

**University of Southampton**

Faculty of Humanities

English

*Geophysical Fictions*

*Traversing the works of Tim Winton and Cormac McCarthy*

By

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Thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

September 2016



## Abstract

This thesis responds to Ocean Studies' dissatisfaction with how literary geography is read metaphorically. Positioned in relation to geocritical, geopoetic and ecocritical endeavours, the present study brings this concern back to land, and builds a method of reading literary geographies that treads a patient and geophysically informed path to comprehending their metaphorical value. To achieve this, the thesis proposes reading literary geographies as forms of heterotopia: fictional and inaccessible, yet tethered to real-world geography and its geophysical dynamics. To realise the potential of this proposal, the core of the thesis is a comparative reading of Tim Winton and Cormac McCarthy, two writers praised for their attention to place.

Prompted by geophysical, environmental, anthropological, historical and philosophical ways of understanding geography, the thesis traverses the rivers, paths, deserts, and cities that emerge in Winton and McCarthy's fiction. Reading these spaces geophysically reveals connections between the two writers that have not yet been enabled by transpacific or transnational frames, appreciating the host of materialities beyond the Pacific that connect them and their thinking. Studying the presence of the fluvial cycle, lines, dust, and concrete in these locations prompts a diversity of metaphorical, symbolic, and literal ways of reading that develop ideas of national identity, gender, community, and crisis within their fiction.

Comparing both writers geographically enables a communication that expands our understanding of their individual literary works, oeuvres, and networks. It also shows the potential of geophysical reading to develop understanding about the concerns of literary inheritance, influence and epochs, helping to place both writers in a broader literary context: as inheritors of a nineteenth-century tradition, as key figures in late-twentieth and twenty-first century fiction, and as writers contesting 'modernity.'



# Table of Contents

List of Illustrations	iv
Declaration of Authorship	v
Acknowledgements	vi
<b>Introduction: Writing the World</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Ch. 1 – Rivers: Confluence and Influence</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>Ch. 2 – Lines: From Sea to Shining Sea</b>	<b>53</b>
<b>Ch. 3 – Sand: From Dust to Dust</b>	<b>92</b>
<b>Ch. 4 – Concrete: Neighbours, Home and Away</b>	<b>129</b>
<b>Conclusion: Reading the World</b>	<b>167</b>
Bibliography	174

## **List of Illustrations**

1.1 – Components of the catchment hydrological cycle	29
2.1 – The Pinnacles	61
2.2 – Graffiti on Native American pictographs	86
2.3 – Pictograph protected by inaccessibility	86
3.1 – Ralph Bagnold	100
3.2 – Extracting a car from soft sand	109
3.3 – Bagnold's log-log diagram	110
4.1 – The Dust Lady	139
4.2 – The Falling Man	139

# Academic Thesis: Declaration of Authorship

I, Joel Found, declare that this thesis and the work presented in it are my own and has been generated by me as the result of my own original research.

Geophysical Fictions: Traversing the works of Tim Winton and Cormac McCarthy

I confirm that:

1. This work was done wholly or mainly while in candidature for a research degree at this University;
2. Where any part of this thesis has previously been submitted for a degree or any other qualification at this University or any other institution, this has been clearly stated;
3. Where I have consulted the published work of others, this is always clearly attributed;
4. Where I have quoted from the work of others, the source is always given. With the exception of such quotations, this thesis is entirely my own work;
5. I have acknowledged all main sources of help;
6. Where the thesis is based on work done by myself jointly with others, I have made clear exactly what was done by others and what I have contributed myself;
  1. Either none of this work has been published before submission, or parts of this work have been published as:

‘Cormac McCarthy and Tim Winton: Working “from the Ecosystem Up”, *Cormac McCarthy’s Borders and Landscapes*, ed. Lou Jillett (London: Bloomsbury, 2016)

Signed: .....

Date: .....



## Acknowledgements

There have been many people who have had a part to play in getting my thesis to completion. Stephanie Jones has suffered countless hours reading my raw work and trying to extract the best from me. This thesis is a culmination of seven years working under her guidance, and it is evidence of how much she has developed my thinking, writing, and reading. Philip Hoare, whose advice and comments have always provided encouragement, and whose own work has provided me with constant inspiration since a chance encounter with *Leviathan* as an undergraduate. Stephen Bygrave, whose attentive reading has helped the project along from its first to last draft. Tim Winton, who kindly agreed to speak with a clueless 22-year-old PhD student and be generous with his time and thoughts. Tim and Denise Winton, who opened their home and showed me their stunning part of the world. Jenny Darling, who has taken deliveries of wine, books, and chased me around Australia with a credit card in displays of patience that, I'm certain, went beyond her requirements as a literary agent. Peter Straus, for regaling me with fond memories of working with both Tim Winton and Cormac McCarthy. Chloe McKenzie, for her keen eye, critical thoughts, and vital encouragement in low moments. Finally, my mum, dad, brother and sister, who probably won't read all of this thesis, but who, in many ways, might understand it best.

*For June, Eve, and Cyril*



# Introduction: Writing the World

This is the sea, then, this great abeyance.

Sylvia Plath, 'Berck-Plage'<sup>1</sup>

Literary criticism has long tended to promote a metaphorical focus on literary landscapes. The moors of *Wuthering Heights*, Thoreau's Walden Pond, and Wordsworth's Lake District are seen as literary images: objects apparently too abstracted through intellectual and emotional reflection to require sustained geographical attention. The attraction to this approach is evident in W. H. Auden's rousing *The Enchafèd Flood* (1950), in which the poet and critic aims to 'understand the nature of Romanticism through an examination of its treatment of a single theme, the sea.'<sup>2</sup> Auden treats the sea as a trope, painting its metaphorical moods and perceiving it primarily as 'that state of barbaric vagueness and disorder out of which civilisation has emerged and into which, unless saved by the effort of gods and men, it is always liable to relapse.'<sup>3</sup>

Hester Blum criticises such approaches, claiming: 'The sea is not a metaphor, figurative language has its place in analyses of the maritime world, certainly, but oceanic studies could be more invested in the uses, and problems, of what is literal in the face of the sea's abyss of representation.'<sup>4</sup> Perhaps Blum would think Auden more accurate had he considered the theme of Romanticism through the nature of the ocean. It is how a reader and critic might use this approach to literary geography that this thesis will explore, looking beyond its ability to convey 'theme' and towards its potential to provide 'method.'

<sup>1</sup> Sylvia Plath, 'Berck-Plage', *Sylvia Plath: Collected Poems*, ed. by Ted Hughes (London: Faber & Faber, 1981), p. 196.

<sup>2</sup> W. H. Auden, *The Enchafèd Flood* (London: Faber & Faber, 1950), p. 15.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., pp. 18-19.

<sup>4</sup> Hester Blum, 'The Prospect of Oceanic Studies', *PMLA*, 125:3 (2010), 670-677 (p. 670).

Literary criticism's stubborn treatment of geography as trope has outlived Auden and been carried into the current century, but its prevalence has, since at least the 1980s, been questioned by a variety of critical fields aiming to more deeply understand the relationship between geography and literature. One of the most prominent causes for such reassessment was the growing dissatisfaction with nationally exceptionalist modes of thinking that attempted to herd literary influence within national borders. Much of the work that responded to this problem emerged from the field of transatlanticism. Studies like Robert Weisbuch's *Atlantic Double-Cross* (1986) shift our attention away from the clear national boundaries of the land towards the sea in an attempt to discover how American literature had been influenced by its European ancestors and counterparts. This transatlantic turn was developed by critics like Paul Giles, whose study *Transatlantic Insurrections* (2001) acknowledges a more mutual trade of influence between the two continents, and more recently by critics such as Wai Chee Dimock, whose *Shades of the Planet* (2007) explores literature in a broader 'transnational' and global frame. The transnational turn has not yet supplanted a transoceanic method, with some scholars cautious of moving from an overly rigid national view of cultural influence to one which risks embracing reductive clichés about global culture in a move Graham Huggan pointedly calls 'globaloney'.<sup>5</sup>

This scepticism has strengthened the diversity of transoceanic studies, with a transpacific frame becoming increasingly popular. In his 2011 survey of the field, Steven G. Yao notes that this geographical frame has been under construction for nearly as long as the transatlantic, but has focused mainly on East Asian and American interactions.<sup>6</sup> Recently, there has been a surge of interest in mutual Australian and American cultural influences. In their 2010 edited collection *Reading Across the Pacific*, Robert Dixon and Nicholas Birns complained that 'The United States–Australian cultural relationship has often simply been assumed rather than theorised or empirically grounded', responding by examining 'the concrete interaction between the two nations'.<sup>7</sup> Paul Giles' extensive *Antipodean America* (2014)

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<sup>5</sup> Graham Huggan, *Australian Literature: Postcolonialism, Racism, Transnationalism* (Oxford: OUP, 2007), p. 10.

<sup>6</sup> Steven G. Yao, 'The Rising Tide of the Transpacific', *Literature Compass*, 8:3 (2011), 130–141.

<sup>7</sup> Robert Dixon and Nicholas Birns, 'Introduction', *Reading Across the Pacific: Australia—United States Cultural Histories*, ed. by Robert Dixon and Nicholas Birns (Sydney: Sydney University Press, 2010), pp. xiii–xxi (p. xvii).

attempted to further correct this through his central thesis that 'Australia has profoundly, if indirectly, helped to shape the direction of American literature, from the late eighteenth century, to the present.'<sup>8</sup> Although such studies have charted previously unacknowledged paths of literary influence and communion over different geographies, their transoceanic and transnational frameworks struggle to account for the effect of geography's physicality upon these literary networks.

