of southern

sense of place (Bone 42)—the auctioneer emphasizes the property's high potential to increase in

market value. He appeals to the potential buyers' interest in making a sound investment—

"Sound as a dollar"—that will benefit themselves and an apparently growing market economy

(6). Like Arthur Ownby and Culla Holme before him, however, Lester Ballard wants nothing to

do with participating in this growing economy. He merely wants his property, and he commands

the auctioneer to leave for what is apparently the second time, when the auctioneer makes it clear

that Lester has been jailed for resisting foreclosure once already. From Lester's resistance at this

foreclosure, it is apparent that he does not understand free market logic, behaving instead as if

the land is his by birthright or inheritance. Literally taking his stand until someone knocks him out, Lester demonstrates his ignorance of the late New South's legal system and market economy, which work here in conjunction to seize and foreclose on his property—regardless of his having inherited the place from his father—presumably due to his inability or unwillingness to pay taxes to the local government (7).

Addressing questions that scenes like those above raise about the effect of market economies on McCarthy's characters, Christine Chollier claims that McCarthy's novels offer a keen and double-edged critique of free market capitalism. Arguing that outcasts like Culla Holme and Lester Ballard are not only excluded from "the dominant social body" but also purposefully "do not take part in the market economic system," Chollier notes their practiced lack of participation and resistance to free market capitalism throughout McCarthy's southern novels especially. Concluding that characters like Lester, Culla, and Suttree prefer older economic models (e.g., gift giving, bartering, and/or labor exchange), Chollier explains why McCarthy's outcasts seem so at odds with their societies: that is, they see something wrong or unfair about the new system (Chollier 176). However, she caveats that this is not to say "McCarthy calls for a romantic return to barter or even gifts," which would be what his characters prefer, but "he nevertheless creates a society which is supposed to have reached a more sophisticated stage of capitalism than the previous [societies, whose economic models his characters ascribe to]" (Chollier 176). In this way, Chollier exposes not only the critique that McCarthy's novels levy against the progress of free market capitalism but also the critique he levies against the conservative agrarian economic model of his humanistic characters. As literal fugitives who take their stand against cultural and economic change to a pathological level, Culla Holme and Lester Ballard exemplify such characters, and their refusal to adapt to and engage

with the capital-intensive economy of the early and late New South leads not only to their
abandonment of a place in society, but also to their allowance of the post-South to purchase their
sense of place wholesale.

Richard Godden explains the New South economy that Culla and Lester find themselves
on either side of, as he discusses the New South's transition from labor-intensive to capital-
intensive economic models during the New Deal era—that is, between 1930 and 1940, a decade
when the tenantry of labor-intensive sharecroppers declined by 62 percent in Mississippi, or as
James Cobb puts it, "the most southern place on earth" (qtd. in Godden 2). Indeed as southern
agrarian laborers, Culla and Lester bookend this era, with Culla experiencing the start of labor's
decline at least thirty years before the New Deal era at the turn of the twentieth century and
Lester experiencing the leveling out of and endpoint of labor's decline (along with the rise of
capital-intensive economics) at least thirty years after the New Deal era in the 1960s. Noting that
"a structural shift" occurred during this transitional period that was "most manifest in eviction
and black diaspora" known as the Great Migration, Godden points out how "the landowning
class shifted its pattern of dependency from black labor to northern capital, while the tenantry
[became] increasingly landless and welfare-dependent" (Godden 2). In thus historicizing the
southern labor market's demise in addition to the impoverished southern worker's landlessness
and effectual eviction from the region, Godden illustrates the decline not only of the labor
market, but also the southern sense of place that attended it.

Godden's description of economic decline does well to provide an historical context for
the sense of place we lose in *Outer Dark* and *Child of God*, especially as it does so in terms of
landlessness and eviction. Indeed, as the first scene of *Child of God* demonstrates, Lester Ballard
lacks a sense of place just as Culla Holme of *Outer Dark* does. Both characters wander the rural

South after being forced from their homes, run into capitalist figures who further destabilize their sense of place, and—like the Fugitives they could be said to represent—are forced to retreat into abandoned structures of the New South, which is crumbling and falling all around them. Contrary to Lester, however, Culla wanders the landscape of an early New South that is just beginning to decline. Yet like Lester, he encounters multiple scenarios of economic valuation within abandoned cabins. The most emblematic of these scenarios occurs in what appears to be an old frontier cabin owned by a man whose father once lived there. Before the landowner catches Culla trespassing on his father's property, the narrator tells us "It was a very old cabin […] the unhewn beams smoked a foggy and depthless black and trellised with cobwebbing of the same color" (195). Like the house in the ghost town at the end of *The Orchard Keeper*, the home appears vacated except for a few artifacts that remain from the Reconstruction era: "a butternut safe," "pieces of cheap white crockery," "a tin percolator in which lay an inverted salmoncan" (196). The presence of cheap, mass-produced china, a tin percolator, the canned salmon, and the setting of the novel around the turn of the twentieth century date the house to the late-nineteenth century manufacturing, mass-production, and processed canned foods. Of course to Culla, all of these materials appear worthless, and he begins transporting them outside in preparation to make the place his own. However, to the landowner (who happens upon Culla dragging the mattress of his late father through the dirt) the cabin still holds currency, if not sentimental value. That is to say, the cabin still retains a sense of place. Thus, when the man forces Culla out of the house, he forces him out of a time capsule for the early New South in an effort to protect this older southern architecture from the placeless post-South around it.

Like Culla Holme, Lester seeks shelter in a deserted cabin in the middle of a wooded area. Lester's cabin includes two rooms and an outhouse, the latter of which has "collapsed in a

shallow hole where weeds sprouted in outsized mutations" (13). Considering the novel's contemporaneity with the time of its publication (i.e., the mid-twentieth century), the presence of an outhouse and its state of dilapidation in the 1960s suggest that the house dates to the early twentieth century, which is to say, the post-Reconstruction era associated with the rise of late capitalism in the New South. Indeed, Lester finds newspapers that date to this economic era with "old news of folks long dead, events forgotten, ads for patent medicine and livestock for sale" (15). The emphasis on economic artifacts of "patent medicine" and "livestock for sale" (like the tinker's advertising for his wares) speak to the rise of the market economy that replaced the predominantly agrarian and labor-driven economy of the Old South. That is to say, the newspaper appears to have operated under an industrial capitalist business model wherein businessmen used advertisements to sell mass-produced goods, meanwhile absorbing, mediating, and commodifying the formerly face-to-face and farmer-dominated livestock trade. The newspaper's location inside of the abandoned house therefore dates the house to the early-middle New South period, which, by the time of the novel's setting, appears like the house in dereliction.

Ultimately, Lester reduces the abandoned house to rubble after his clogged chimney starts a fire starts in the attic. The conflagration that follows (along with the house's collapse) may symbolize the post-South era's erasure of the New South era—just as the Green Fly Inn's conflagration and collapse symbolize the New South's erasure of the Old South era—so that the novel illustrates the decline of the New South era and the rise of the post-South era, when free market capitalism dominates the region, and where southerners who maintain the old southern agrarian humanist ideology of land ownership have lost their sense of place.

Having lost his father's house to a real estate auctioneer and his second home to a fire, Lester fails to own a home in the post-South. He proceeds to live in caves, emerging only to purchase items from stores in town or purvey stolen goods to stores out of town, both of which he fails to accomplish with satisfactory transactions. Indeed, after failing to trade a knife for whiskey, failing to pay his grocer an enormous debt (which the grocer figures will take Lester longer than his lifetime to pay), and failing to understand a blacksmith who teaches him how to smithy in an attempt to save him money, it seems Lester's series of financial failures—accompanied by his unsuccessful attempts at home ownership—ultimately result in his retreat from society into the underground architecture of caves much older than the abandoned structures of the New South or Old South. When regarded alongside the fact that Lester kills several women to transform their inanimate bodies into real-life sex dolls, such regressive behavior demonstrates Lester's attempt to slow down and cope, both with his own sense of placelessness among his fellows and also with the high rate of cultural and economic change that took place during the transition from the late New South to the post-South.

Lester's most crucial business failure occurs when he attempts to sell wristwatches at a flea market in a neighboring county, where he must walk "past more houses and past the ruins of a tannery" (128). These remains suggest the end of an era when tanneries conducted business, and much like the tannery, Lester runs out of business, as he tries but fails to get the price he asks for three wristwatches, all of which he sells for lower than he wants at eight dollars. After this exchange, the man who bought them turns around and flips them, selling one to his friend for three dollars and another to someone else for five dollars, all while Lester looks on. This capitalistic act effectively steals a watch from Lester, and it doubly reinforces the central character's lack of sense of place as well as his inability to cope with (or understand) the

economics of free market capitalism. After this transaction, Lester retreats even further into his cave "in the bowels of the mountain," where we are made to enter what the final scene of the novel calls "the mausoleum" (196)—i.e., Lester's inner sanctum, "where dead people lay like saints" (135). Here, Lester constructs a burial chamber with the bodies of his murder victims, which he engages with in acts of necrophilia. Extending tropes of the southern gothic and the grotesque (e.g., female victimization, body disfigurement, and the architecture of the catacombs) to a penultimate level of postmodern self-awareness, McCarthy describes the caves as if they were halls in a gothic castle with "damp stone corridors […] limestone columns and what looked like huge stone urns moist and ill-shapen," all of which lead to the "bellshaped cavern" that houses his dolled-up corpses (134-35). Later, Lester even goes so far as to dress himself like he dresses these women, "a gothic doll in ill-fit clothes," girding himself "in frightwig and skirts" before attempting to murder the man who bought his father's house (140).

Noting that Lester dresses himself and the dead women's bodies like dolls (he makes special trips to buy them nice clothes and makeup in town), we see that this mausoleum represents Lester's private attempt to construct and participate in the cultural materialism he sees outside his cave. Indeed, never given window to Lester's thoughts on the reason for his retreat into caves, we can only infer a correlation between Lester's business failure and his retreat into the mausoleum, so that Ballard's retreat and construction of the mausoleum become his attempt to re-create and capture the architecture, economy, and social structure of the post-South as he sees it. With his sense of place continually uprooted by capitalist figures, however, Lester can hardly do anything more than construct a perverted representation of a post-South society—one that is dead, violable, and oblivious to his need for a sense of place. Lester's mausoleum also affirms the deadened, darkened, placeless space of the outside world, which seems to him

(almost sympathetically) as inexplicably mean as the three antagonists in *Outer Dark*. Of course, the irony here is that Lester becomes as unsympathetic as the three antagonists of *Outer Dark* by murdering as many people as he does, as well as by attempting to murder the farm/land owner who bought his farm.

In thus delineating Lester's transition from farm/land owner to serial killing necrophiliac and cave dweller, McCarthy takes tropes of the southern gothic and the grotesque to a metanarratalogical level, mobilizing these tropes to critique the southernness of what southernists have explicitly branded as a "Southern" genre. In so doing, McCarthy uses the form (as Faulkner did) to level a critique against southern institutions; however, instead of leveling this critique against the plantation culture of the Old South as Faulkner did, McCarthy levels his critique against southern agrarian infrastructure and its attendant literary humanism, demonstrating the sad perversity of those who attempt to defend and preserve such institutions. In so doing, McCarthy turns the weapon of southern writers against themselves, critiquing the supposed southernness of the southern gothic, and illustrating that when the gothic is removed from its southern setting and set inside the cave of a placeless post-South, it becomes even more terrifying, because it leaves the realm of an exotic, regional South and enters the realm of global possibility.[8]

Outer Dark's three antagonists perhaps best demonstrate how McCarthy mobilizes the gothic to undermine the traditional southern agrarian lifestyle, as they allegorize southern agrarian farmers who appear less like the chosen people of God and more like the spawn of

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[8] When interviewing McCarthy for his filmic adaptation of *Child of God,* James Franco asked, "Why did you write a book about this subject?" After replying smartly, "I don't know, James, probably some dumb-ass reason," McCarthy said "Well, you know, there are people like that amongst us nowadays," suggesting that regardless of why he wrote the novel and despite the fact that Lester seems so far on the fringes of society, people like him are among us today (Franco).

Satan. That is to say, if the Southern Agrarian is a steadfast shepherd, then these three are

shapeshifting demons:

> *They entered [...] through the open doors of the barn and almost instantly out the other side marvelously armed with crude agrarian weapons, spade and brush-hook, emerging in an explosion of guineafowl and one screaming sow, unaltered in gait demeanor or speed, parodic figures transposed live and intact and violent out of a proletarian mural and set mobile upon the empty fields* (35).