One of the most influential and geographically focused works to emerge from the broader field of Atlantic Studies, which includes work deriving from the social sciences and history, is Paul Gilroy's *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (1993). In this seminal work, Gilroy proposes that 'cultural historians could take the Atlantic as one single, complex unit of analysis in their discussions of the modern world and use it to produce an explicitly transnational and intercultural perspective.'<sup>9</sup> Gilroy argues that appreciating the Atlantic as this 'unit' requires an engagement with the triangular trade and the culture it took on board, transported, and transformed. In pressing the importance of this engagement, Gilroy argues for both the material significance of oceanic trade and the power of the journey itself:

It should be emphasised that ships were the living means by which the points within the Atlantic world were joined. They were mobile elements that stood for the shifting spaces in between the fixed places that they created [ . . . ] Ships also refer us back to the middle passage, to the half-remembered micro-politics of the slave trade and its relationship to both industrialisation and modernisation. As it were, getting on board promises a means to reconceptualise the orthodox relationship between modernity and what passes for its prehistory.<sup>10</sup>

This engagement takes us beyond the cold economics of the Atlantic slave trade and toward its profound effect on Atlantic cultures. Despite this achievement, the study's engagement with the ocean is still limited by its focus on the human. The geographers David Lambert, Luciana Martins, and Miles Ogborn claim that 'Overemphasis on

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<sup>8</sup> Paul Giles, *Antipodean America: Australasia and the Constitution of U.S. Literature* (Oxford: OUP, 2014), p. 3.

<sup>9</sup> Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (London: Verso, 1999), p. 15.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 16–17.

human agency, especially in accounts of the Atlantic, makes for a curiously static and empty conception of the sea, in which it serves merely as a framework for historical investigations, rather than being something with a lively and energetic materiality of its own.<sup>11</sup> The most outspoken critic of this emphasis of the human on the Atlantic, Philip E. Steinberg, takes particular aim at Gilroy, complaining that 'venturing into Gilroy's Black Atlantic, one never gets wet.'<sup>12</sup> Steinberg's dry assessment of Gilroy's monumental work is indicative of a growing awareness that, despite all of its ambition and achievements, the study of transatlanticism, and of Atlantic Studies more broadly, has reduced the ocean to a watery highway for human communication and interaction.

To counteract this anthropocentrism and to offer a corrective to reliance on metaphor, Steinberg calls for a 'more systematic attempt to integrate geophysicality into our understanding of human activities in the sea'.<sup>13</sup> Like Blum, Steinberg does not 'deny the importance of either the human history of the ocean or the suggestive power of the maritime metaphor'.<sup>14</sup> Steinberg simply argues that 'in order to fully appreciate the ocean as a uniquely fluid and dynamic space we need to develop an epistemology that views the ocean as continually being reconstituted by a variety of elements: the non-human and the human, the biological and the geophysical, the historic and the contemporary'.<sup>15</sup> If the current focus of human agency upon the ocean requires deepening through engagements with the material geography of the sea, but at the same time the power of metaphor is not to be denied, how might critics reshape their engagement with physical geography in literary fiction? The answer to this question is largely blank, with Steinberg admitting that his is 'an ambitious agenda [...] [which] goes well beyond more established goals in the ocean-region studies community'.<sup>16</sup>

This is a question that emerges from the sea, but its implications reach beyond the watery part of the world, asking questions of the relationship between literature and geography more broadly. This thesis engages with this inquiry by considering

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<sup>11</sup> David Lambert, Luciana Martins and Miles Ogborn, 'Currents, Visions and Voyages: Historical Geographies of the Sea', *Journal of Historical Geography*, 32 (2006), 479–493 (p. 482).

<sup>12</sup> Philip E. Steinberg, 'Of Other Seas: Metaphors and Materialities in Maritime Regions', *Atlantic Studies*, 10:2 (2013), 156–169 (p. 158).

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 164.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 157.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 157.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 165.

how literary criticism might be directed by an engagement with geography which heeds Steinberg's call to look beyond the metaphorical in spaces where diverse historical, non-human, biological and geological presences and materials exert pressures that create vibrant geophysical environments. However, this thesis will not abandon metaphor. Instead, the calls of Steinberg and Blum encourage a more patient unravelling of the nuances and complications that lie in the gulf between geophysical reality and the metaphorical value of its literary representation. This encouragement reveals ways of reading literary geographies that are missed when we too eagerly convert them into metaphors and tropes without dwelling on their geophysical properties. It also reminds us of the inter-connected significance of material geographies to the study of literature, bringing back onto land what the ocean studies community has learnt at sea, appreciating that, as John Stilgoe writes, 'landscape smells of the sea.'<sup>17</sup>

The earthy critical framework most obviously significant to this enquiry is ecocriticism, being a well-known and established critical movement that grew from pioneering studies in the 1990s, most notably Lawrence Buell's *The Environmental Imagination* (1995). Despite its popularity, ecocriticism lacks a consistent rubric to work within. Buell describes the field as being more 'issue-driven than methodology-driven' having had no 'field-defining statement that was supplied for more methodologically-focused insurgencies.'<sup>18</sup> This adaptability has led to ecocriticism becoming a large and open marquee that attracts critics who might share no more than interests in 'ideas of nature, wilderness, natural science, and spatial environments.'<sup>19</sup> With such a broad embrace, this thesis could conceivably operate under the ecocritical canvas. Yet, my encounters with ecocritical studies have made me wary of the field's issue-driven nature and its tendency to be explicitly political.

Greg Gerrard describes ecocriticism as an 'avowedly political mode of analysis' in which 'ecocritics generally tie their analysis explicitly to a "green" moral and political agenda.'<sup>20</sup> Such an approach makes the field uninhabitable for those critics (and potentially authors) who are ecologically engaged, but might deny, question, or merely be ambivalent towards the broader politics of climate change.

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<sup>17</sup> John R. Stilgoe, *What is Landscape?* (London: The MIT Press, 2015), p. 1.

<sup>18</sup> Lawrence Buell, 'The Ecocritical insurgency', *New Literary History*, 30:3 (1990), 699–712 (p. 700).

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 699.

<sup>20</sup> Greg Gerrard, *Ecocriticism* (Routledge: London, 2012), p. 3.

Later chapters of this thesis also experience how such an avowedly political starting point can lead to readings where attempts to extract an explicitly “green” message from a text can smother its more nuanced, and thus more powerful, political implications.

Bertrand Westphal has argued that ecocriticism’s less politically tied counterpart is the field of geopoetics. Unlike the largely American field of ecocriticism, geopoetics has a clear lineage emerging from Europe, being founded by the Scottish poet and theorist Kenneth White. Westphal describes the field as offering ‘a hodgepodge of ideas, without the systematic theoretical framework it might have aspired to provide.’<sup>21</sup> One can see from the diversity of material of *Stravaig*, the Scottish Centre for Geopoetics online journal, that the movement is unconcerned with providing a theoretical framework for literary critics. Instead, what geopoetics promotes is a more personal and individual engagement between the human and geography, resulting in poetic and meditative, rather than critical or theoretical, responses to place. White establishes that geopoetics is primarily concerned with ‘the human being in the universe, the relationship between human being and the planet earth, presence in the world.’<sup>22</sup>

Between the political focus of ecocriticism and the more poetical and ontological inclinations of geopoetics, there is the emerging school of geocriticism. It is possible to see geocriticism as one of the many subsets or offspring of ecocriticism, but it also has its own distinct lineage that emerged, in part, from dissatisfaction with ecocriticism’s perceived lack of direct engagement with the spatial turn.<sup>23</sup> Founded in France by Westphal’s study *La Géocritique, Réel, Fiction, Espace* (2007), the field has begun to see growth internationally with the translation of Westphal’s book as *Geocriticism: Real and Fictional Spaces* (2011) being followed by works such as *Geocritical Explorations: Space, Place, and Mapping in Literary and Cultural Studies* (2011). One of the crucial attractions of geocriticism is the field’s endeavour to rescue the physicality of the relationship between geography and literature, with Robert Tally

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<sup>21</sup> Bertrand Westphal, ‘Foreword’, *Geocritical Explorations: Space, Place, and Mapping in Literary and Cultural Studies*, ed. by Robert T. Tally Jr. (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), pp. ix–xv (p. xi).

<sup>22</sup> Kenneth White, *The Wanderer and his Charts: Essays on Cultural Renewal* (Edinburgh: Polygon Books, 2004), p. 244.

<sup>23</sup> Westphal, p. xii.

Jr. claiming that 'Geocriticism explores, seeks, surveys, digs into, reads, and writes a place; it looks at, listens to, touches, smells, and tastes spaces.'<sup>24</sup>

As with any fledgling school of thought, the attractiveness of geocriticism's lofty ambition is paired with the lurching uncertainties of how to achieve them. Westphal has proposed that critics might reach this visceral appreciation of literary geography through 'a geo-centred rather than ego-centred approach; that is, the analysis focuses on global spatial representations rather than individual ones (a given traveller's, for example.)'<sup>25</sup> Eric Prieto questions such an approach, arguing that it would render illegitimate studies of places and geographies, such as Hardy's Wessex, that value the authorial transformation of places. Prieto proposes more flexible boundaries to accommodate a 'kind of metacritical endeavour, one that extends literary studies into the domain of the geographical referent in a way that transcends literature's aesthetic function and seeks to show how it can actually participate in and inflect the history of the places in question.'<sup>26</sup> The methods I develop in this thesis appreciate both ecocriticism's political engagement with space and the geopoetic exploration of broader ontological relationships with the world, but they will ultimately contribute to this developing and flexible geocritical framework.