Reading these three figures further as the narrator encourages us to read them—namely, as

"*parodic figures transposed live and intact and violent out of a proletarian mural*"—we see that

they serve to both allegorize and satirize Grant Wood's *American Gothic* as nameless members

of the agrarian working class who are not innocent farmers, but rather murderers. Here, the three

figures' transformation inside the barn from itinerant farmers into walking parodies of modernist

art exemplifies the South's transition from housing farmers who maintain pastoral control over

the land and animals (i.e., a humanist vision) to the postmodernist vision of anti-pastoral chaos,

wherein farmers have lost control of their land and animals. The novel thus engages in Guinn's

act of mythoclasm, standing the Southern Agrarian myth of the farmer as shepherd figure on its

head and rendering the South into the postmodern space that is the post-South. Indeed, the three

figures' transformational passage through the barn mirrors the cultural transition from modern

southern literature to postmodern southern literature, as they enter the barn to the scene of a

pastoral dream vision, "*the peaceful and ruminative stock coming erect […] shifting with eyes

sidled as they passed, the three of them paying no heed*" but exit like an image from a gothic

nightmare "*armed with crude agrarian weapons […] in an explosion of guineafowl and one

screaming sow*" (35). Guinn would argue that this transfiguration destabilizes the myth of the

pastoral southern agrarian, as the narrator later renders one of these peaceful-seeming farmhands

into an "anthroparian," or demonic anti-human, who uses his brush hook to kill a farm owner for

no apparent reason (51). The passage thus demonstrates how the three figures appropriate

technology and architecture from an older southern culture—i.e., the agricultural tools of

southern agrarianism and the barn as a military barracks—to pit themselves against those who

built these structures. We might even read these characters as posthuman southern beings, who—

like McCarthy in his appropriation of the southern gothic to satirize the form itself—

reappropriate the dominant technology of the South for their own purposes, and instead of using

this architecture and technology to cultivate the land, use them to cull southern agrarians from

the landscape (51).

The ultimate image of the loss of southern agrarian landscapes comes in the final scene of

each novel, where McCarthy likens such landscapes themselves to architectural ruins. In *Outer*

Dark, a bog replaces "peaceful mazy fields," when Culla wanders down a well-traveled road

surrounded by farm animals, which gradually fades into a barren wasteland: "a shadeless burn

[…] the charred shapes of trees in a dead land where nothing moved save windy rifts of ash that

rose dolorous and died again down the blackened corridors" (141-142). In *Child of God*, Lester's

mausoleum replaces the image of a farmer "plowing an upland field," when one spring evening,

"the plow was snatched from his hands" and "his span of mules disappear into the earth" as

Lester's underground burial chamber becomes a ruined sinkhole (195). In both scenes, McCarthy

mobilizes the architectural language of "corridors," "chambers," "vaults," and ultimately "the

mausoleum" to describe the landscape as if it—like the cabins and tanneries and the rubble of the

Green Fly Inn—were in ruins. Similar to McCarthy's description of the three antagonists

entering one side of the barn peacefully and exiting the other side armed to the teeth, these

scenes transform pastoral daydreams into gothic nightmares, and they underscore both Culla's

and Lester's wandering sense of placelessness, which will only be rivaled in *The Road*.

We see the underpinnings of *The Road*'s future south in images of urban ruin in *Suttree*, which opens with a haunting walk through the streets of late-night Knoxville in the 1950s. In its opening passage, the narrator guides us through the city's underbelly, where we are made to regard layers of old architecture that delineate a descent into the city's built-over past. Given this kaleidoscopic view of the city's history, we receive a cross-sectional perspective of its geological stratification: "*fossil bones, limestone scarabs rucked in the floor of this once inland sea*" (3, italics in original). The narrator then pans out to the earth's surface where we see the "*curious marble architecture*" of a graveyard with headstones whose "*names grow dim with years*" (3). Looking up, we regard "*corrugated warehouse walls* [...] *where blownout autos sulk on pedestals of cinderblock,*" until finally, the narrator zooms out to take in the city's jagged skyline, "*buildings stamped against the night* [...] *like a rampart to a farther world forsaken*" (3). Images of architectural decay and dereliction thus crowd our vision of Knoxville's skyline, and the narrator guides us through the city streets as if he were directing us through Dante's postmodern *Inferno*:

> *Cross here* [...] *To a darker town, past lamps stoned blind, past smoking*
> *oblique shacks and china dogs and painted tires where dirty flowers grow.*
> *Down pavings rent with ruin, the slow cataclysm of neglect* [...]
> *Encampment of the damned.* (3)

Our descent into what the narrator calls an "encampment of the damned" renders Knoxville's skyline like the *Inferno*'s City of Dis, comprised of outlandish "mosques" (Alighieri VIII, 171), streets reduced to ruins, and people living amid "broken stones" (Alighieri XI, 1) inside of "crammed-in tombs" (Aligheri IX, 115). Although mosques do not appear in *Suttree*'s Knoxville, the narrator's description of the city's industrial skyline makes the horizon seem dominated by an outlandish architecture. That is, the mosque-ridden skyline is to Dante as the industrial skyline is to Suttree. Indeed for Dante, the skyline signifies how Eastern culture has

constructed a city like a drain to suck the life out of sinners and make the Christian way of life

untenable. Whereas for Suttree, the skyline signifies how the invasive force of industry has

"*dried up the sap of the earth for miles about*" and, like a drain, made the agrarian way of life

untenable (3). Both city skylines offer signs of the decline of a preferred humanist ideology in

the Western world: i.e., Christianity and Southern Agrarianism, respectively. *Suttree*, however,

situates that decline of humanism in the middle the twentieth century, which is to say, at the

nadir of the South's transition from the modern to the postmodern, from the humanist to

posthumanist south.

Suttree's narrator observes the fallout of this transition, reading the city by its industrial

skyline and apprising it directly in terms of its architecture: "*a mongrel architecture reading

back through the works of man in a brief delineation of the aberrant disordered and mad*" (3).

Reading the city's cultural history through its architectural layers, the narrator thus juxtaposes

the city's buildings against the geological strata beneath it, exposing how haphazardly the city's

buildings were constructed, like a "*carnival of shapes upreared on the river plain,*" which is to

say, like the tents of a wandering circus, and as a replacement to the sedentary and rudimentary

life of the agrarian southerner. Reading the skyline of Knoxville in this light, we see that the final

line of the novel's opening passage, "*Ruder forms survive*" (5), states the existence of Suttree's

home in McAnally Flats, the slum where the last few structures of rudimentary agrarianism

survive in the form of fishermen's' boats and pig farmers' fields, which are extinguished by the

postsouthern landscape and dominated by the structures of late capitalism. Indeed, we witness

the decline of those agrarian structures and their attendant ways of life throughout the novel, so

that by the novel's final scene, Suttree witnesses the wholesale razing of McAnally Flats—

Knoxville's last vestige of a primarily agrarian culture and economy:

> Yellow machines groaned over the landscape, the earth buckling,
> the few old coalchoaked trees upturned and heaps of slag and
> cellarholes with vatshaped furnaces squat beneath their hydra
> works of rusted ducting and ashy fields shorn up and leveled and
> the dead turned out of their graves. (464)

Knoxville's industrious workers thus operate "yellow machines" (e.g., bulldozers, backhoes, grinders, and compactors), which become parodies of the farmer's mule and plow as they stir up old trees, cellars, and furnaces to make room for the construction of late capitalism's pervasive trade-route: i.e., the Interstate Highway System. Fredric Jameson's vision of the "new multinational downtown" violently replacing "the older ruined city fabric" and destroying "precapitalist Third World agriculture" applies well to the razing that Suttree observes here (*Postmodernism* 36). For indeed, I-40's construction integrates Knoxville's downtown area into a multi- and inter- national trade network, erasing the regional trade network maintained by the residents of McAnally Flats during the exact same time period that Jameson uses to frame the beginning of late capitalism: that is, "the end of the 1950s and early 1960s" (*Postmodernism* 1). During this timeframe, industrial capitalism overtook the southern landscape in the form of factories, interstate highways, and suburban neighborhoods, the industry of which Suttree watches "accomplish itself" before he hitchhikes out of Knoxville on this interstate. From this vantage, he can see where "behind him the city lay smoking, the sad purlieus of the dead immured with the bones of friends and forebears" (470). Thus regarding the archaeological remains of the old agrarian culture and economy that was McAnally Flats, Suttree witnesses the decline of southern agrarianism and the rise of late capitalism, which has, over the course of McCarthy's first four novels, come to dominate the South after humanism.

Chapter 2 | And This, Too: The Myth of Western Exceptionalism in Cormac McCarthy's "Western" Novels

After migrating to West Texas in 1976, Cormac McCarthy started telling about the West instead of the South. In fact he appeared, like critic Robert L. Jarrett suggests, to make "a sudden break with the past" and his "career in Southern fiction" (qtd. in Cant 22)—a break that many scholars denote strongly by dividing the author's work, as Rich Wallach and Wade Hall do, into "Southern" fiction and "Western" fiction, as well as interpreting his novels set in the Southwest as deliberate forays into uncharted literary territory for McCarthy. Avoiding such strong division in this chapter, I put forth instead that the author uses his Southwestern setting to explore southern literature's complicated transition from modernity to postmodernity, as he extends many of the tropes of southern literature (e.g. the gothic, graphic violence, and dialect) into his Western fiction, rendering his Southwest in every way an extension of his South.

Framing this middle period in McCarthy's career as an artistic exploration helps explain why McCarthy spent at least twenty years publishing novels set in the Southwest (beginning with *Blood Meridian* in 1985 and ending with *No Country for Old Men* in 2005) as opposed to fourteen years publishing novels set in the South (beginning with *The Orchard Keeper* in 1965 and ending with *Suttree* in 1979). That is, the reason he expends six more years publishing about the West than he does the South is because he requires more time to investigate the extent to which the remains of southern cultures and economies have fanned out and vanished from that other southern region "south of the South"—i.e., the Southwest (Gorman 43).

In this chapter, then, I contend that Cormac McCarthy's so-called "Westerns" broaden and explore the post-South horizon presented in his "Southern" works via their more global southern setting. To proceed with this argument, I seek first to establish a literary and historical

connection between the South and West in terms of "region" and "nation." Establishing this connection will serve to frame McCarthy's work after *Suttree* and before *The Road* as neither Southern nor Western, but as Southwestern, which for all intents and purposes, will serve as a regional metonymy for McCarthy's post-South. Once this regional-historical framework is established, I read the novels as the author's exploration of a postsouthern space run rampant with ideologies of western exceptionalism, which blatantly appear crumbling in images of architectural ruin interspersed throughout the region's southwestern landscapes.

Susan Kollin's work on the intersection between Southern and Western literature in Cormac McCarthy's "anti-Westerns" largely underlies the foundation for my reading of these novels. I extend her analysis of McCarthy's critique of Western mythos—which she deems problematic because it "nevertheless enables more Western myths to follow" (Kollin 586)— while I interpret McCarthy's Westerns not merely as critiques of the Western mythos, but as wholesale mythoclasm of the culture and economy of western exceptionalism, which McCarthy continues to deconstruct by illustrating older western cultures in ruins. However, I critique Kollin's argument that McCarthy's anti-Westerns "enable more Western myths to follow," and counter that McCarthy's Southwestern novels neither celebrate nor elegize these myths' passing, but instead scatter their ruins throughout the Southwest, illustrating that, like the culture and economy of southern exceptionalism, the culture and economy of western exceptionalism, too, shall pass.

To reach this anti-Western conclusion, I examine scenes of architectural ruin from *Blood Meridian* (1985) and link them to parallel scenes from *No Country for Old Men* (2005) and The Border Trilogy (1992, 1994, 1998). In this way, I read *Blood Meridian* as the epicenter from which ruin spreads in the later novels, and I trace the remains of its massacred borderland

villagers and crumbling mission churches to their twentieth century counterparts in massacred

borderland drug dealers and widespread crumbling infrastructure. I ultimately conclude that all

of McCarthy's Southwestern novels represent and critique these structures of western humanism,

which is to say, the architecture of western exceptionalism that supported Manifest Destiny,

Christianity, and capitalism; forced Mexican and indigenous cultures and economies into

extinction; and which will—if we follow the implications of their ruins for contemporary

Western culture and economics—inevitably drive itself to extinction.

Martyn Bone's theory that the post-South became more like global America than another

incarnation of the New South aligns with James Cobb's thesis that America's New South became

America's "No South" after World War II. After all, according to both authors, the region had

become more like the rest of the nation in terms of having a westernized culture and economy by

the beginning of postmodernity. Along with James Egerton, Cobb observes this phenomenon in

terms of the "Americanization of the South," a movement made evident by the general attitudes

expressed by southerners of the 1970s. During this decade, the presence of southern politicians in

Washington, such as former president and Georgia farmer, Jimmy Carter, signified that the

region had become less than supreme, a notion which Fred Hobson later echoed by describing

the region in terms that mirror its perfect lack of exceptionality at this time: "successful,

optimistic, prosperous, and bland" (qtd. in Cobb 236). Cobb thus explains conservative

southerners' resistance to Americanization as a result of a "rapidly northernizing, alien, and

anonymous No South," which in Bone's terms, translates to the increasingly "placeless" space

that the South became after 1945—that is, the post-South. During these rocky years, southerners

experienced a new reconstruction via "surging urbanization and industrialization," all of which

"heightened the anxieties of those who looked at the South supposedly enjoying unparalleled

progress" but "actually saw a South on the verge of losing its identity" (Cobb 235-244). In this way, the postmodern era rang in a series of identity crises for southerners who wanted to maintain their sense of place, and who felt their region becoming less and less exceptional during its uncomfortable conversion from southern region into western nation.

Positing this series of identity crises in the years after WWII and the civil rights movement, Cobb provides a microcosm through which to study what happened further south and further west on the border between the United States and Mexico during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. During this timeframe, the borderland shifted dramatically from functioning as a series of small, independent agrarian regions to acting as one large part of two industrial nations. And yet, as Deborah Cohn, Jon Smith and many other global southernists have pointed out, the U.S.-Mexico border region suffered a much longer and drawn out identity crisis than the U.S. South did during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, when the territory between the United States and Mexico was continually forced through multiple wars to become less like the Global South and more like the Global West.

In terms of how contemporary literature of the U.S South has dealt with this westward movement, Robert Brinkmeyer offers several case studies in *Remapping Southern Literature* (2000). Taking the works of Doris Betts, Barry Hannah, Barbara Kingsolver, Dorothy Allison and Cormac McCarthy as his signposts, he asserts a complex connection between literature from the U.S. South that is about the U.S. West, arguing that "Southern literature about the West represents a startling break in the Southern literary tradition [from concern for sense of place]," while concluding that contemporary writers from the South adapt southern fiction to the Western genre and thereby "fundamentally challenge the generally accepted parameters of what we designate 'Southern' and more generally as 'regional' fiction" (Brinkmeyer 3). Brinkmeyer

affirms that even without the ostensibly southern sense of place derived from settings in "The South," we can still understand Western literature, and specifically the Western, to be grappling with southern issues. In fact, he posits that southern writers of the Western genre such as Cormac McCarthy transfer quintessentially southern senses of community, place, and a certain degree of grotesque violence to their representations of the Wild West. With its decidedly southernist approach, however, *Remapping Southern Literature* still only urges us to view southern writers as writing Westerns for the purpose of expressing a desire to revive a sense of place in southern fiction. That is, Brinkmeyer does not explore how southern writers might instead be using the Western genre to evolve and adapt to their new environment in a post-South: a space where their sense of once having inhabited a place is now gone.

Brinkmeyer does more to explore this avenue by going global in his study of the South and West for his more recent work, *The Fourth Ghost* (2009), comparing extensively the ideologies that drove both southerners and Nazi Germans to harbor latent and overt beliefs in western exceptionality. He argues incisively that "the South's racial ideology comes close to mirroring that of Nazi Germany" (97), and he reads William Alexander Percy's *Lanterns on the Levee* (1941) as a distilled instantiation of the mid-twentieth century southerner's subtly fascist ideology. In this sense, mid-twentieth century southerners' carefully disguised belief in the exceptional nature of all things southern and all things human—couched in false humility and sympathy garnered from presenting themselves as victims of northern industry—made them ideological kin to Nazi Germans, who, according to renowned Holocaust historian Yehuda Bauer, presented themselves as victims of Jewish culture and economics (Bauer 48). In terms of playing the victim, carrying out racism, and harboring ideologies of white supremacism, those mid-twentieth century southerners who wished to rid the South of northern industrial economics

and maintain a racial divide between blacks and whites were only one national leader away from siding with mid-twentieth century Western Europeans who wished to rid the world of the Jews. It is little surprise, then that the South of the twentieth century becomes a hub of western exceptionalists: i.e., Americans who believed in the myth of American exceptionalism. And like John Egerton notes in *The Americanization of Dixie, The Southernization of America* (1974), many of these more conservative Americans migrated and concentrated in the South after WWII, where they became increasingly less concerned with maintaining the infrastructure and cultural values of the Old South and more concerned with championing the dominant cultural values of global western America—that is to say, capitalism and Christianity.

Both of Brinkmeyer's studies concerning the intricate relationship between the South and West can be applied to our understanding of the humanist ideologies maintained by southern transplants of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, i.e., the American Cowboy: a mascot of western exceptionalism, who carried out acts of genocide in the spoken (or unspoken) name of Manifest Destiny, decimating Mexican and indigenous life in the global south of the U.S.-Mexico borderland. If we view Cormac McCarthy's so-called "Western novels" through the lens of Brinkmeyer's studies of Southern and Western literature, we see expansions of the regional South into the global West, and so we can understand why there is little difference between the humanist worldviews of southerners and cowboys, both of whom witness the decline and extinction of older cultures and economies in North America's southernmost geographical location. Interpreting McCarthy's work after *Suttree* and before *The Road* from this angle, the novels appear neither "Southern" nor "Western," but instead as McCarthy's way of combining both South and West into the space of the global Southwest and exploring that space as the landscape of a more globalized post-South. Like McCarthy's mythoclasm of southern

exceptionalism, this exploration serves largely to critique white, male westerners, whose feeble attempts to preserve the myths of western exceptionalism (e.g., Manifest Destiny, white supremacism) always come crumbling down.

McCarthy's first Southwestern novel, *Blood Meridian* (1985), explores the extermination of agrarian ways of life in the global south that was the borderland territory between Texas and Mexico of the nineteenth century—i.e., the Old West. Using Kollin's terminology, the novel functions as McCarthy's greatest anti-Western because it exposes the atrocities that occur between Texas and Mexico, doing nothing to romanticize history in favor of American nationalism and doing much to deconstruct what John Cant addresses as the myth of American exceptionalism. As an historical novel, it also captures the Old West's mythic quality by referring to its protagonist anonymously as "the kid." We follow the kid lighting out for the territory from East Tennessee to West Texas and Northern Mexico, witnessing his absorption into a gang of mercenaries led by historic outlaw, John Joel Glanton. While with Glanton, the kid observes and participates in making of the myth of Manifest Destiny, even enjoying the spoils of collecting Native American scalps for bounty while Glanton pursues the thousand-dollar head of an Apache chief named Gómez. However, the novel's conflict comes from the kid's struggle, "this-town-ain't-big-enough-for-the-both-of-us" style, to distinguish himself from Glanton's partner in crime, Judge Holden: the novel's aloof, ingenious, and giant white antagonist. As a character who espouses Western philosophies that avow humans' roles as masters of the world, the judge comes to embody a sometimes satiric, sometimes demonic personification of western humanism, and he accuses the kid of not throwing in his lot with the rest of Glanton's Gang for not participating wholeheartedly in their war against Mexico and the indigenous. Using the logic of Manifest Destiny, Holden justifies this war with religious reasoning, declaring, "War is god"

(261). Ultimately, after everyone in the Glanton Gang is killed by Yuma Indians except for the

kid and the judge, the kid grows into a man, but unfortunately, the judge rapes and kills him in

the final scene of the novel, enveloping him "against his immense and terrible flesh" in the

outhouse of a dilapidated brothel (347). McCarthy's great anti-Western thus ends with this

devilish image of the personification of white, male western exceptionalism: Judge Holden,

playing a fiddle, dancing victoriously, and claiming that he will never die (349).

On one level, the death of the kid—a native of the nineteenth century Old South who has

defied the judge and his western humanist worldview—signals the disappearance of another

southern way of life in the borderland south of Texas and Mexico. That is, the kid's

disappearance in the outhouse illustrates an extinction of the southerner's sense of exceptional

freedom from the capitalistic rule of the Western world, which has also squashed the Spanish

Mission churches and Mexican villages of Deborah Cohn's second south (i.e., Mexico) into

ruins. On another level, however, the death of the kid coincides with the death of the Mexican

and indigenous agrarians that the mercenaries have slaughtered, so that the kid also functions as

a global citizen of both Souths, wherein the architectural ruins of Central American civilization

(which the kid sees first-hand), as well as the mass extermination of North American bison,

(which the kid hears about shortly before he is killed) signal not only the widespread decline,

genocide, and extinction of Hispanic and Native American ways of life, but also the unwitting

self-destruction of the American Cowboy via the all-consuming humanism of Manifest Destiny.

Looking more closely at the novel's connection to McCarthy's "Southern" novels, we

note that it also picks up where *Suttree* left off with a scene of westward expansion. Like

Suttree's exit from Knoxville on newly constructed I-40, the kid's move west exits the scenery of

decline in Tennessee's southern agrarian landscape and enters the rise of a more global southern

horizon. Indeed as the kid passes through the "flat and pastoral landscape" of West Tennessee,

he encounters signs of slavery that alter his sense of place, and "he wanders west as far as

Memphis," where he sees, "Blacks in the fields, lank and stooped, their fingers spiderlike among

the bolls of cotton," a scene which the narrator refers to as "A shadowed agony in the garden"

(4). This dark image tinges the kid's transition from pastoral East to anti-pastoral West with the

horror of slavery, transforming the southern landscape from pastoral dream vision to gothic

nightmare, much like *Outer Dark*'s antagonistic triune do when trespassing through a barn and

arming themselves with tools they will use to slaughter farmers. The kid's walk toward the

western sunset exemplifies such anti-pastoralism, as he passes "A lone dark husbandman" who

has his back to the sunset and is thereby shrouded in darkness "pursuing mule and harrow down

the rainblown bottomland toward night" (4). This directional inversion on the road from

Northeast Tennessee to Southwest Tennessee epitomizes the transition from south to west in

McCarthy's novels, wherein southern sense of place falls by the wayside and structures of the

Old South—like the "lone dark husbandman" plowing with his mule and harrow toward

darkness in the East—ultimately disappear.

Contrasted with *Suttree*'s twentieth century image of I-40's construction, *Blood*

Meridian's opening on the road from East Tennessee to West Tennessee in 1848 appears to take

a step back in terms of southern history, i.e., into "a nightmarish world" where slavery reigns and

"the market for Indian scalps is thriving" (*Blood Meridian*, 25th Anniversary Edition, back flap).

However, in terms of the Western world economy—which *is* the South's economy in 1985 when

McCarthy published *Blood Meridian*—the novel moves forward, presenting the rise to

dominance of free market economics in the more global souths of southern Texas and northern

Mexico. From this angle, we see that even though most of the novel takes place during the 1840s

and 50s, its action illustrates the consequences of privatization and late capitalism—the economic model whose move toward privatization reached a global peak during the mid 1980s (Piketty 136). From this historical viewpoint, *Blood Meridian* continues *Suttree*'s portrayal of these economic practices' destructive impact on southern cultures, economies, and environments, but relocates that portrayal within the Southwestern region of the U.S.-Mexico borderland, where it exposes and dismantles the pervasive infrastructure of late capitalism in the 1980s.

Another reason to view *Blood Meridian* as a critique of late capitalism of a 1980s post-South is that it overlaps in many ways with *No Country For Old Men*, the final installment of McCarthy's Southwestern novels, which is set in 1980. Both novels follow the wanderings of central characters into west Texas and south of the border into Mexico; both illustrate bloody massacres there, which spring from a desire to conduct illicit business (i.e., the scalp trade in *Blood Meridian* and the drug trade in *No Country for Old Men*); and both are complicated by the machinations of cold, philosophical antagonists (i.e., Judge Holden from *Blood Meridian* and Anton Chigurh from *No Country for Old Men*). Most notable for a discussion of late capitalism's dominance over both novels' southwestern landscapes, however, are each novels' massacres, both of which occur in unknown borderland spaces as direct results of corporate corruption and leave behind ruins that reveal how the western exceptionalist ideology of late capitalism has caused cultural and economic extinction in the post-South.