One element in need of development for geocriticism to become a secure framework of literary analysis is the position of literary geography between the reader, the writer, and the text. Do we read literary geographies as emerging from the author who writes the physical world into their text, or from the reader who reads it out of the text and into the physical? Do we shift between author and reader as dominant creators of the literary geography, or ignore them completely to view literary geography as manifest objectively in the text? The answer to this question will alter our understanding of literary geographies, as both the reader and the writer function as separate prisms through which the world is reordered depending on their perspective, perception, and understanding. In arguing for a geo-centric rather than ego-centric approach, Westphal risks ignoring these transformations. Following such an approach could inadvertently lead to reading literary geography as textual

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<sup>24</sup> Robert T. Tally Jr., 'On Geocriticism', *Geocritical Explorations: Space, Place, and Mapping in Literary and Cultural Studies*, ed. by Robert T. Tally Jr. (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), pp. 1–9 (p. 2).

<sup>25</sup> Westphal, p. xv.

<sup>26</sup> Eric Prieto, 'Geocriticism, Geopolitics, Geophilosophy, and Beyond', *Geocritical Explorations: Space, Place, and Mapping in Literary and Cultural Studies*, ed. by Robert T. Tally Jr. (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), pp. 13–27 (p. 22).

replications of the real world, and to understanding any differences between the two as imperfections.

Sten Pultz Moslund reveals the potential pitfalls of such an approach when he argues that geocritics should explore how abstract ideas conjured by language connect with ‘an immediate, precultural sensory experience of the physicality of the thing-world.’<sup>27</sup> This is an attractive proposal explored in a provocative essay, but there are clearly flaws in such a formulation of the relationship between language and object. Of most concern is the implied devaluation of difference which is more fully revealed when Moslund writes: ‘In spite of the fact that our experiences of and thus our sensitivity to different climates and topographies differ widely, we all share fundamental sense memories of the elementals of the world that fill out all places.’<sup>28</sup> Surely these differences of perception, which Moslund implies are obstacles to be overcome, are instead one of the crucial opportunities for a sustained engagement with literary space? It is within these differences of reactions to spaces, by both author and reader, that literature reveals its potential value to geography. By presenting individual perspectives of the physical environment, literature reveals relationships between the human and geography that are as diverse and dynamic as the geophysical environments themselves.

## Fictional Space

As both fields require a re-negotiation of the relationship between human, geography, and text, geocriticism’s struggle with the place of the author and reader can both strengthen and be strengthened by Ocean Studies’ call for a geophysical engagement that exceeds metaphor. To achieve these two aims we can learn from the troubled, but still geographically significant, concept of the heterotopia.

Michael Foucault defined heterotopias as: ‘counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within

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<sup>27</sup> Sten Pultz Moslund, ‘The Presencing of Place in Literature: Toward an Embodied Topopoetic Mode of Reading’, *Geocritical Explorations: Space, Place, and Mapping in Literary and Cultural Studies*, ed. by Robert T. Tally Jr. (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), pp. 29–43 (p. 33).

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 41.

the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted.<sup>29</sup> Kevin Hetherington offers the refined definition of heterotopia as: 'a place of alternate ordering'.<sup>30</sup> The vagueness and unfinished nature of Foucault's theory has led to it being in widespread but cautious circulation, being infinitely adaptable to different subjects and fields of knowledge. Despite a consistent suspicion surrounding its use, the concept has remained in productive circulation within geography. This is particularly true for geography of the ocean, being a space that drifts into Foucault's study through his vague observation that, as 'a place without a place' in 'the infinity of the sea', the ship is 'the heterotopia par excellence'.<sup>31</sup> Geographers have expanded this claim, considering the sea itself 'a distinct marine heterotopia, a space of alternate ordering'.<sup>32</sup> Steinberg sees the ocean as a space of alternate ordering when viewed from a land-based capitalist gaze, with the ocean's liquid space enabling movement of capital while also hindering attempts to construct upon its surface. This makes the ocean a heterotopia because it is a space so crucial and different to the land that everything must be done differently around, over, and through it. For all its faults and vagaries, the heterotopia gives the literary critic a basic blueprint of how to engage with literary geography in a way that both satisfies the geographer, and solidifies geocriticism's unsettled relationship with the space between author, reader and text.

The potential for engaging with the heterotopia emerges if we begin to see literature, specifically prose fiction, as a heterotopic space. Andrew Thacker observes that in Foucault's original writing on heterotopia, *The Order of Things*, he used the term 'to describe a form of writing that undermines the idea of such an ordering of knowledge'.<sup>33</sup> Thacker goes on to suggest that there are specifically heterotopic works and spaces within writing. However, is not all fictional writing heterotopic? Whether it is absurdist or realist, writing is an author's alternate ordering of things, creating or presenting spaces for the purpose of storytelling. These places may be

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<sup>29</sup> Michael Foucault, 'Of Other Spaces', trans. by Jay Miskowiec, *Diacritics*, 16:1 (1986), 22–27 (p. 24).

<sup>30</sup> Kevin Hetherington, *The Badlands of Modernity: Heterotopias and Social Ordering* (London: Routledge, 1997), p. 67.

<sup>31</sup> Foucault, p. 27.

<sup>32</sup> Philip Steinberg, *The Social Construction of the Ocean* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 193.

<sup>33</sup> Andrew Thacker, *Moving Through Modernity: Space and Geography in Modernism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), p. 27.

based upon or inspired by places we recognise, but they are not real and they are not physically accessible to their readers. Instead, they must be seen by reading and accessed through the imagination. This inaccessibility would appear to be a major sticking point in classifying literary spaces as heterotopias, as Foucault clearly states that heterotopias are 'real places—places that do exist.'<sup>34</sup> Here, we begin to realise the complications of heterotopia as a concept because literature is also clearly not a utopia or a mirror, Foucault's two other categories of space that are linked to all other spaces.

Despite the well-known limits and problems of the heterotopia, Thacker refines the theory to its essential parts and values it as: 'a concept which connects material and metaphorical spaces in the literary text in new and illuminating ways showing how the formal practices and spatial form of the modernist text should be read in conjunction with a wider understanding of the historical geography of modernity.'<sup>35</sup> Although focused on modernism, Thacker's method shows the value of the heterotopia to literary studies more generally by offering a framework in which to consider a work of fiction as an exceptional re-ordering of the world that remains connected to its wider geographical and temporal contexts.

Thacker's refined approach is particularly valuable to any field, such as geocriticism, which is uncertain of how to account for the reader or writer's role in transforming text into literary geography. In accepting that a literary depiction of a space is a transformation out of reality, we are able to explore how geographies and spaces have fluid, unfixed, and subjective meanings to writers and readers that emerge from differences of personal experience. Literary works may share similar elements with each other, but the unique construction, and even reception, of these heterotopias communicates the ways a space like the ocean is perceived differently by various authors and their readers. This does not mean that literature only offers individual vignettes. It also gives us the opportunity to build almost an heterotopography of geographies and their shifting associations and meanings. To be satisfied with these outcomes, however, risks merely formalising literary criticism's established explorations of landscape's symbolic and metaphorical tropes.

A full apprehension of heterotopia enables the literary critic to remain alert to the fluidity of various geographies' metaphorical and symbolic associations while

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<sup>34</sup> Foucault, p. 24.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p. 29.

remaining firmly anchored to real-world geography. The reordering process of fiction can create ranges of alterations, from minor changes (names, dates, places) to the invention of new worlds and dimensions, only because we understand them as different in reference to our physical world. Even where literature might totally alter a space as we recognise it, these differences tell us something about our apprehension of the unaltered world. If we allow an anchor drop from our readings of altered literary geographies, and hold to an acute awareness of geophysical reality, we stand to gain a better understanding of both the literature in which we are reading the geography, and the geography that is shaping the literature.

Having seen from a host of Atlantic geographers the desire for a renewed attention to geophysicality, and attempting to bring this desire back ashore to address literary criticism's want for such attentiveness, the question becomes *how* might such an engagement look? I have already proposed looking at literary geography as a heterotopic refraction tethered to geophysical reality, but a more refined methodology is required to read the messages trilling between these two worlds.