In *No Country for Old Men* (2005), the massacre occurs between Hispanic drug runners and an unknown party in the desert of southwest Texas. Its ruins—shot-up trucks, dead Mexicans still holding automatic weapons, dead attack dogs, bricks of packaged heroin, and a suitcase containing $2.4 million—are discovered by the novel's central character, Llewellyn Moss, while hunting at the beginning of the novel. From the remains he finds, we can infer very little besides

the fact that the massacre occurred very recently and behind the scenes. And yet, from the few clues that the novel does leave, we can identify the parties involved. For instance, we know that an American corporation is involved, since at one point in the novel's hunt for the $2.4 million (taken by Moss) we enter the seventeenth floor of a large office building "with a view over the skyline of Houston" (139). Here, an unnamed businessman sits behind an expensive desk made of walnut and steel where he informs his new hit man "we're missing product and we're out a bunch of money" (140). Accompanying this information with the presence of heroin and Hispanic drug dealers, we can assume that Mexican drug cartel are likely on the receiving end of this bad deal and have hired their own hit man, Anton Chigurh, to reclaim the $2.4 million they were supposed to gain from trading drugs for American money with the Houston businessman.

From this evidence, we can infer that the American businessman is corrupt—we can also infer that he was probably trying to have his cake and eat it too by attempting to keep his money and steal the cartel's drugs—all of which led to the massacre in the desert. Of course, McCarthy forces us to perform a lot of detective work to produce this reading. In so doing, he highlights the covert and corrupt nature of corporate capitalism, so that although we have to do some digging, we can logically deduce the following narrative tropes from what we do know: the ruins of the shootout speak for a drug deal gone wrong; the Houston businessman wreaks (almost parodically) of corporate greed; and the death of nearly every character touched by this massacre—the Hispanic drug runners, Moss and his wife, at least one local policeman, the hit man hired to kill Anton Chigurh, a number of Mexican and American henchmen, as well as the Houston businessman—tell the tale of late capitalism's insidious, pervasive, and destructive impact on human life.

In *Blood Meridian*, late capitalism's destructive impact on human life is made overt and explicit when the Glanton Gang perpetrates what the novel calls the "Massacre of the Tiguas" (173), an act of genocide that takes place after the company discover a group of indigenous farmers settled on a grassy plain outside of what is now El Paso and the Hueco Tanks. After slaughtering these people with frightening ease, the company scalps their heads to collect a bounty from the Mexican government and leave the settlement a horrific mass of bloody bodies. McCarthy takes no more than a page to illustrate with terrifying clarity the way Americans carried out this act of Manifest Destiny, collected trophies for their capitalist bounty, and committed genocide that erased not only nineteenth century Mexicans, but also prehistoric indigenous peoples' from the Southwest:

> In the days to come the frail black rebuses of blood in those sands
> would crack and break and drift away so that in the circuit of a few
> suns all trace of the destruction of these people would be erased.
> The desert wind would salt their ruins and there would be nothing,
> nor ghost nor scribe, to tell any pilgrim in his passing how it was
> that people had lived in this place and in this place died. (182)

Blood Meridian adapts what Heike Paul calls the Western genre's myth of the "'Vanishing Indian'" (Paul 336) in *The Myths that Made America* (2014). However, Glanton's slaughter of the indigenous does not relegate Native Americans to a distant past out of vain hope that doing so might assuage American guilt for instituting Indian Removal. Conversely, the scene demolishes the myth of the "Vanishing Indian," removing historians' rose-colored glasses and revealing the extermination of indigenous people as the horrific and destructive act of genocide and cultural erasure that it actually was (and still is). It places emphasis on how the sands of time would erase "all trace of *the destruction* of these people" (182, emphasis added), burying their ruins to make the village look as if it had merely been claimed by the landscape, when really it was eradicated by a company of American mercenaries carrying out the mission of Manifest

Destiny. *Blood Meridian* thus exposes how early it was that the force of late capitalism began to plunder the landscape, tear down its infrastructure, and haunt the post-South that is McCarthy's Southwest.

In these global postsouthern readings, Judge Holden and John Joel Glanton function as early incarnations of the Houston businessman from *No Country for Old Men*. That is, they function as the heads of a private corporation—i.e. "The Glanton Gang" of mercenaries, aptly referred throughout the novel as "the company"—that exploits the native peoples and natural resources of the U.S.-Mexico borderland territory to collect a profit. By the same token, the Houston businessman from *No Country for Old Men* functions as a latter-day American Cowboy à la Judge Holden and John Joel Glanton, using his place at the top of a private corporation to exploit people of the U.S.-Mexico borderland to collect his own profit. From this vantage, both novels comment on late capitalism in the 1980s, whose roots they trace back to the Old West so as to compare the overt devastation wrought by Manifest Destiny with the more covert and contemporary devastation wrought by corporate capitalism.

Blood Meridian and *No Country for Old Men* bookend the same widespread devastation of late capitalism illustrated in The Border Trilogy. This trilogy traces the Old West's decline over the course of the twentieth century by following the lives of two latter-day cowboys, John Grady Cole and Billy Parham, as they cross the border into Mexico between 1933 and 2002. Here, they retreat south, finding work on traditional plantation ranches (i.e., haciendas), surrounding themselves with animals not yet tamed or hunted into extinction, and otherwise preserving what they see as the dying culture and economy of the American Cowboy. By the end of these novels, however, the economy of the American Cowboy has recognizably disappeared, as is evident in its ruined infrastructure: "There was no work in that country anywhere. Pasture

gates stood open and sand drifted in the roads and after a few years it was rare to see stock of any

kind" (*Cities of the Plain* 264). As with the end of *Suttree*, these older structures from an older

economy become replaced by the newer architecture of "concrete tile by the highwayside,"

juxtaposed with "a big yellow Euclid truck," apparently used in the construction of "pale and

naked concrete pillars of an east-west onramp," which are "curving away […] rising without

capital or pediment like the ruins of some older order standing in the dusk" (289). This late

capitalist image, as Jameson would note, destroys John Grady's and Billy's hopes to participate

in "precapitalist Third World agriculture" (*Postmodernism* 36) and recalls the construction of I-

40 in the final scene of *Suttree*. However, the scene's comparison to "ruins of some older order

standing in the dusk" does more to highlight the similarity between western cultures that have

already passed (e.g., the "pillars," "capitals," and "pediments" of Ancient Greece and Classical

Rome), as well as newer western cultures that McCarthy suggests will come to pass (e.g., late

capitalism and Christianity). In fact, we see through Billy Parham's tired eyes at the end The

Border Trilogy's final installment, *Cities of the Plain* (1998), that the older architecture of late

capitalism and Christianity are already replaced by the even newer architecture of a

technological age:

> [T]o the west stood what he took for one of the ancient spanish
> missions of that country but when he studied it again he saw that it
> was the round, white dome of a radar tracking station. Beyond that
> and partly overcast also in the moonlight he saw a row of figures
> struggling and clamoring silently in the wind. They appeared to be
> dressed in robes […] They had the look of inmates in a madhouse
> palely gowned and pounding mutely at the glass of their keeping.
> (289)

Billy here confuses structures of a newer Southwest with figures of an older Southwest. He

recognizes the next morning, however, that "what he saw out on the desert in the new day's light

were only rags of plastic wrapping hanging from a fence where the winds had blown them," not

the human figures of "inmates in a madhouse palely gowned," as he imagined the night before

(289). More importantly, the newer architecture of a structure dedicated to the progress of

information technology (i.e., the radar tracking station) replaces the older architecture of a

structure dedicated to Christian tradition (i.e., the "ancient spanish mission"), and Billy

recognizes this mistake as a final sign that an older western culture is gone. For indeed like the

cottages in the town of Red Branch from *The Orchard Keeper*; like the shacks of McAnally Flats

from *Suttree*; like the wickiups of the Plains Indians from *Blood Meridian*; and like the ranches

from all McCarthy's Southwestern novels, the mission church, too, has become myth, legend,

dust.

     Blood Meridian offers the most pervasive imagery to speak for Christianity's decline in

the Southwest not only via imagery of ruined mission churches (which it boasts the most of

among the Southwestern novels and will be discussed below), but also via the disturbing scene of

a ruined reenactment of the crucifixion, which the kid wanders across after he's grown into a

man. Before the kid witnesses this scene, however, it is interesting to note that he wanders the

desert as an unwitting ambassador of the Christian religion, carrying "a bible he'd found at the

mining camps […] no word of which he could read," as if it were a prop (325). In fact, the Bible

makes him appear like "some sort of preacher" (325), but the narrator says "he was no witness"

in the biblical sense, because he does not preach "of things at hand nor things to come, he least

of any man" (325). *Blood Meridian* thus divorces one of the original texts of Western culture

from its context, reduces it to a prop (at worst) or an artifact (at best), and signifies the decline of

Christianity's significance in the post-South, so that ultimately, when the kid comes across the

ruins of a massacre where a pilgrimage of flagellants were killed during their reenactment of the

crucifixion, the novel seems to set a nail in the coffin of Western Christianity:

> The company of penitents lay hacked and butchered among the stones in every attitude. Many lay about the fallen cross and some were mutilated and some were without heads […] Perhaps they'd gathered under the cross for shelter but the hole into which it had been set and the cairn of rocks about its base showed how it had been pushed over and how the hooded alter-christ had been cut down and disemboweled. (327)

It is no coincidence these carcasses appear parallel to the massacred buffalo—"the dead animals scattered over the grounds […] by the thousands," which the kid later observes being piled into gigantic mounds of bones (329-331). These scenes' juxtaposition suggests a parallel between the cultural, economic, and environmental acts of self-destruction perpetuated by Western Christianity and its ideological offspring, Manifest Destiny. We encounter the placelessness that accompanies these western ideologies' decline in the same way we encounter Billy Parham's, when, after looking up from the beheaded alter-christ, the kid confuses a huddled figure kneeling among the rocks on the plain for a woman who has survived the massacre. He even speaks to her compassionately and at some length as an old woman, affectionately calling her "Abuelita" and offering to escort her to safety. Yet when he touches her arm, she rocks back and forth, and he discovers "She weighed nothing. She was just a dried shell and she had been dead in that place for years" (328). Although we're not given window to the kid's thoughts, this revelation surely awakens the kid to the fact that the chivalrous days of escorting women to safety are over, just as the days of Spanish Missions on the horizon are over for Billy Parham.

It is ultimately here—inside what Dana Phillips colorfully describes as the "ruined, eroded, and buzzard-draped mission churches in *Blood Meridian*"—that we see the final decline of Christianity into what Phillips aptly calls "the salt ruins of humanity" (Phillips 448-450). We first witness these "salt ruins" inside *Blood Meridian*'s first "abandoned church" (16), where, after having passed out drunk the night before, the kid comes to in the nave:

> A ruinous church […] the vaulted ceiling and the tall swagged
> walls with their faded frescoes. The floor of the church was deep in
> dried guano and the droppings of cattle and sheep. Pigeons flapped
> through the piers of dusty light and three buzzards hobbled about
> on the picked bone carcass of some animal dead in the chancel.
> (27)

Reminiscent of an abandoned Catholic church that Suttree visits in Knoxville with its sagging walls and faded frescos, this structure has no significance of place to the kid, who regards it like a zoo of the dead, with the skeletons of several species of livestock inside the church suggesting the entombment of a pastoral landscape. Where once "the mission occupied eight or ten acres of enclosed land" that was apparently arable, only "a barren purlieu that held a few goats and burros" remains (28). Such barrenness speaks for the end of an agrarian way of life, which like the Green Fly Inn of *The Orchard Keeper*, stood for an older agrarian culture that once dominated the region. The emphasis in *Blood Meridian*, however, is not on the passing of the plantation structure from the Old South, but on the passing of the structures of Western Christianity: the religion whose evangelical ideology caused westerners to believe that they possessed a God-given right to claim the southernmost region of North America for themselves and their God.