Westphal writes that any study operating in a geocritical framework must involve a level of interdisciplinarity that 'produces true interactions among disciplines like literary studies, geography, urbanism and architecture, with pathways to sociology and anthropology.'<sup>36</sup> Such calls are more easily and frequently heard than they are answered. The size and rapid development of single fields, such as oceanography, leaves one to question how the study of literature might catch up with scientific understanding, let alone work with it. Lambert et al. do not see this intimidating specificity and pace of development within oceanography as an insurmountable obstacle for a non-scientific critic:

A lack of oceanographic unity does not mean that the more-than-human worlds of the sea can be ignored, nor has it in the past. For example, the enduring power of conceptions of the North Atlantic as a circular system derives from the flow of ocean currents. This circulatory logic finds most obvious expression in the notion of a 'triangular trade' linking Europe, Africa and the Americas—the 'great sailing circle' of ships 'corresponded well with the cosmic clockwise gyro of winds and

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<sup>36</sup> Westphal, p. xiv.

currents circling the usually calm waters of the Sargasso Sea—a notion which persists despite revisionist work recognising the complexity and bilaterality of shipping patterns.<sup>37</sup>

Steinberg also hints that a research scientist's knowledge of the current developments is not a pre-requisite to answer his call, and likewise emphasises the importance of having a basic understanding, albeit one more developed than Lambert's, of dynamics and processes like the ocean's movements:

Rather, in a more fundamental way, the ocean is a space of circulation because it is constituted through its very geophysical mobility. As in Lagrangian fluid dynamics, movement is not something that happens between places, connecting discrete points on a “rim.” Rather, movement emerges as the very essence of the ocean region, including the aqueous mass at its centre. From this perspective, the ocean becomes the object of our focus not because it is a space that *facilitates* movement—the space across which things move—but because it is a space that is *constituted by* and *constitutive of* movement.<sup>38</sup>

This emphasis on understanding the ocean as a space of constant movement complements several land-based geographical frameworks which all intend to decentre the human and appreciate the agency of materialism. Here, Bruno Latour's work on actor network theory, Deleuze and Guattari's explorations of assemblage theory, and Jane Bennett's investigations of vibrant materialism, could all provide complementary frameworks for carrying this investigation into the study of literature.<sup>39</sup> However, because this thesis attempts to complicate rather than escape geography's relationship with metaphor, and willingly returns to the human without necessarily prioritising their presence, it will work from a different framework. Instead, the thesis takes inspiration from Tim Ingold, whose writing provides the

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<sup>37</sup> Lambert et al., p. 482.

<sup>38</sup> Steinberg, ‘Of Other Seas’, p. 165.

<sup>39</sup> Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network Theory* (Oxford: OUP, 2005); Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (London: Continuum, 2004); Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010).

most attractive and complementary model for how literary critics might carry the lessons of Ocean Studies to develop an increased sensitivity to their geophysical environments.

In his essay 'Earth, Sky, Wind and Weather', Ingold criticises what he sees as an overwhelming desire of writers and critics of many disciplines (mainly, in this case, ethnography) to view the physical world as 'furnishings':

The hill is not an object on the earth's surface but a formation of that surface, which can appear as an object only through its artificial excision from the landscape of which it is an integral part. And the fire is not an object but a manifestation of the process of combustion. Turning to the sky: stars, whatever their astronomical significance, are perceived not as objects but as points of light, and sunsets as the momentary glow of the sky as the sun vanishes beneath the horizon. Nor are clouds objects. Each is rather an incoherent, vaporous tumescence that swells and is carried along in the currents of the medium. To observe the clouds is not to view the furniture of the sky but to catch a fleeting glimpse of a sky-in-formation, never the same from one moment to the next.<sup>40</sup>

Ingold's description of the world in constant formation reveals the same frustration that Steinberg and others have with our conceptions of the ocean: that we constantly perceive the world to be furnished for our own experience. Ingold's proposal to counteract this view by paying attention to the underlying causes, dynamics and interactions which create, sustain and evolve these perceived furnishings also reflects Steinberg's desire that those working with the ocean remain alert to its underlying movements and dynamics. This shared objective further indicates the potential for Ingold's work to help bring the lessons and concerns of ocean studies back inland.

Ingold floats the idea that the perception of the world as 'furnished' underlies so much critical work across disciplines because its writers are used to thinking and writing indoors:

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<sup>40</sup> Tim Ingold, 'Earth, Sky, Wind, and Weather', *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 13 (2007), 19–38 (p. 28).

I have suggested that because we generally think and write indoors, the world we describe in our writing is one that has been imaginatively remodelled as if it were already set up within an enclosed, interior space. In this as if world, populated only by people and objects, those fluxes of the medium that we experience as wind and rain, sunshine and mist, frost and snow, and so on, are simply inconceivable. This, I believe, accounts for their absence from practically all discussions concerning the relations between human beings and the material world.<sup>41</sup>

It is easy to level such an accusation at some literary criticism (though we can assume, and must hope, that critics are doing more in their free time than wandering around in urban environments looking at the floor) but it certainly could not be directed toward much of the literature they work with. Although they are usually not scientists or geographers, the writer or poet is popularly and romantically envisioned as a Thoreauvian figure exposed to the elements getting muddy and wet as their experiences are written onto the page. Yet, as we have seen in the case of transatlanticism and even ecocriticism, the physicality of this geographical inspiration and experience is often lost in the critical analysis of the writing. If Ingold is correct in believing that critics are seeing the *real* world as furnished, then this loss is unsurprising as they are surely even more likely to view the reordered world of literature as furnished by its author.

Dismantling this misconception and scouting this methodology both enables and is strengthened by the central concern of this thesis, a comparative analysis of Tim Winton and Cormac McCarthy, two landmark antipodal novelists whose acute sensitivity to place enables geography to clearly impose itself within their novels as dynamic environments rather than static furnishings.

### **Tim Winton and Cormac McCarthy**

Winton and McCarthy are writers who have a vast influence on the literary landscape of their nations. Their works receive outpourings of critical praise not just

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p. 32.

from within their own nations, but from across the globe. McCarthy has won the Pulitzer Prize, is frequently mentioned as a contender for the Nobel Prize for literature, and was heralded by Harold Bloom as one of the greatest living American writers.<sup>42</sup> Despite writing from the less globally-scrutinized literary marketplace of Australia, Winton has received similar levels of praise, having been nominated for the Man Booker twice, and won the Miles Franklin prize four times. This is more than any other previous winner, a list that includes Patrick White and Peter Carey. The wide-ranging and deep level of popular and critical admiration has seen their work become firmly embedded in the canon. McCarthy's *Blood Meridian* (1985) was featured in *Time*'s list of 100 greatest novels since 1923, and Winton's *Cloudstreet* (1991) was twice voted as the greatest Australian novel by the Australian Society of Authors polls of its members and the public.<sup>43</sup> Much of this praise is directed at their ability to portray the human and physical geography of the environments from which they write. McCarthy's violent prose is most frequently and iconically set in the unforgiving and harsh landscape of the south-western United States, with many of his novels, and their film adaptations, adopting its vast deserts and plains as an unavoidable central character. Winton's fiction is also inextricably bound to Western Australia, with its rugged coastline providing a crucial central role.

Considering their similar national stature, and their shared association with the western regions of their nations, it is surprising that there has been no examination of the two writers together. Until now, connections between the two have been acknowledged in circuitous ways, including the marketing of other novels, such as Favel Parrett's *Past the Shallows* (2011), which evoked comparisons with both writers in its blurb.<sup>44</sup> It becomes even more surprising that no formal connection has been explored when we consider that both writers share a history of publication with Picador, with both of their early successes, Winton's *Cloudstreet* and McCarthy's *All the Pretty Horses* (1992), being overseen in their UK purchase and publication by Peter Straus. Just a little digging quickly uncovers that McCarthy was an early

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<sup>42</sup> Leonard Price, 'Harold Bloom on *Blood Meridian*', *The A.V Club* (15 June 2009) <<http://tinyurl.com/myv3le6>> [Accessed 21 July 2016].

<sup>43</sup> Richard Lacayo and Lev Grossman, 'All-TIME 100 Novels', *Time* (06 January 2010) <[goo.gl/4gVPns](http://goo.gl/4gVPns)> [accessed September 03/09/2016]; Malcolm Knox, 'Readers' poll puts Winton on cloud nine', *Sydney Morning Herald* (26 November 2003) <[goo.gl/o5hkyK](http://goo.gl/o5hkyK)> [Accessed 03 September 2016].

<sup>44</sup> Favel Parrett, *Past the Shallows* (London: John Murray, 2012).

influence on Winton, who admired his work before either had achieved popular acclaim, and with whom he was particularly proud to eventually share a publisher.<sup>45</sup> Winton even has an original manuscript of *All the Pretty Horses* that had been accidentally left at his home after a visit from Straus. Unaware of its future value and significance, the Winton household absorbed the manuscript, which now exists as an unpublished collaboration between McCarthy and Winton's children, who saw that the novel might be improved by their illustrations.<sup>46</sup>

As well as evading sustained comparison, both writers have eluded being firmly positioned within a transpacific frame. It was only in 2013 that the Cormac McCarthy Society began to explore McCarthy's Pacific currents when their annual conference was hosted in Sydney. Here, Rick Wallach spoke for the first time about McCarthy's striking affinities with Patrick White.<sup>47</sup> Similarly, despite Winton's openness about the influence of American writers and the influence of their local diction upon his work, critics are yet to interrogate the strength and implications of this relationship.<sup>48</sup> Even those directly American-Australian studies in the field of transpacific studies, such as Giles's exhaustive *Antipodean America*, pay no attention to either writer.

Although a transpacific frame could be a rewarding way of comparing Winton and McCarthy's work, this thesis will explore the various hydrological, tectonic, geological and anthropogenic material influences that connect and differentiate their experience of geography beyond the Pacific. By reading the effect of these environments and geographies within their novels, we might draw more nuanced maps of relationships between writers of two nations separated and joined by a host of materialities beyond the Pacific.