We see the architecture of Renaissance humanism throughout the ruins of *Blood Meridian*'s sixteenth century Spanish colonies, which appear later and even more ruinous in "The town of Janos" (85). Here, every structure in the town, including "[a]n ancient walled presidio composed wholly of mud, a tall mud church and mud watchtowers" appears "rainwashed and lumpy and sloughing into a soft decay," as the kid rides past yet another church "where old spanish bells seagreen with age hung from a pole" (101). The shot-up remains of stone saints outside the first church the kid wakes up in speak similarly for its passing as a Spanish Mission, which, like its earlier, mud ancestor whose bells have oxidized "seagreen" over

time, was founded by an ideology that regards the human form as the pinnacle of earthly

creation. In McCarthy's post-South, however, this human form is reduced to rubble when

Americans from the North use nineteenth century firearms to render this Christian architecture

into posthuman sculptures:

> The facade of the building bore an array of saints in their niches
> and they had been shot up by American troops trying their rifles,
> the figures shorn of ears and noses and darkly mottled with
> leadmarks oxidized upon the stone. The huge carved and paneled
> doors hung awap on their hinges and a carved stone Virgin held in
> her arms a headless child. (28)

Their guns functioning as new-age mallet and chisel, the American soldiers transform these

sculptures of the perfect human form into statues more stone than human, i.e., posthuman beings,

"shorn of ears and noses and darkly mottled with leadmarks oxidized," as if they were sculpted

purposefully in this new way (28). Matthew Taylor's comparison of Michelanglo's most perfect

human statue, *David*, with the artist's most imperfect human statue, *Atlas Slave,* do well to

represent the difference between these saints' appearance before and after American

intervention. Taylor interprets the two statues to represent two distinct cosmologies: "*David*:

individual and representative, pinnacle of creation, human bridge between mundane and divine

[…] the *Atlas Slave*: a different kind of intermediary, Atlas, one who separates rather than brings

together" (Taylor 1). *Blood Meridian*'s effaced sculptures blur the boundary between human and

stone in the same way as these two statues when viewed as a pair, and their ruins offer us the

novel's first look at a posthuman architecture: one where, as *Blood Meridian* puts it, man and

rock "become endowed with unguessed kinships" (259).

 We pan out to regard even more imagery like this in the novel's penultimate posthuman

image of the Glanton Gang wandering the desert like gorgons loosed from their pedestals: "like

beings provoked out of the absolute rock and provoked nameless and at no remove from their

own loomings to wander ravenous and doomed and mute as gorgons" (180). Then finally, we zoom out to regard the ultimate panorama of what the novel calls an "optical democracy": a posthuman landscape, wherein we regard the Glanton Gang from so far a distance in the desert that, "in the neuter austerity of that terrain all phenomena were bequeathed a strange equality and no one thing nor spider nor stone nor blade of grass could put forth claim to precedence" (258). As Taylor puts it, this brand of "posthumanism is best understood as a broader, transhistorical attempt to integrate the human into larger networks of being [which] encompasses not only technoscientific transhumanism […] but also older, romantic forms of incorporation into natural environments" (Taylor 5). Of course, McCarthy's posthumanism is distilled from this older, romantic philosophy. However, it also appears to foretell an incorporation of the human into larger networks of being through the loss of humanity entirely by means of the extinction of human presence.

The ruined saints of *Blood Meridian*'s first abandoned church come to function as archaeological images of the posthuman being after the extinction of human presence, and they culminate in the narrator's final image of the Virgin Mary carrying a beheaded baby Jesus—the definitive image of a perfect god / perfect human transformed into neither perfect god nor perfect human, but ruined stone. This image not only joins the baby Jesus with statues of Ancient Greek and Classical Roman gods as an artifact of religious extinction, but also with the corpse of a child that the kid sees lying dead in the church's sacristy. With these images of dead children and many more throughout *Blood Meridian* and the rest of McCarthy's novels, the narrator suggests humanity's lack of futurity in the post-South borderland between the U.S. and Mexico, where manifestations of western culture in the Christian architecture of Spain and Mexico have fallen

largely into disrepair. Indeed, they have done so well before the end of the nineteenth century,

and they foretell the extinction of humanist cultures like them in a future century.

Chapter 3 | And This, And This, And This: *The Road* as Cormac McCarthy's Posthuman South

Set amid crumbling interstate highways, billboards, and cities in the American Southeast around turn of the twenty-first century, *The Road* (2006) illustrates an extinction of the postmodern South. In this space, our sense of placelessness reaches its ultimate peak, as the fertile southern landscape is reduced by an anonymous apocalypse to a barren wasteland. Reading with Martyn Bone's interpretation of Barbara Kingsolver's *Prodigal Summer* (2000)—a portrayal of yet another southern landscape's "despoliation and extinction"—*The Road*'s ashen wasteland becomes a space where "Nature has been entirely effaced," and therefore a space where "'place' in 'the South' must be increasingly understood in a transnational context" (Bone 248). From a reading like Bone's, we might deduce that *The Road*'s own "despoliation and extinction" suggest a turn toward the transnational for McCarthy, as ruins and ashes could signify the dissolution of barriers erected by southerners and Americans between themselves and the rest of the world. Performing a transnational reading in this way, however, would assume that *The Road* imagines a future South that is a utopian transnational space, one where borders between itself, its previous incarnations, and the rest of the world have been dissolved, or as Michael Kreyling says in relation to Bone's work, been "buried too deep for recovery by history or memory or anyone but the archaeologist" (Kreyling 15).

Assuming the role of that archaeologist in this chapter, I dig to contend that *The Road* does not imagine a South where previous incarnations of the U.S. South (i.e., the Old South, New South, and post-South) have been buried so deep as to not be recoverable by history or memory, but instead forecasts a posthuman south: a space wherein the ruins of older Souths appear like fossil remains that illustrate less a burial of older southern cultures and more the

extinction of human exceptionalism which attended them. *The Road*'s setting envisions this future South as a gray landscape where two of the earth's last humans—the novel's nameless protagonists, referred to only as "the man" and "the boy"—forage through homes, grocery stores, and interstates littered with ash in their attempts to survive cannibalism, illness, and cold climates on what the novel frames as a southward journey.

I explore three key scenes from *The Road* to demonstrate how McCarthy achieves this vision of a future South. First, with the scene of the man and boy's investigation of a ruined plantation mansion used to house humans as food, I investigate how the novel shows us the remains of southern exceptionalism, which dies out in McCarthy's "Southern" novels. Second, with the scene of the man's return to his ruined childhood home, and then third with the scene of the man's discovery of a Coca-Cola in a ruined vending machine, I examine how the novel shows us relics of the passing of Christianity and late capitalism, respectively—i.e., ideologies of global western exceptionalism—which pervade his later, "Western" novels. In assimilating all of these Souths under one roof, *The Road* functions as a kind of columbarium of southern cultures, encapsulating them within the ruins of an apocalyptic setting to show that they have returned to ash. Instead of burying these ashes in a place of rest, however, McCarthy spreads them along a southward road, clearing the path for contemporary southern literature to abandon its concern for the past and adopt a concern for the future.

Before reaching this conclusion, however, I seek to ground the novel's concern for the future in a critical discourse that interprets it as environmental speculative fiction. Then, after laying this groundwork and performing the close readings outlined above, I appeal to Jameson's *Archaeologies of the Future* (2005) and his chapter on "The Utopian Enclave" to understand the novel's final paragraph and its vision for the future, ultimately concluding that *The Road* is a

utopian novel of the ecotopian variety—that is, a utopia which need not have a positive or optimistic connotation of the perfect political state (12). Instead, I theorize that *The Road* affords us the opportunity to interpret the end of the world, at least while speculating through an environmental lens, as the harbinger of a post-political future where the environment can finally rest in peace. Through this lens, the posthuman south can be interpreted, in Alan Weisman's terms, as "the world without us," a post-anthropocene where nature might enter a post-human state, and an ecosystem without humans may be foregrounded as the most perfect state for the rest of the planet (Weisman 5).

If, as John Cant says, McCarthy's novels have always been concerned with writing "The Grand Narrative of Western culture," then *The Road* is the logical conclusion of that grand narrative (Cant 266). Much like Cant, most "Cormackians" (i.e., longtime scholars of McCarthy's work who ascribe to the Cormac McCarthy Society) read *The Road* aesthetically as both the magnum opus and denouement of his entire career—to riff off the author himself, "the book made out of all his earlier books"—as well as a return to the South of his "Southern" novels.[9] From this narrow angle, the novel can be read as a return to the southern gothic of McCarthy's literary past, which, especially when paired with Oprah's biographical interpretation of the novel as a story about McCarthy's son, makes the text appear like his most personal novel (McCarthy 3:20-4:17). Conversely, many non-Cormackian readers have noted that the novel's post-apocalyptic frame can be interpreted more broadly as McCarthy's foray into the literary future, specifically into the genre of science fiction. This marks it as McCarthy's most universal

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[9] See any and all conference papers from "The Road Home: Cormac McCarthy's Imaginative Return to the South" (2007), Stephen Frye's *Understanding Cormac McCarthy* (151-152), Dianne Luce's "The Painterly Eye: Waterscapes in Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*" (68-69), as well as Peter Josyph's *Cormac McCarthy's House* (38-39) for more ways to read *The Road* as a literary-artistic culmination of allusions to the author's earlier novels.

novel. Of course, Cormackians should admit that the novel has received international acclaim

and the Pulitzer Prize because of its universality, while non-Cormackians should admit that,

because it is a father-son narrative dedicated to the author's son, the novel is highly personal.

What we may glean from both camps, however, is that the novel's success comes from

both its universality and particularity—qualities that are not aesthetically or mutually

exclusive—and which I think we can capture if we interpret the novel as southern science fiction.

Doing so, I believe, will explain the novel in terms of what science fiction author, astrophysicist,

and Alabama native Gregory Benford calls "Southern speculative fiction" in his essay, "The

South and Science Fiction" (2000), wherein he establishes science fiction as the black sheep of

southern literature because of its perceived progressiveness and lack of historical accuracy.

Despite the genre's marginalization, however, Benford contends that southern science fiction

exists, albeit tenuously, in his own writing, as well as in the form of alternative southern

histories.[10] Indeed, according to Benford, even though southern science fiction may appear less

than concerned with regional and technological progress (he even goes so far as to claim "the

South is fundamentally *not about* innovation and technology" [389, emphasis added]), it is still

very much concerned with the science fictional tropes of "landscape as a shaping force," "social

inertia," and "the acceptance of inevitability" (388-390). As a novel conceived from McCarthy's

late-night vision of "fires up on the hill" and "everything being laid waste in fifty or a hundred

years" (McCarthy 3:20-4:17), Benford's tropes apply well to explain why *The Road*'s "country

to the south" (4) appears an "ashen scabland" (16); why the landscape shapes the earth's last

inhabitants into "creedless shells of men tottering down the causeways like migrants in a

feverland"(28); and why the entire novel becomes a space where "[t]he frailty of everything" is

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[10] See: *C.S.A.: The Confederate States of America* (2004) for one such alternative history.

"revealed at last" (28). That is, Benford's tropes explain that McCarthy is writing southern science fiction.

Michael Chabon, McCarthy's first contemporary to publish about *The Road*'s connection to science fiction in his *New York Times* review, "After the Apocalypse" (2006), highlights the fact that "many reviewers […] seem to have read *The Road* as the turn toward science fiction that any established literary writer may reasonably be permitted." However, Chabon sidesteps reading the novel as hard or even soft science fiction, going so far as to agree with certain Cormackians that the novel signifies a return to McCarthy's literary past in the southern gothic because it demonstrates "brilliant genre work [with] adventure and Gothic horror" (Chabon). More recently, however, Christopher Pizzino has picked up where Chabon left off, departing radically from Chabon's claim that "*The Road* is neither parable nor science fiction," and claiming that we should read the novel as utopian science fiction imbedded with a lesson about the questionability of human virtue. His interpretative framework is worth quoting at length:

> Reading *The Road* as sf confronts us with radically different questions
> about where value lies in the text […] If the critical consensus thus far
> posited the novel as a tale of simple, desperate human virtue, *The Road*
> expresses utopian impulses that complicate the framework in which virtue
> is defined. (Pizzino 360)

That is to say, the novel does not permit black and white notions of human virtue to gain any traction. It even questions the man's separation of the world's survivors into two camps (i.e., "the good guys" vs. "the bad guys"), when, after the man kills another man who threatens the boy's life, the boy asks "Are we still the good guys?" to which the father responds "Yes. We always will be" (77). In Pizzino's science fiction reading, the boy's innocent question undermines the father's utopian assertion of absolute human virtue, and it asks us to consider the

following question: how can a framework of absolute human virtue exist in a posthuman future where humans must kill each other to survive?