The potential for this more integrated approach to their literary geographies is felt in the few moments when both writers speak directly about their works and processes. In an early interview with *The New York Times*, McCarthy not only illustrated his fascination for natural history and science, but also claimed that he 'doesn't write about places he hasn't visited' and has made 'dozens of [...] scouting

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<sup>45</sup> Personal correspondence.

<sup>46</sup> Personal correspondence.

<sup>47</sup> Cormac McCarthy Society 'Borders and Landscapes' conference 23-25 July 2014 at the University of Western Sydney.

<sup>48</sup> Aida Edemariam, 'Waiting for the New Wave', *The Guardian* (28 June 2008) <<https://goo.gl/U9MXzm>> [Accessed 21 July 2016].

forays to Texas, New Mexico, Arizona and across the Rio Grande into Chihuahua, Sonora and Coahuila.<sup>49</sup> McCarthy believes that this attention to detail, which is informed by his eclectic intellectual interests and his preference for socialising with the scientific rather than literary community, gives his work the ability to 'encompass all the various disciplines and interests of humanity'.<sup>50</sup>

Winton speaks less boldly, but just as passionately, explaining: 'I write from the eco-system up.'<sup>51</sup> He emphasises the importance of knowing the intricate details of these spaces and their hidden operations, believing that 'if place and landscape are characters and not simply backdrop, it really helps to understand some of the forces at work beneath the surface, to really know rather than to merely exploit that character'.<sup>52</sup> In this shared emphasis that geography is not a mere furnishing but an intimately drawn and dynamic presence, both writers indicate that we can read geography out of their fiction with equal attention.

Critics of McCarthy and Winton do not often engage with these landscapes as fully as the authors themselves. The lack of sustained geographical criticism of Winton's work is unsurprising considering the bemusing lack of critical attention given to an author of his standing.<sup>53</sup> McCarthy's works, however, entertain a large party of critics, and there is even a society devoted to his writing. Although these scholars draw fascinating and varied readings from attention to McCarthy's landscapes, the physical geography underpinning McCarthy's vistas are rarely unravelled with the same delicacy with which he constructs them. Critics seem to favour stepping back from the detail of the literary geographies, surveying them for their relationship to the philosophical channels that run through the novels' prose. Even more explicitly place-based studies of McCarthy's work tend to prioritise the metaphorical value of place, struggling to know how to work literally with

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<sup>49</sup> Richard B. Woodward, 'Cormac McCarthy's Venomous Fiction', *The New York Times* (19 April 1992), <<https://goo.gl/eaIwaH>> [Accessed 21 July 2016].

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>51</sup> Tim Winton, 'The Island Seen and Felt: Some Thoughts About Landscape', talk delivered at the Royal Academy (15 November 2013).

<sup>52</sup> Personal Correspondence.

<sup>53</sup> To date, there are only three significant book-length publications devoted to studying Winton's work. Two biographically inflected monographs: Richard Rossiter's *Reading Tim Winton* (Sydney NSW: Angus and Robertson 1993) and Salhia Ben-Messahel's *Mind the Country: Tim Winton's Fiction* (Crawley, WA: University of Western Australia Press, 2006), and only one edited collection, Lyn McCredden and Natahaneal O'Reilly's *Tim Winton: Critical Essays* (Crawley, WA: University of Western Australia Press, 2014).

geographical particularities. Dianne Luce reveals this struggle in *Reading the World: Cormac McCarthy's Tennessee Period* (2009) through her argument that 'realistic designation of place is essential in most of McCarthy's work, functioning to evoke a world of cultural realities that impinge on his characters' lives and choices.'<sup>54</sup> Phrases like 'designation of place' and proposals that the language of McCarthy's spaces are 'functioning to evoke cultural realities' indicate that McCarthy is the furnisher of literary spaces which function primarily as symbolic references to broader cultural and philosophical ideas. This underlying belief leads Luce to solidify her study's emphasis on the metaphorical value of geography, emphasising that 'McCarthy's settings are typically metaphorical as well, reflecting the metaphysical positioning of his characters.'<sup>55</sup> This points the way for a study that focuses on reading the literary space as furnished by McCarthy to express his interests in 'particular philosophical mindsets and systems of metaphors.'<sup>56</sup> Following such paths work to further document and detail McCarthy's established and significant philosophical concerns, but exploring both writers' fiction by feeling the dynamism of their geographies grants us new perspectives on their novels, provoking and broadening our traditional understanding of their fiction.<sup>57</sup>

The tendency of critics to quickly reach for metaphor and symbol when exploring both writers' literary geographies is partly due to their literary locations; the coast of Winton's works, and the mountains and deserts of McCarthy's, contain an attractive wealth of biblical and symbolic substance. Where McCarthy's merciless deserts are praised for 'channelling the Old Testament' via the rumbling tones of the King James Bible, Winton's coast invokes a New Testament interest in the potential for miraculous grace.<sup>58</sup> These biblical sensibilities are philosophical and theological, but they are also geographical. The power of the sea and desert landscapes occupies much of the Bible, with their creation being the subject of the first chapter of Genesis before becoming crucial sites of trials and punishments, grace and forgiveness. This history has further fuelled their curiously harmonic and dissonant associations,

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<sup>54</sup> Dianne C. Luce, *Reading the World: Cormac McCarthy's Tennessee Period* (Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 2009), p. viii.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Another crucial space-focused study which follows a similar path to Luce, is Georg Guillemin's *The Pastoral Vision of Cormac McCarthy* (Texas A & M University Press, 2004).

<sup>58</sup> Tim Adams, 'Cormac McCarthy: America's Great Poetic Visionary', *The Guardian* (20 December 2009) <goo.gl/nx3dS3> [Accessed 04 July 2016].

building them as crucial sites in the rigidly symbolic and metaphorical approach to literary geography. This relationship is one of the most intriguing subjects of Auden's *Enchafèd Flood*, in which he considers the lasting metaphorical attractiveness of the two geographies:

- 1) Both are the wilderness, i.e., the place where there is no community, just or unjust, and no historical change for better or for worse.'[. . .] 2) Therefore the individual in either is free from both the evils or the responsibilities of communal life. Thus Byron writes of the ocean: Man marks the earth with ruin—his control [/] stops with the shore.'[. . .] 3) But precisely because they are free places, they are also lonely places of alienation, and the individual who finds himself there, whether by choice or fate, must from time to time, rightly or wrongly, be visited by desperate longings by home and company.<sup>59</sup>

Such issues of justice, freedom, control, isolation, alienation, and history are undoubtedly valuable presences in literary depictions of these landscapes. But, such rich symbolic associations mean that we are easily tempted down well-trod paths guided by the metaphorical and symbolic tradition of Auden rather than patiently following Steinberg or Ingold's more difficult request to navigate these spaces in appreciation of them as dynamic environments. The potential fruitfulness of taking this more sustained geographical approach to literature is even apparent in one of the focal writers of Auden's study, Herman Melville, whose work is often weighted by a keen awareness of both the scientific and symbolic values of his literary spaces and subjects.

Melville is one author whose relationship with science and geography has received considerable attention, with marine biologist Harold J. Morowitz asking literary critics why 'Melville felt it necessary to cram the middle third of his great novel with a virtual textbook of cetacean biology.'<sup>60</sup> Philip Hoare answers that it fits within the work as a crucial part of Melville's novel, describing the book as a 'laboratory of literature, created in an age before art and science became strictly demarcated.'<sup>61</sup> Hoare demonstrates that this laboratory of scientific learning informs

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<sup>59</sup> Auden, pp. 25–26.

<sup>60</sup> Harold J. Morowitz, 'Herman Melville, Marine Biologist', *Biological Bulletin* 220:2 (2011), 83–85 (p. 85).

<sup>61</sup> Philip Hoare, 'Cetology: How Science Inspired *Moby Dick*', *Nature*, 493 (2013), 160–162 (p. 160).

Melville's deployment of symbol and metaphor, hypothesising that Darwin's 'recorded observation of marine iguanas as "imps of darkness" seemed to set the tone for Melville's metaphoric view of the Galapagos, which he saw as "five-and-twenty heaps of cinders ... In no world but a fallen one could such lands exist."<sup>62</sup> Many of the questions and observations regarding Melville's ties to science address *Moby Dick* (1851), where slabs of footnotes and asides stand testament to his obsession with oceanography and cetology. But it is in his lesser-known works, free of references and technical digressions, that the intricate effects of this knowledge are revealed.

In *John Marr and Other Sailors* (1888) the eponymous sailor surveys the deserted plains of his later years, a land that holds his recently deceased wife and child, and watches it transform into the sea of his past:

Such a double exodus of man and beast left the plain a desert, green or blossoming indeed, but almost as forsaken as the Siberian Obi. Save the prairie-hen, sometimes startled from its lurking-place in the rank grass; and, in their migratory season, pigeons, high overhead on the wing, in dense multitudes eclipsing the day like a passing storm-cloud; save these—there being no wide woods with their underwood—birds were strangely few.

Blank stillness would for hours remain unbroken on this prairie. "It is the bed of a dried-up sea," said the companionless sailor—no geologist—to himself, musing at twilight upon the fixed undulations of that immense alluvial expanse bounded only by the horizon, and missing there the stir that, to alert eyes and ears, animates at all times the apparent solitudes of the deep.