According to Pizzino, the novel's utopian impulse does not come from any commitment to preserve or recreate the man's forgotten, humanist world, but instead from an "ethical commitment to futurity," or hope, which the novel seems to invest in the boy (Pizzino 360). Pizzino's reading, however, rests on the assumption that the novel's complication of human virtue can be traced back to its utopian impulses, which he views as rooted merely in the sympathy we are made to feel for the boy as a totalizing symbol of hope for the human race. While I agree that the novel's complication of human virtue can be traced back to its utopian impulse toward an "ethical commitment to futurity," I think Pizzino views the novel's hope for a better future somewhat narrowly through the eyes of the father. I think we can also trace the novel's impulse toward futurity even deeper to an ethical commitment to futurity of the environment, even with the absence of the man, the boy, and all sign of humanity. From this angle, the novel seems less about its characters and more about its characters' surroundings, less about human futurity and more about planetary futurity.

Dana Phillips's observation that all of McCarthy's novels seem less concerned with character-driven narrative than they are with poetic descriptions of the world (Phillips 437) corroborates this reading of *The Road*. McCarthy's characters receive no familiar names to humanize them besides "the man" and "the boy," and their surroundings appear even worse off than they are: that is, except for a few lucky mushrooms, entirely dead (40). From this long view, the novel's setting seems even more sympathetic than its characters, as its descriptive passages ask us to reflect on the implications of living in an environment that can no longer support us.

At least two critics in recent years—specifically Laura Gruber Godfrey in her 2011 essay, "Geography and 'Green' Memory in Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*," and Ben De Bruyn in his 2010 essay, "Care, Ruin, and Vision in McCarthy's *The Road* and Harrison's Ecocriticism"— agree that *The Road* is very concerned with speculating on what could happen to the earth in the event of a planetary disaster. Godfrey notes "*The Road* […] almost seems to provide the fictional answer to a long-standing and anxious question about what might happen if we 'lose' the beauty of the natural world to the carelessness and greed of humans" (Godfrey 167). De Bruyn cites the same cause as the novel's source for speculation, albeit in simpler, more moralizing terms:

> If we continue to carelessly fill our shopping carts and to ignore
> the environmental problems which force some of us today to wear
> mouth masks, McCarthy suggests, our children may have to wear
> mouth masks everywhere and carry their entire world in a grocery
> cart. (De Bruyn 780)

According to both critics, then, the novel should be read as speculative fiction of the didactic and prophylactic variety, one that encourages us to disengage from any behavior that might lead to a dystopian end-of-the-world scenario. I think Kevin Kearney does well to corroborate these dystopian readings, as he interprets the novel very explicitly as "speculative fiction" concerning a doomed and gloomy future "without the human" (Kearney 175). However, Kearney's dystopian speculative fiction reading also renders *The Road* into a somewhat depressing novel, which I don't think is the case, especially if we consider the body of scholarship published about its hopeful overtones, as well as its naturalistic and environmental undertones, all of which become apparent in what critics Georg Guilleman and Christopher J. Walsh have observed in the novel's revisionary ecopastoralism. Guilleman and Walsh provide the most thorough treatment of these naturalistic and environmental tendencies to date, dedicating entire books to reading McCarthy's treatment of ecopastoralism as a radical revision of the American literary tradition of

romantic naturalism. Playing out McCarthy's critique of America's relationship to the landscape in terms of cartography, Walsh cites Guilleman's *Pastoral Vision of Cormac McCarthy* (2004) in the seventh chapter of his illuminating book, *In the Wake of the Sun* (2010), arguing well that McCarthy resists allowing the man of *The Road* to successfully chart he and the boy's southward journey on pre-apocalyptic maps of the landscape. According to Walsh, the man's inability to map their journey stems from McCarthy's resistance to allowing his characters the hubris of anthropocentric mapmaking, which would dictate that they know how the landscape is divided: "*The Road* […] succeeds once again in leveling human and non-human phenomena, animate and inanimate matter […] provok[ing] us into undertaking a kind of deeper mythic mapping that makes us reconsider our relationship to our ecological environment" (Walsh 269). That is to say, much like *Blood Meridian*'s portrait of "optical democracy," where "man and rock become endowed with unguessed kinships" (258), *The Road's* post-apocalyptic environment levels human and non-human phenomena. In this indifferent environment, pre-apocalyptic human beings become post-apocalyptic posthuman beings—or, as the narrator refers to the father, "alien […] being[s] from a planet that no longer existed" (153).

Although a posthumanist reading is beyond the scope of Walsh's chapter, I think that reading hubris synonymously with humanism may help us understand the novel's ending with a sense of hope and serenity about the absence of the human. Doing so allows us to encounter a space that posthuman architectural theorist, Ariane L. Harrison defines in her recent collection, *Architectural Theories of the Environment: Posthuman Territory* (2013), wherein "human and nonhuman elements," which are "regarded as irreconcilably disparate in a humanist frame of reference" appear to "integrate in a posthuman one" (Harrison 32). We encounter a similar relationship between human and nonhuman in *The Road*'s southern ecosystem after structures of

humanism have disappeared. Here, humans have no pretentions to worldly superiority because they are forced to blend in with their surroundings in a way that foregrounds the gray landscape. This landscape is Cormac McCarthy's posthuman south: a future space where everything in the ecosystem "to the south" appears "Barren, silent, godless" (4). Here, "south" is no longer a conservative subculture of the United States, no longer a locality, no longer a region, no longer a nation, no longer a way of life, no longer even an accent. It is merely a cardinal direction. This is McCarthy's ultimate vision of the end of western civilization. This is his ultimate vision of the South after humanism.

When the man and boy come across the ruins of a plantation mansion converted into a cannibal hideout, we recognize that its scene re-presents the image of Old South agrarianism already presented as extinct throughout McCarthy's "Southern" novels. The loaded image of its façade, "tall and stately with white doric columns across the front," at once displays the Old South's proud, humanistic ideology while also reminding us of "the two Doric columns of white marble" that supported the Green Fly Inn in *The Orchard Keeper* (13). Yet its interior, "waterstained and sagging," is plagued by signs of the abandonment of human signage and an atavistic return to survival in its rudest form, i.e., not subsistence farming, but anthropophagy (read: cannibalism).

However, when the man and boy first view what appears to be the last vestige of southern agrarianism after the apocalypse, we are not prompted to think about humans eating humans. Instead, we are reminded of the ruder forms that survive in McCarthy's "Southern" novels, particularly *Suttree*, where the title character visits a similar mansion (that is, his childhood home), a house with "tall fluted columns" and "an immense and stark facade" (135) before returning to his own last vestige of agrarian living, McAnally Flats—that "*Encampment of the*

damned" (3), which often appears like a war zone, strewn with the detritus of "ruined household artifacts that rear from the fecal mire of the flats" (4). In *The Road*, the interior of the plantation mansion appears similarly destitute, even holocaust-like, as the cannibals have burned every piece of the mansion's furniture, as well as thrown their captives' belongings into a corner, where the man and boy see them "[p]iled in a windrow […] a great heap of clothing. Clothes and shoes. Belts. Coats. Blankets and old sleeping bags" (106-107). Very much like those piles of clothes found in concentration camps during World War II, these cast-off belongings suggest the nakedness and oppression of those who once owned them. Their World War II imagery joins with the antebellum imagery of the plantation mansion to blend historically significant crimes against humanity. However, these derelict images exhibit past living conditions not merely of Nazi Germany or the antebellum south—and McCarthy here affirms Brinkmeyer's connection between the two times and places—but also the future living conditions of a posthuman south. In this placeless space, the icon of the Old South has been reappropriated for a different kind of oppression—not slavery, not genocide, but homicidal cannibalism. But *The Road*'s anthropophagy does not read like a crime against humanity that may be confined to a particular place and time in history. From that vantage, we might have the luxury of assuming that humans are "better than" stooping to committing such crimes. McCarthy does not permit us that luxury. He forces us to look at cannibalism as a cultural norm and common method of survival in his posthuman future.

I will tease out this reading in more detail below. To clarify, I am not arguing that *The Road* (or Cormac McCarthy) advocates cannibalism as a means for surviving the apocalypse. Besides reading the novel as a Choose-Your-Own-Adventure, How-To-Survive-The-Apocalypse fiction—which would be a gross, albeit humorous oversimplification—I think doing so would

marginalize the man and boy's conversations about "the good guys" vs. "the bad guys," (or "the survivors who don't eat people" vs. "the survivors who eat people") as irrelevant to developing an understanding of the novel, when they most certainly are not. My point is only that *The Road*'s future setting does not permit reading the actions of the cannibals, the actions of the man and the boy, or the actions of any of the novel's characters for that matter, as capable of being understood in terms preferred by western humanist ideologies and their cultures. Rather, I argue that the novel uses the cannibals of the plantation mansion to illustrate the extent to which post-apocalyptic human beings are no longer able to adhere to humanist systems and ideologies.

When the man and boy enter this "once grand house," the narrator glosses the history of its wooden porch, where "chattel slaves had once trod those boards bearing food and drink on silver trays" (106). In typical southern gothic fashion, the repressed horror of this history reappears—as it does at the end of *Child of God* when a farmer and mule fall through the ground and discover themselves surrounded by made-up corpses in Lester Ballard's cave—upon the man's forcing open of a locked trapdoor in the plantation kitchen to reveal the holocaust-like image of a cellar full of emaciated people. Unike Ballard's corpses, these people are not dead people made to look alive, but live people who look dead and smell dead, pitiful zombies whose malnourished bodies and pleas to "Help us" frighten the man and boy into fleeing the mansion, while the mansion's ostensible owners (six cannibals) are returning from the fields in the backyard (111). With this ostensibly gothic, anti-pastoral image of cannibals stalking through fields toward a house whose larder they've stocked with humans, the novel's six antagonists recall *Outer Dark*'s unnamed, antagonistic triune, who haunt the fields and rural roads of an anonymous southern town, trespassing, stealing farm equipment, and killing farmers for no apparent reason. In *The Road*, however, McCarthy takes this image of an anti-pastoral triune to

another level, doubling their number, and rendering them not merely into murderers but homicidal cannibals. As with the antagonistic triune, the sextet appears transposed out of a gothic text, only instead of appearing like the triune do (i.e., as a realization of Grant Wood's *American Gothic*), they appear like a realization of the Sawyers, i.e., the cannibalistic butcher family of *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (1974). This renders them and the novel's setting, like the man's late wife once said, "like the walking dead in a horror film" (55), as they inhabit a future space where horror has become more than just a movie genre, but everyday reality. In this world, humans don't kill and eat other humans due to any apparent psychopathology, but do so instead out of necessity and as a means of survival. That is to say, within the novel's posthuman future, homicidal cannibals such as the Sawyer family are not abnormal; they are the norm, just as farming in the south once was but no longer can be, as agrarian cultures and economies have become environmentally impossible from the result of global ecological fallout. We see the impact of this fallout everywhere in the novel—whether it's the man realizing that cows are extinct (120) or both central characters viewing the "Senseless. Senseless" boneyard of fishes and seabirds once they reach the coastline: i.e., "[o]ne vast salt sepulcher" (222)—as nature's remains constantly remind us that the old ways of using (and abusing) the planet's resources are gone.

Reading the novel through a southern gothic or psychoanalytic lens, the plantation mansion affirms that the past is not even past—that even after the apocalypse, the great sin of slavery somehow haunts the southern psyche. However, to read its architecture in these outmoded ways misses the fact that the humans in the cellar are not slaves; they are food. Their bodies are not used to till fields or pick cotton, but to eat, as the cauterized hips of a man still

alive and lying on a mattress illustrates that cannibals preserve the human bodies like livestock, as fresh meat for later use (110).