But a scene quite at variance with one's antecedents may yet prove suggestive of them. Hooped round by a level rim, the prairie' was to John Marr a reminder of the ocean.<sup>63</sup>

This perspective renders Melville and Marr aware of their own place within a lively geophysical world; his literature is a reordering of the world through its addition of people and situations to a landscape of his own unique configuration, but our attention is drawn to the intricacy of the ecology. The prose conjures a world of ecological delicacy, with the effects of a natural exodus being drawn with the pained

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Herman Melville, 'John Marr', *The Poems of Herman Melville*, ed. by Douglas Robillard (London: Kent State University Press, 2000), p. 265.

awareness of a nineteenth-century George Monbiot clamouring for rewilding. This element of Melville's work is not spoken about by Auden, and is often paid less attention by critics than his obvious fondness for religious symbolism and rich metaphors.

Winton and McCarthy also blend sea and desert spaces in ways that both tempt metaphorical engagement and reveal their ecological entanglement. One moment in McCarthy's *The Crossing* (1994) reads like McCarthy channelling Melville. Billy Parnham echoes Marr's vision of the desert as the bed of a dried-up sea, a geological view that gives him access to the past:

He sat in the sun and looked out over the country to the east, the broad barranca of the bavispe and the ensuing Carretas Plain that was once a seafloor and the small pieced fields and the new corn greening in the old lands of the Chichimeca where the priests had passed and soldiers passed and the missions fallen into mud and the ranges of mountains beyond the plain range on the range in pales of blue where the terrain lay clawed open north and south, canyon and range, sierra and barranca, all of it waiting like a dream for the world to come to be, world to pass.<sup>64</sup>

In his memoir *Land's Edge* (1993), Winton also, more explicitly than in his fiction, considers the blurred boundaries between the sea and the desert of his own Australian landscape and the interconnectedness of its life and systems:

Nowhere else on the continent is the sense of being trapped between the sea and desert so strong as in Western Australia. In many places along this vast and lonely coastline, the beach is the only margin between them. From the sea you look directly upon red desert and from the wilderness there is a steely shimmer of the Indian Ocean. There are roos on the beach and shells out on the plain. [...] I don't believe there's anything cosmic or divine or morally superior about whales or dolphins or sharks or trees, but I do think that everything that lives is holy and somehow integrated; and on cloudy days I suspect that these extraordinary phenomena, and the hundreds of tiny, modest versions no one hears about, are an ocean, an earth, a Creator, something

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<sup>64</sup> Cormac McCarthy, *The Crossing* (London: Picador, 1994), p. 135.

shaking us by the collar, demanding our attention, our fear, our vigilance, our respect, our help.<sup>65</sup>

These extracts are single examples of how Winton and McCarthy's writing is informed by sensitivity to the history, geology, and ecologies of their geographies. As with Melville's work, this is an awareness that has been gained without an academic or strictly scientific background but through experience, observation, and accessible science. It is the writer's intimate inhabiting of these spaces as well as a non-professional awareness of and engagement with science that enables their literary geographies to resist any reading of them as mere furnishings. It is also this experiential and researched engagement with geography that can help critics read this awareness out.

Developing a method to engage with literary geographies by reading them as heterotopic transformations rooted in geophysical reality broadens our access to the significance of literary geographies and refines our appreciation of their metaphorical value. This approach provides perspectives that can challenge individual readings of novels, and even an author's oeuvre, as well as provide a more nuanced context for comparative analysis. But it is not limited to such author-based revision, it also holds the potential to clarify and question our understanding of broader critical concerns, specifically literary inheritance and epochs.

## The Study

This exploration brings the sea immediately inland by focusing on the fluvial cycle. Contextualizing the river as a crucial but troubled site of American literature and identity through its role in defining the USA in opposition to the Old World, I frame the river as a site of mixed and difficult metaphors. The First chapter considers the presence of this metaphorical and symbolic power in two works by the USA's most significant writers, Mark Twain and Herman Melville. In Twain's *Huckleberry Finn* (1884) and Melville's poem 'John Marr' (1888), the river is more than symbol but a dynamic fluvial cycle that provides a structure for their texts to investigate personal

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<sup>65</sup> Tim Winton, *Land's Edge: A Coastal Memoir* (London: Picador, 2012), pp. 42–46.

and ontological themes while playfully disrupting the river's symbolic potential. Winton's *Breath* (2008) and McCarthy's *Blood Meridian* (1985) continue in this tradition, drawing from the river to both provoke and deny metaphorical translations of their narratives. At the same time, they deepen the personal, ontological and ecological concerns raised by Twain and Melville.

The second chapter considers how, while both authors value their nations' difference to Europe and its cultural traditions, they are also wary of a national exceptionalism that would too-readily forget the troubled narratives buried in their lands. Interested in their European context of composition and setting, the chapter focuses on two of their strangest and least discussed novels, Winton's *The Riders* (1994) and McCarthy's *Outer Dark* (1968). Both works centre on protagonists negotiating unfamiliar paths and routes in a spirit of dislocation and bewilderment as they attempt to reunite and rebuild their families. Aided by geographers and ethnographers interested in mobility, the chapter follows the paths and lines left and taken by the narratives, arguing that they indicate an attempt to navigate through difficult spatial and temporal contexts to find their own understanding of home. Exploring the paths' ability to traverse the temporal and the spatial leads us to find that they are imbued with the significance of narrative lines, drawing from European literary traditions and marrying them with an awareness of the land that reverberates with native and aboriginal concepts of navigation and storytelling. The process of unravelling this unacknowledged thread slowly reveals how both novels weave a narrative that utilizes the diverse colonial and aboriginal histories and understandings of the land to create works that might do justice to their nations' troubled histories.

Chapter three moves away from national concerns to consider the controversial gender politics of Winton and McCarthy's fiction, specifically the accusations that their works display an unsettling undercurrent of misogyny. By focusing on *Dirt Music* (2001) and *No Country for Old Men* (2005), I propose that masculinity is intimately informed by the materiality of sand. This relationship connects both novels to a tradition of sandy literature concerned with masculinity, most significantly the troubled and troubling men of the Western. By looking at the forces behind this tradition and sand's geological creation, it becomes clear that both novels are interested in masculinity's associations with violence. The chapter considers damaged male characters by reading their experience through the scientific and

biographical works of Ralph Bagnold, a man whose intimate experience of sand and deserts was forged as both soldier and scientist. Bagnold's biographical and scientific writings help us uncover the buried intricacies of both novels' relationship with gender, revealing a concern with stifling expectations of gender norms and stereotypes. In attempting to escape these concerns, both Winton and McCarthy bring the feminine into sandy narratives and spaces typically associated with masculinity. Both novels then appear to glimpse how both the materiality and long cultural tradition of sand, and its relationship with masculinity, may be brought into relief by an acceptance of the feminine.

The final chapter considers how Winton and McCarthy's interest in the potential for the past to inform the future affects how we place their works in modernist/postmodern/post-postmodern epochs. It considers how both of their most recent novels, Winton's *Eyrie* (2013) and McCarthy's *The Road* (2005), are shaped by central concrete surroundings. Concrete's power as a symbol of modernity and as a crucial material in defining twentieth and twenty-first-century space, enables the urban environments of both novels to pose urgent questions of how we define our neighbour in a post-9/11 environment of suspicion. By examining this situation, both novels push at the potential of literature to move beyond a postmodern sense of detached irony and insincerity, and solidify into something that may be foundational in developing our understanding and appreciation of our neighbours.

By focusing on particular materials, these chapters are able to open with investigations of how materiality affects our reading of these works, but also consider how the physical world is narrativised through the process of literary fiction. By appreciating these material and literary exchanges, the thesis expands our understanding of individual works by Winton and McCarthy, deepens our understanding of their oeuvres, and establishes the significance of their literary relationship. In turn, these achievements can help bring back to shore what has been asked and learnt within the Ocean Studies community and strengthen an emerging geocritical framework.

## Rivers: Confluence and Influence

Soon we'll reach the silver river,  
 Soon our pilgrimage will cease;  
 Soon our happy hearts will quiver  
 With the melody of peace.

Yes, we'll gather at the river,  
 The beautiful, the beautiful river;  
 Gather with the saints at the river  
 That flows by the throne of God.

‘Shall We Gather at the River?’ 1864

It is hard to conceive of a geographical feature with greater metaphoric power than the river. The wealth of its symbolic value to the American literary tradition from which both McCarthy and Winton have drawn is expressed in the hymn ‘Shall We Gather at the River?’ Composed in 1864, the hymn is now perhaps more familiar to the regular congregation of the cinema than that of the church, having become a crucial song in many of John Ford’s greatest movies. For the singing settlers on screen, the flowing river is a metaphor for the Promised Land on earth and in heaven: a site of earthly freedom from persecution and heavenly grace. By the river, a community can gather and wash away the transgressions of God’s law to be granted eternity in heaven. For the cinemagoer, Ford’s use of the song often disrupts these intended metaphors. In one of his most significant movies, *The Searchers* (1956), the hymn is sung at the funeral of a family who have been slaughtered and kidnapped by Comanche warriors, and precedes the combat at a river between the Comanche and the Texas Ranger rescue party.<sup>1</sup> This bloodier association of the river is adopted

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<sup>1</sup> *The Searchers*, dir. By John Ford (Warner Brothers, 1956).

in McCarthy's *Blood Meridian* (1985) where a Mennonite warns the Glanton Gang that if they cross the Rio Grande into Mexico: 'Ye carry war of a madman's making into a foreign land. Ye'll wake more than the dogs.'<sup>2</sup> Both epic stories draw our attention to the instability of the river as metaphor, loading its waters with mixed and often contradictory meaning. It is a site of peace and war, and of transition between sin to grace and civilisation to barbarity.