Of course this reading would make the Southern Agrarians turn over in their graves, since within their extinct social framework, the scene appropriates trappings of Southern Agrarianism and renders them into the trappings of cannibalism. However, when examined through a posthuman lens, we regard the scene within the framework of its post-apocalyptic setting; one where, as Taylor would put it, humans have been "dethroned from the apex of cosmic meaning," and thereby stationed within a cosmology that has "disable[d] the particular forms of mastery associated with Enlightenment and counter-Enlightenment selfhood," i.e., "the mastery of otherness and the mastery of identity" (Taylor 11). Within this cosmology, the master-slave dichotomy does not exist. Indeed, human beings have been reduced to nameless shells of their former selves, so that although the appearance of human oppression inside a plantation mansion within "the South" may appear, in traditional southern gothic fashion, to revive the South of the Southern Renaissance, the novel's post-apocalyptic cosmology renders such a reading anachronistic. To use Guinn's language, the scene of the plantation mansion is mythoclastic because it sets the mythic image of the plantation not within a past dominated by humanist ideologies of the Old South or New South, but within a future where dominant ideologies, like the structures built to support them, have become obsolete. So then, instead of forcing us to reckon with the past, the plantation mansion urges us to consider what it might be like to live in a future south—one where traditional humanist ideologies (such as the mentality that those-who-till-the-earth-are-the-chosen-people-of-God) no longer apply to the practice of merely trying to survive.

The Road shows us again the prevalence of the posthuman south over older, humanist ones when the man revisits his childhood home. Here, we see "an old frame house with chimneys and gables and a stone wall" whose exterior displays "peeling wooden clapboards [that] were largely gone from the lower walls for firewood leaving the studs and insulation exposed" (25). Unlike the plantation mansion, the rotting and abandoned insides of the man's former home can be seen from the outside. That is, the façade of the past has already fallen to reveal the future of posthuman dereliction. Much like Lester Ballard's and Culla Holme's withdrawal into abandoned cabins that are described in similar states of disrepair as they wander their respective southern countrysides, the man's return to his childhood home signifies a retreat into an older southern architecture. Yet unlike Ballard and Holme, the man's retreat is not for the purpose of his survival (as it should be under his and the boy's present circumstances) but for the gratuitous purpose of diverting from the road for a brief walk down memory lane. The man's attempt to salvage the past by reconstructing the home for the boy through memory also mimes John Grady Cole's attempt to salvage the past by reconstructing an abandoned frontier cabin through architectural restoration in *Cities of the Plain*. Indeed, both John Grady and the man regard the physical remains of these structures as remnants of exceptionalist western cultures and economies that have now vanished. While John Grady Cole views old name brand calendars, coffee boxes, and rain coats emblematic of the passing of an early-twentieth century capitalism (145), the man views old holes on the mantle where stockings used to hang during Christmas, empty spaces symbolic of the passing of Christianity and the holiday so often associated with late-twentieth century capitalism: "He felt with his thumb in the painted wood of the mantle the pinholes from tacks that had held stockings forty years ago. This was where we used to have Christmas when I was a boy" (26).

Housing relics of the rituals of Christianity, the man's childhood home here functions as a time capsule of the western humanist ideology that prevailed during pre-apocalyptic times. The father also remembers the small-town sense of family and community that he experienced on "cold winter nights when the electricity was out in a storm and we would sit at the fire here, me and my sisters, doing our homework" (26). However, this memory of home and hearth is soon crowded out by the posthuman present in which the house is situated, as when the man and boy continue to explore the house, the man opens his bedroom closet "half expecting to find his childhood things," but is greeted instead by "raw, cold daylight [that] fell from the roof […] gray as his heart" (27).

This image of the father's heart pulses dimly throughout the novel. In fact, John Cant links it to the fiery image of the "ardent heart," which he believes to survive in the boy with his call to "carry the fire" (Cant 271). But a gray heart is no ardent heart, and the man and boy's observation of gray light descending from the sky recalls their earlier observation of a single snowflake described expiring in the man's hands "like the last host of christendom" (16). A similar tone of expiration accompanies the man's realization that the small, private, closet space of his childhood room has been rent open and exposed to the "raw, cold daylight" of a harsh climate already contributing to his failing health. In this moment, the man sees that he is no longer looking at the place of his childhood past, but a vacant space, reminding him that his past has not merely passed, but gone extinct, as the apocalypse has not only killed off a majority of the human species, but also extinguished the majority of their histories and memories.

For all the history and memory the place rekindles, then, the man's childhood home serves more as a *momento mori* for the older, southern cultures of the pre-apocalyptic South than a nostalgic escape into the gilded halls of reminiscence. The childhood home thus functions as a

kind of tomb for these older, southern cultures that were once united by humanist ideologies like Christianity because it is reduced to an abandoned house whose history is known only to the man and his memory. Both this memory and history disappear with the man's death at the end of the novel, as the pre-apocalyptic generation of the man gives way to the post-apocalyptic generation of the boy. Dividing the man and boy into these two very distinctive generations (one pre-apocalyptic and humanist, the other post-apocalyptic and posthumanist) helps explain both characters' different reactions in the final scene that I will discuss in this chapter: i.e., the Coca-Cola scene.

Set at a deserted supermarket, the scene illustrates how irrelevant the global capitalist economy has become within a South no longer known by one of its original products. Inside the supermarket, the man and boy walk through littered aisles, where "in the produce section […] they found a few ancient runner beans and what looked to have once been apricots, long dried to wrinkled effigies of themselves" (22). Products once sold thus become relics of a lost world in ancient history, as the supermarket houses products that are now "effigies"—remains of what Poe would call "the old time entombed" ("The Haunted Palace" 37-40). This archaeological imagery continues with the appearance of "two softdrink machines that had been tilted over into the floor and opened with a prybar," as if they were plundered sarcophagi. On the ground next to them are "coins everywhere in the ash," seeming cremated as now worthless emblems of global capitalism's former dominance (22-23). Fishing a Coke out of the gutted machine with ease, the man demonstrates the apparent uselessness of the former currency, so that with this image of capitalism's latency, *The Road* speculates on what Fredric Jameson might view as the fruition of Thomas More's utopia: that is, not just the "abolition" of, but the "demolition and removal" of money and property (*Archaeologies* 12).

The man's reaction to the Coke as a cultural artifact demonstrates, however, that the Coke still holds value for him as the product of an older, humanist culture, because he gives it to the boy as "a treat" (23). Yet the boy does not react to the Coke initially as if it were a treat, but as if it were a foreign object, asking, "What is it?" This difference in each generation's response to the Coke indicates the key difference between the humanist and posthumanist souths. For the man of the pre-apocalyptic, humanist south (i.e., a person like us) the Coke may conjure up images of family bonding, such as TV commercials; perhaps also an image of Atlanta, Georgia, the former capital of the confederacy and present hub of the late capitalist post-South, where Coca-Cola Company is based; as well as the logo whose pervasiveness connotes the dominance of global western capitalism, which here seems to extend its presence even into the post-apocalyptic future. However, for the boy of the post-apocalyptic, posthuman south, the Coke elicits a wary response due to its unfamiliarity. It is a foreign object, which he cannot regard as the product of humanist culture that the man sees because he was born after humanist structures such as the nuclear Christian family, cities like Atlanta, and institutions like capitalism had dissolved. As a member of the posthuman generation, then, the boy affirms that Coca-Cola does not retain its capitalist influence within a posthuman south. Indeed the scene does affirm Thomas More's classical vision of utopia, portraying the demolition and removal of money and property as an event that could allow a father and son to share one of the last Cokes on earth, completely free of charge.

Showing us the ruins of a capitalist, humanist, and postsouthern institution within a future south, the Coca-Cola scene represents in microcosm the extinction of these institutions as they are shown dying off in McCarthy's "Western" novels. However, McCarthy displays the death of southern cultures that surround these institutions with more finality in *The Road*. Like the

plantation mansion scene and the childhood home scene, the Coca-Cola scene presents us with the entombment of these older southern cultures, so that by the man's death at the end of the novel, it is as if we have walked through a columbarium of southern cultures and looked within the niches that house the ashes of each south's extinction.

Upon punctuating these extinctions with the man's death, the novel stops narrating the life and death of its characters and starts narrating the life and death of its environment. Indeed its final paragraph contributes an ecological frame to the novel that, in the descriptive words of Ben De Bruyn, "conjures up an enigmatic vision of trout swimming in a river" (De Bruyn 785). Interestingly, McCarthy uses the second person "you" in this passage to place these trout in our hands—"You could see them standing in the amber current […] They smelled of moss in your hand" (287)—implying that *we* have removed the fish from the river. From this perspective, and in accordance with Laura Godfrey's notion that final paragraph paints "McCarthy's portrait of ecological crisis and loss" (Godfrey 172), the passage seems to blame these trout's absence from the novel's ecosystem on human hands. This renders *The Road* into a subtle indictment of humankind as the cause of its apocalypse, and it renders the trout, as Christopher Walsh notes in the repetition of trout imagery from earlier in the novel, "the fullest expression of the novel's dystopian ecological consciousness" (Walsh 267).

Viewing the passage as a dystopian indictment of humans for causing the apocalypse, however, commits the anthropocentric fallacy of refocusing attention on the human, when the passage's attention is focused less on the second person "you," and more on the trout—less on the human and more on what might come after the human. For De Bruyn, this vision "clearly hints at both destruction and regeneration" of the environment (785). Like many others who have speculated on the meaning of this passage, however, De Bruyn emphasizes that it "describes one

of the father's memories *after he has died*" (788, emphasis in the original), and he does not detail how its hinting at the destruction and regeneration of the environment disrupts scholarship about this scene, which too often assumes its origins as a memory of the man.

Locating the final paragraph in the man's memory does well to observe the man within a utopian natural setting—i.e., before the apocalypse transformed the Green World into a gray world, and where the human figure remains in control of the environment with his grasp of the fish. However, doing so fails to account for the final paragraph's panorama of the future landscape as if humans were no longer there. We view a panorama like this one in a speculative passage toward the end of the novel, when the man and boy pause on the road to take in their ruined surroundings. At this juncture, the narrator muses, "Perhaps in the world's destruction it would be possible at last to see how it was made. The ponderous counterspectacle of things ceasing to be. The sweeping waste, hydroptic and coldly secular. The silence" (274). It is here, in this post-political and peaceful space, wherein humans can no longer profess nor attempt to control the environment. It is here that we enter an ecotopia in which the environment can rest in silence without human presence, as it does again in the final sentence of the final paragraph, when we view a second panorama of the environment as if humans had disappeared, another ecotopia, where "all things were older than man and they hummed of mystery" (287).

Viewing these panoramas of future, posthuman landscapes through the lens of an environmental reader, the novel's final sentence does more to de-anthropocentrize the narrative than re-anthropocentrize it. In fact, if we cut the clauses that mention a human, second person "you" and attend to the narrator's descriptive emphases on the environment, we gain perspective of the world without humans:

> Once there were brook trout in the streams in the mountains […]
> Polished and muscular and torsional. On their backs were

> vermiculate patterns that were maps of the world in its becoming.
> Maps and mazes. Of a thing which could not be put back. Not be
> made right again. In the deep glens where they lived all things
> were older than man and they hummed of mystery. (287)

This is the world without us—the world that was—the world to come. Here, signs of human life neither remain nor are they nascent, as "maps of the world in its becoming" on the trouts' backs illustrate the environment's return to a time "older than man," when humans did not exist (287). This prehuman image bookends a speculative novel about human extinction with a before-and-after image of planetary peace, and the final paragraph allows us to view the environment's ultimate precedence over mankind, portending "as it was, so it shall be." So evoking a sense of serenity about the absence of the human and accepting the planet's claim to our humanity, *The Road* concludes on a note of transience (and prophecy) that this, too, shall pass.

Coda: Futures for the Posthuman South

If "the past is never dead" or "not even past," then what is the future (Faulkner 92)? If we follow the logic of Cormac McCarthy's novels from the preceding chapters, then our answer is that the future is dead, at least for humanists. But what of the South and of southern literature? Has McCarthy's work illustrated our arrival at a time in southern letters when southern writers have stopped walking backwards into the present and faced forward? Abandoned their concern for the past and adopted a concern for the future? "Architectures for a Future South" has answered that if we view Cormac McCarthy as a writer of the South, then at least one southern writer has faced forward to leave behind the myths of southern literature's past—i.e., the myth of southern exceptionalism, the myth of western exceptionalism, and the myth of human exceptionalism—as well as adopted a concern for what looks to be a future south. Many other southern writers have done the same. In what follows, I speculate on some of the wider implications that the ruined architectures of McCarthy's posthuman south could have for reading and teaching postmodern literature of the U.S. South. But first, I will survey briefly the ruins that McCarthy's novels have scattered throughout the U.S. South and Southwest in the interest of gaining a macroscopic perspective of his movement from the Old South and New South to the post-South and posthuman south.

Starting in East Tennessee, McCarthy's Southern novels illustrate the abandonment and ruin of architectures from the Old South and New South. In *The Orchard Keeper* (1965), the Green Fly Inn teeters on the precipice of the Tennessee Valley, where it's supported by two Doric columns: last vestiges of an Old South agrarian culture and economy that have all but disappeared in the New South of the 1930s. With the Inn's conflagration and collapse into the Tennessee Valley, however, the TVA replaces its pillars of the Old South with the "squat metal

tank" and "high legs" (51) of a new water tower. From its vantage on a mountaintop, this structure of the New Deal signals the dominance of an industrial economy run by faceless government men of the New South. In *Outer Dark* (1968) and *Child of God* (1973), this industrial economy and those faceless government men coevolve into a late capitalist economy and nameless traveling salesmen. Culla Holme and Lester Ballard confront these figures as forces to be reckoned with and that ultimately drive their retreat into abandoned cabins during the waning of the New South era between 1900 and the 1960s. Over this span of time, we witness agrarian southerners' increasing inability to cope with late capitalist culture and economics in the New South, where we see both characters work and wander as itinerant laborers who become parodies of the fugitive Southern Agrarians with their retreats into architectures of an older South. For McCarthy however, these wanderings into past places do not return the reader to a southern sense of place. Rather, they illustrate the postsouthern sense of placelessness that southerners felt as they saw the collapse of their older culture and economy at the advent of postmodernity. It is precisely at this advent that McCarthy's last fugitive, Suttree of the titular novel *Suttree* (1979), labors as a fisherman in the ghetto of McAnally Flats. Here, his home among the free-range pigs and chickens becomes the last agrarian holdout against the encroachment of late capitalist structures in downtown Knoxville, Tennessee, circa 1951. By the end of the novel in the late 1950s, however, Suttree is forced to abandon his houseboat in McAnally Flats, as government-contracted workers demolish the neighborhood and pave the way for the construction of I-40 through Knoxville. By this time, Suttree appears to embrace the placeless post-South wholesale, hitchhiking out of the city on this new, westward road.

The ruin and removal of every structure inhabited by the characters of these novels illustrates how the culture and economy of southern agrarianism have steadily declined

throughout the South's transition from the Old South to the New South to the post-South. In this sense, the novels show how the Agrarians' humanistic myth of southern exceptionalism has not only fallen by wayside since the decline of modernity and the rise of postmodernity, but also—like the Green Fly Inn that ran molten with glass at the bottom of the Tennessee Valley to become "some imponderable archaeological phenomenon" (47)—they fossilize the architecture of southern exceptionalism to remind us of its inevitable extinction. McCarthy's first four novels thus trace the decline of Old and New South agrarianism, as well as the South's transition to a post-South era, where late capitalism replaces a decreasingly regional South with a more global, western America.

Picking up where *Suttee* left off looking westward and portraying a more globally westernized South, McCarthy's "Western" novels explore the ruination of architectures of Christianity and capitalism throughout the Texas-Mexico borderland. The novels' characters wander throughout this placeless and often anonymous space, where structures of Christianity and capitalism stand for mass ideologies that represent both regionally southern and globally western beliefs in human exceptionalism. However, unlike his first four novels, McCarthy shows us that these myths of western exceptionalism have not only destroyed the agrarian cultures and economies of the region (e.g., indigenous peoples and Mexican villages) but also begun to destroy themselves. Thus, in these novels' southwestern landscapes—which are quintessentially postsouthern in that they expand the southern landscapes of McCarthy's first four novels westward—we watch the fallout of humanist ideologies in the American West, as the forces of capitalism and Christianity, personified by the American Cowboy, observe and even partake in the destruction of their own architectures.

In *Blood Meridian* (1985), we witness the collapse of Western Christianity in the novel's nineteenth-century mission churches, which with stone saints shot up by American soldiers in the 1840s, already appear like crumbling statues of the ancient Greek and classical Roman gods. By the end of The Border Trilogy in *Cities of the Plain* (1998), we witness similar images of the collapse of capitalism in abandoned frontier cabins, where carved wooden saints appear alongside old rain slickers, catalogues, and calendars, making the place look like a time capsule of early-modernist consumerism since latter-day cowboys deserted them in the early twentieth century. However, even with these warning signs, the latter-day cowboys' blind followers (John Grady Cole and Billy Parham) proverbially still live in the Old West during the second half of the twentieth century, as they continue to work on economically unviable ranches, watch the stockyards dwindle away to empty fences, and mistake new satellite towers for old mission churches. *No Country for Old Men* (2005) illustrates the end result of capitalism's encroachment throughout the Southwest, as the image of shot up trucks on the Texas-Mexico border after a drug-deal gone wrong functions as the epicenter from which the ruination of every American character in the novel—i.e., Llewellyn Moss, Sherriff Bell, and the corporate leaders who brokered the drug deal—spreads like the aftershock of an earthquake.

Like the remains of the Green Fly Inn, the abandoned cabins of East Tennessee, and the literally flattened McAnally Flats of McCarthy's first four novels, the remains of the next five novels' borderland mission churches, southwestern frontier cabins, and derelict mid-twentieth century automobiles show how another myth of human exceptionalism has become obsolete in the post-South. Unlike McCarthy's first four novels, however, his novels set in the Southwest explore the ruin of western exceptionalism as a consequence of the self-destructive behavior of the American Cowboy figure. In fact, that figure's stock in (white, male) human supremacy

appears poised, in the form of both capitalism and Christianity, to plummet headfirst into cultural

extinction by the end of *No Country for Old Men*.

The Road (2006) speculates on what the South and West could look like should they

career and crash at the endpoint of cultural extinction. Indeed it combines the ruin of

architectures from the Old and New South with the architectures of Christianity and capitalism

under the roof of one novel, illustrating the journey of its anonymous characters, the man and the

boy, down a southward road. In this postsouthern space, the man and boy traverse ruins that

stood for the culture and economy of older, humanist Souths, which have been erased by the

apocalypse and replaced by a future south. Here, a plantation mansion stands as a monument to

Old South agrarianism but is appropriated as a safe-house and meat cellar by homicidal

cannibals, whose diet demonstrates that most survivors in their environment have shed any

ideology that elevates the human to a supreme species we should not eat. The man stands as an

exception to this rule, however, as he and the boy do not eat their fellow survivors. Much like his

crumbling childhood home from the mid-twentieth century, the man stands as a relic of the old

humanist Souths, which becomes clear in his attempt to lead the boy through his former home,

tell him its history, and show him his memory of what it meant to live in a world with such

things as Christmas, and by extension, Christ. However, the relics and rituals of this holiday (and

the ideology it stood for) mean nothing to the boy, who, being born after the apocalypse, fears

their effect on the man and encourages him to leave the home behind. The boy thus acts as an

ambassador from a newer, posthumanist generation to the man's older, humanist generation. We

witness the most marked difference between these two generations when the man and boy

encounter a ruined vending machine from which the man produces a Coca-Cola, and the boy—

having been born after the dissolution of the southern Fortune 500 company and global

institution of western capitalism that was The Coca-Cola Company —asks "What is it?"

The remains of architectures from each of these institutions—i.e., southern agrarianism,

Christianity, and capitalism—illustrate how the culture and economy of the post-South has fallen

into ruin, and thus, how the belief in human exceptionalism has, like the rest of the human race,

gone extinct in a future south. However, the end of *The Road* clears away the wreckage of these

ruins to view how a world without the ideology of human exceptionalism (and without humans)

might look—that is, not merely gray and barren, but peaceful and serene. So, if we read the

novel as southern science fiction through an environmental lens, the planetary ecosystem

becomes our focus, and it becomes possible to view the ruins that the characters encounter as

signifiers of neither a utopian nor dystopian consciousness for the novel, but an ecotopian one. In

this post-political, posthuman future, we watch the environment finally rest in peace after

humans have passed from its surface.

What implications does the southern cultural history that I traced above have for teaching

southern literature? It offers a framework through which to view the movement from southern

modernism to southern postmodernism in terms of a movement from humanism to

posthumanism. We can apply this framework to understand southern literature of the postmodern

era, such as the work of Flannery O' Connor and Walker Percy, especially texts that illustrate

technology playing a role in the changing South (see: Flannery O' Connor's portrayal of murder

via tractor in "The Displaced Person" [1951], gun violence in "A Good Man is Hard to Find"

[1953], or Walker Percy's explicit engagement with science fiction in *Love in The Ruins* [1971]

and *The Thanatos Syndrome* [1987]). We can especially apply this framework to understand the

anti-humanist musings that underlie characters from even more contemporary southern fiction,

such as Rust Cohle in *True Detective* (2014), who equates south Louisiana with a "giant gutter in outer space," where "the honorable thing for our species to do is deny our programming, stop reproducing, [and] walk hand in hand into extinction" ("The Long Bright Dark"). Extrapolating further on this seeming increase in posthumanist ideologies in southern texts, we might even use the posthuman south as a cultural-historical framework for understanding the U.S. South's historical shifts from antebellum South to postbellum South, from Old South to New South, and New South to post-South, so as to explain why southerners have appeared to become less and less proud of their "heritage" and "burden" as their distance from modernity increases.

During his Nobel Prize acceptance speech, William Faulkner warned of a writer who would "write as though he stood among and watched the end of man" (William Faulkner – Banquet Speech). Resisting this future writer's apocalyptic vision, Faulkner issued the following statement of belief:

> I decline to accept the end of man […] I believe that man will not merely endure: he will prevail. He is immortal, not because he alone among creatures has an inexhaustible voice, but because he has a soul, a spirit capable of compassion and sacrifice and endurance. (William Faulkner – Banquet Speech)

In expressing this belief in both the prevalence and immortality of the human species, Faulkner allied himself with the hubris of human exceptionalism, while McCarthy—only seventeen years old at the time Faulkner's speech was delivered in December of 1950—would become the writer that Faulkner foretold, ultimately divorcing himself from the ideology of human exceptionalism by writing his most highly acclaimed novel as if he "stood among and watched the end of man." Of course, for all the comparisons that readers have made between Cormac McCarthy and William Faulkner—calling McCarthy "a genuine heir to the Faulknerian tradition" (Yardley) or "the twenty-first century Faulkner," as one of my graduate colleagues described him—we may

be given to ask why the author has not won the Nobel Prize, or to use John Grammer's terms,
why it is so "hard to imagine McCarthy on some platform in Stockholm, assuring us that man
will survive and prevail" (30).

To me, the reason seems that McCarthy does not tell us what we want to hear. He does
not pander to our desire to be told we are special. His work expresses an acceptance of the end of
man because that end is inevitable. He is aware of the bigger picture in which we are a mere
pixel, of what astronomer Carl Sagan called "the delusion that we have some privileged position
in the Universe" (Sagan xv-xvi), and of the fact that if natural history's estimate that "more than
99 percent of all the species that have ever lived on Earth are now extinct" (Stearns x) could be
any indicator of our species' prospects, then at some point, we—like the trilobites, like the
dinosaurs, and like the dodo bird—will go extinct.

In this sense, McCarthy is the posthumanist to Faulkner's humanist. His work responds to
humanist claims that "the past is never dead" and humans will "survive and prevail" by
illustrating that the past will die because humans will neither survive nor prevail. Indeed *The
Road* even suggests that if the future is dead—that is, if humans are all going to die—then so will
the past. Who could say that if a great extinction were to occur on the scale that it does in *The
Road*, we would not take our histories and memories with us? Would not our past, like
everything in novel, shrink "down about a raw core of parsible entities. The names of things
slowly following those things into oblivion. […] In time to wink out forever" (89)?

Using a posthumanist framework for future studies of southern literature could provide an
alternative approach to solving the problem that many current southernists find themselves
facing. That is: how do we interpret literature of the global south without committing the
imperial fallacy of imposing American notions of the U.S. South on texts outside of the United

States? —Texts whose connection to literature of the U.S. South often seems tenuous at best? A posthuman approach to literature of the global south removes this imperial tendency. It provides a cultural-historical framework with which to read literature of the global south as part of a transideological movement away from believing in human exceptionalism and toward recognizing that the human species is not exceptional. It allows us to refocus our attention on an eco-central setting instead of anthropocentric character development. It permits us to set aside the burden of critical bias for southern literature's past and shoulder a critical concern for southern literature's future.

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