The river, and all the diverse and problematic metaphorical associations that flow through it, is not only a major feature of American literature, but arguably its source. Not the Rio Grande that McCarthy's Westerns so frequently cross—this would be to share a national source with another nation—but the wholly American Mississippi of Mark Twain, of whom William Faulkner claimed: he is 'the first truly American writer, and all of us since are his heirs.'<sup>3</sup> With the Mississippi flowing through Twain's premier novel, *Huckleberry Finn* (1884), the river and its metaphorical instability is at the very source of 'truly American' literature. Huck and Jim's quest for freedom upon the Mississippi encounters a diverse and difficult arrangement of riverine metaphors that troubles America to this day.

Leo Marx's assessment of *Huckleberry Finn* illustrates the difficulty of building a rigid metaphorical reading on this symbolically loaded but fluid geography. Marx argues that the river is a symbol of freedom and the raft a symbol of the precariousness of attaining such freedom.<sup>4</sup> This metaphorical framework begins to look unsteady when Marx argues that 'the geography of the novel, the raft's powerlessness, the goodness and vulnerability of Huck and Jim' contribute to a 'logic of metaphor' that leads the reader to a conclusion at odds with the novel's ending.<sup>5</sup> Marx claims that, to be metaphorically coherent the novel should not end with Jim being freed, but with the conclusion that their quest for freedom 'cannot succeed.'<sup>6</sup> Marx's criticism lays a line of questioning that continues to be followed by many who propose that the final fifth of the novel, in which Huck follows Tom Sawyer in delaying Jim's freedom to prolong their own sense of adventure, becomes a grim

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<sup>2</sup> Cormac McCarthy, *Blood Meridian* (London: Picador, 1990), p. 40 (All subsequent references are from this edition).

<sup>3</sup> William Faulkner, *Faulkner at Nagano* (Tokyo: Kenkyusha Press, 1957), p. 88.

<sup>4</sup> Leo Marx, 'Mr. Elliot, Mr. Trilling, and "Huckleberry Finn"', *The American Scholar*, 22:4 (Autumn, 1953), 423–440 (p. 431).

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 438.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

burlesque incongruous with the rest of the novel. Further, Jim's eventual freedom and the lack of justice for Tom Sawyer's callous actions is seen to undermine the seriousness with which the narrative treats the inhumanity of the slave trade.<sup>7</sup> Although undeniably troubling elements of the narrative, one problem with this dominant line of criticism is that it stems from the perceived failure of the novel to comply with Marx's reading of the metaphorical framework. This plots a path of thinking that leads us to face the uncomfortable question of how the novel *should* end, to which Marx responds, unsatisfactorily, that the critic is not always 'equipped to rewrite what he criticises.'<sup>8</sup>

Marx's dissatisfaction with the novel's ending results, in part, from an early obstacle in the construction of his metaphorical reading of the Mississippi: whether the river, and the events it bears witness to, should be read ontologically or politically. Does the river primarily enable Jim and Huck's journey along the river to investigate broad ontological concepts of freedom and equality, or to offer a more precise interrogation of these ideas as manifest within nineteenth-century America and its relationship with slavery? Marx decides to read it primarily politically, and in doing so concludes that the novel's ending clashes not only with 'the symbols, the characters, and the theme as Clemens had created them', but most importantly, 'with history.'<sup>9</sup>

Navigating between the ontological and the political interests of literature is difficult beyond *Huckleberry Finn*, and is an experience of reading McCarthy's work. Where critics, such as David Holloway, take explicitly political approaches to McCarthy's fiction, others warn against doing so. Steven Frye cautions against politically inflected readings of violence in McCarthy's novels, arguing that 'Although McCarthy's interest in violence may be in part political it is in a deeper sense ontological.'<sup>10</sup> Georg Guillemin goes further, suggesting that the primarily political readings of McCarthy proposed by ecocriticism 'may actually do nothing so much as reflect the ecological shift within the critical community'.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 440.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 437.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 439.

<sup>10</sup> Steven Frye, 'Blood Meridian and the Poetics of Violence', *The Cambridge Companion to Cormac McCarthy*, ed. by Steven Frye (Cambridge: CUP, 2013), pp. 107–120 (p. 109).

<sup>11</sup> Georg Guillemin, *The Pastoral Vision of Cormac McCarthy* (Texas: Texas A&M University Press, 2004), p. 145.

Reading the river beyond the symbolic may resolve this often unhelpful separation of the ontological and political. Reading Cormac McCarthy's *Blood Meridian* alongside Tim Winton's *Breath* (2005) enables us to see how their literary rivers engage with but exceed the novels' political and ontological concerns. Following these rivers reveals that they both invite and deny a metaphorical reading through their presence in the texts not as static symbols, but as a part of a broader fluvial cycle. To realise the significance of the river's dynamic presence beyond these two texts, we can also extend the comparison and chart a comparative reading of the river that threads back through *Huckleberry Finn* and Herman Melville's poem 'John Marr' (1888). These two works by towering figures of the American literary tradition form a pairing of one of America's most praised works, with one of its most forgotten. They combine to reveal the life of the fluvial cycle in *Breath* and *Blood Meridian* through their interest in the fluvial cycle's role in the crossing of two shadow lines: the end of childhood and the closing of adulthood.

## Fluvial Cycle

Tim Ingold's understanding of ecology helps to realise the river's dynamic presence in the literature of McCarthy and Winton, as well as its connections between them and their nineteenth-century American ancestors. In his essay 'Bindings against Boundaries: Entanglements of Life in an Open World', Ingold argues that it is the constant movement of lines that allows us to see that we live in an open world, rather than a closed, or furnished one. To explain this, he immediately reaches for the metaphor of the river:

Every line—every relation—in fluid space is a path of flow, like the riverbed or the veins and capillaries of the body. As the sanguinary image suggests, the living organism is not just one but a whole bundle of such lines. [. . .] An ecology of life, therefore, must be about the weaving and binding of lines, not the hammering of blocks. As an ecology of threads and traces, it must deal not with the relations between organisms and their external environments but with

the relations along their severally enmeshed ways of life. Ecology, in short, is the study of the life of lines.<sup>12</sup>

Reaching for the river to convey the need to understand those intermingling of lines is simple to understand; the river is not only a cartographic criss-crossing of streams and creeks, but also an environmental weave of unseen flows and lines of the 'catchment hydrological cycle.' This is illustrated most effectively through a diagram from Geoff Petts and Ian Foster's *Rivers and Landscape*.<sup>13</sup>

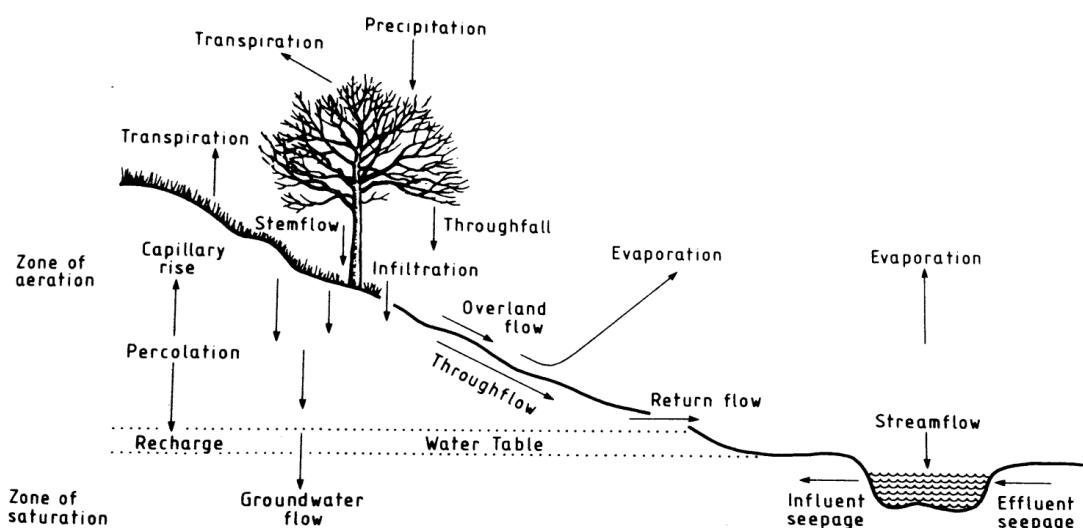


Fig 1.1: Components of the catchment hydrological cycle.

This process occurs in an even greater set of lines than featured in this diagram through its place in the broader fluvial cycle, created by water running downstream to the ocean before ascending into clouds, and moving over high ground before raining to repeat the cyclical journeys. Notably absent from this particular diagram is the human. This is an absence of which Ingold's understanding of an all-encompassing 'ecology of life' makes us acutely aware. In *Blood Meridian* and *Breath*, we see the human within this fluvial cycle drawn with a detail that a diagram cannot achieve, with the unseen flows of the fluvial cycle shaping the novels' protagonists and narratives as much as their landscapes and vistas.

<sup>12</sup> Tim Ingold, 'Bindings Against Boundaries: Entanglements of Life in an Open World', *Environment and Planning A*, 40 (2008), 1796–1810 (p. 1806–1807).

<sup>13</sup> Geoff Petts and Ian Foster, *Rivers and Landscape* (London: Edward Arnold, 1985), p. 9.

Although many of McCarthy's books contain echoes of Huck Finn and his Mississippi world, it might be surprising to focus a riverine reading of McCarthy's fiction upon a book other than *Suttree* (1979), which takes place along the banks of the same river as Twain's most famous novel and in which the river is a more obvious presence. One could also argue that Winton's *Cloudstreet* (1991) was more influenced by this riverside ecology, taking place by the Swan River in Perth. What makes *Blood Meridian* and *Breath* more intriguing for this study is their loose bildungsroman form. This form not only ties them more closely to Twain's novel, but, crucially, allows the novelists to explore their geography through the experiences of a single character, rather than presenting a snapshot of its influence in a period of one's life, as in *Suttree*, or its diffuse influence upon an entire family, as with *Cloudstreet*. This crucial difference sees the authors write their young protagonists as querying witnesses, but more importantly, still-developing products of their riverside ecologies and dynamic fluvial systems.

A crucial element of the fluvial cycle only implicit in the diagram, and which is crucial to the bildungsroman, is that of time. Just as a river's flow, direction, and shape change over time, the bildungsroman is dependent upon time's passing to shape the child into an adult. The power and presence of time's passage through these riverine works is not restricted to their individual literary timeframes, but extends through the broader literary context in which the novels sit, with the rivers of *Blood Meridian* and *Breath* receiving and evolving the literary river from Twain, Melville, and other nineteenth-century writers. Realising the river's temporal significance and presence beyond the narratives' drama allows us to view the river in the novels through two interlinking frames. The first frame clarifies how the ecological and dynamic presence of the river provokes and disrupts metaphorically ontological and political readings. The second frame is more complicated, bringing into focus how the river carries and connects these novels with a literary tradition and context. It perceives the rivers as tributaries of a longer literary tradition, with Twain as the American spring. Exploring the river's connective presence in these two frames opens the potential of a geophysical criticism to inform our understanding not just of individual literary works but also of literary inheritance and influence.

## Inheritance

Critics, reviewers, and occasionally the authors themselves often summon Mark Twain, Herman Melville, William Faulkner, Flannery O'Connor and other nineteenth- to early twentieth-century American writers as literary ancestors of Winton and McCarthy. McCarthy shares national and regional interests as well as landscapes with many of these canonical figures. For Winton, a writer in another hemisphere and with his own nationally conceived literary narrative, this influence is more surprising. Winton believes that the strength of this American influence emerges from a strange recognition of their geographical context:

I admired those American writers' refusal to obediently replicate that received British diction [...] As a young man I responded immediately and instinctively to Twain, for instance, because of this; there was a kind of shiver of recognition despite the great distances of time and geography. Also, Melville, Faulkner, Hemingway. In British writing, only Stevenson and to some extent Conrad carried a frisson of similar magnitude, perhaps partly because they were spending so much time in the New World—and obviously in the outdoors in wild places (and wilder situations, at times).<sup>14</sup>

Winton's admiration for these writers preludes a complicated relationship with Europe that will be seen throughout this thesis. McCarthy expresses a similar valuing of writers on the margins of the Old World when he claims, rather obtusely, that he dislikes novels which do not 'deal with life and death', citing the European and adopted-European writers Marcel Proust and Henry James as 'not literature'.<sup>15</sup> Similarly antagonistic sentiments flowered early in American literature, particularly along its original riverine geography. At the beginning of *Life on the Mississippi* (1883), Twain writes a long list the Mississippi's geographical facts and oddities, putting them in competition with European equivalents, including that 'It draws its water supply from twenty-eight States and Territories'<sup>16</sup> and that it 'discharges three times

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<sup>14</sup> Personal correspondence.

<sup>15</sup> Richard B. Woodward, 'Cormac McCarthy's Venomous Fiction', *The New York Times* (19 April 1992), <<https://goo.gl/eaIwaH>> [Accessed 21 July 2016].

<sup>16</sup> Mark Twain, *Life on the Mississippi* (Oxford: OUP, 1990), p. 1.

as much water as the St Lawrence, twenty-five times as much as the Rhine, and three-hundred and thirty-eight times as much water as the Thames.<sup>17</sup>

It is tempting to take these sentiments and use them as evidence to further explore what Paul Giles has called the United States' and Australia's historical 'triangular relationship with Great Britain', bringing Winton and McCarthy into debates about the presence of contemporary transatlantic/transpacific, or indeed trans-hemispheric, antagonism.<sup>18</sup> This framing more explicitly informs chapter two, but focusing primarily on this dynamic risks ignoring that Twain saw the Mississippi as a site upon which an American identity might grow independently of the Old World.

The preface to *Life on the Mississippi* draws an intimate portrait of the river that disarms the idea that it was simply a geographical weapon with which to combat Europe's assumed cultural parentage and dominance of the United States. An excerpt from *Harper's Magazine*, the preface reads: 'But the basin of the Mississippi is the *Body of the Nation* . . . Latitude, elevation, and rainfall all combine to render every part of the Mississippi Valley capable of supporting a dense population. *As a dwelling-place for man it is by far the first upon our globe.*'<sup>19</sup> This Mississippi is not a site from which to plot an insurrection against an external cultural force, but a place where America may gain its bearings and define itself not in relation to Europe, but in relation to its own geography.

The intimacy of Twain's particular connection with the Mississippi is also displayed in the preface to *Huckleberry Finn* where he feels compelled to write of the varying dialects of his novel:

The shadings have not been done in a haphazard fashion or by guesswork; but painstakingly, and with the trustworthy guidance and support of personal familiarity with these forms of speech.

I make this explanation for the reason that without it many readers would suppose that all these characters were trying to talk alike and not succeeding.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Paul Giles, *Antipodean America: Australia and the Constitution of U.S Literature* (Oxford: OUP, 2014), p. 6.

<sup>19</sup> Twain, *Life on the Mississippi*, p. xvii.

<sup>20</sup> Mark Twain, *Huckleberry Finn* (London: Penguin, 1994), p. 27.

Twain makes this statement with the confidence of a woodsman guiding visitors through the landscape, establishing an authority on such matters that has been gained through careful study and experience. The vernacular of the Mississippi becomes a form of human geography and just as to explore the Mississippi you have to know its banks and understand its currents, to accurately write the river you must hear its voices and know its inflections.

Even more intriguingly, Twain not only allows the Mississippi to shape how he writes, but also how he reads. In *Life on the Mississippi*, Twain appears to be something of an early geocritic, expressing his belief that the river plays a crucial role in his assessment of literature, claiming, 'When I find a well-drawn character in fiction or biography I generally take a warm personal interest in him, for the reason that I have known him before—met him on the river.'<sup>21</sup>

Twain's openness about how the river shaped both his writing and his reading exposes a fascination with the river's ability to be intimate and personal while also broadly political and ontological in its significance. For Twain, the Mississippi was equally a symbol of national identity, and a site of personal encounters. For both *Blood Meridian* and *Breath*, this relationship with the river starts at the intimate, establishing the protagonists at the mercy of a fluvial cycle that draws them to rivers which become pivotal sites of their adolescence before pushing them through the deeper sites of the cycle to realise its diverse connections to their lives and their lands.

### **The ecology of the novels**

Indicating the shadow that Mark Twain casts over *Breath*, the novel is focused around the small riverside town of Sawyer. Here, our twelve-year old protagonist, Bruce Pike, is not forced to the river to escape an abusive father, like Huck, but drawn to it as an escape from the 'embarrassment' of both his 'insignificant' hometown and his 'codger' parents.<sup>22</sup> This desire to escape manifests as a yearning to 'swim in the ocean' (19), a desire long unrealised due to his father's fear of the sea. Bruce tries to keep this increasingly urgent and visceral longing at bay by swimming

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<sup>21</sup> Twain, *Life on the Mississippi*, p. 135.

<sup>22</sup> Tim Winton, *Breath* (London: Picador, 2008), p. 10 (All subsequent references refer to this edition).

in the Sawyer River, but this does not satisfy him. His hunger for the sea keeps him up at night, with the sound of waves on the distant shore being both 'soothing' and exciting, sounding 'more like artillery than mere water' (9). In hearing this from his house, the novel begins to show its sensitivity to the ecological and physical connections between Bruce and the ocean, with the surf's roar trilling up the river, through the floorboards of Kari that once grew on its banks, and into his skull.

For the protagonist of *Blood Meridian*, known only as 'the kid,' the draw to the river is closer to that felt by Huck: like Huck, the kid's mother is deceased and the father has been driven to drink. This situation torments the kid, with the narrator observing that his upbringing with his father has given him a 'taste for mindless violence' (3). The novel opens with the kid running away from his father's home in Tennessee, with no specific aim or destination disclosed. He simply 'wanders west as far as Memphis, a solitary migrant upon that flat and pastoral landscape' (4). This aimlessness is perhaps as deceiving as the 'flat' pastoral landscape the narrator describes. Because the kid never leaves the Mississippi basin in which he was born, he ends up, just like any rain that falls within the region, following the imperceptible gradients of the land to the banks of the Mississippi in Saint Louis.

For Huck, Bruce, and the kid, reaching the river is not a solitary act, but one that connects them with others who have been caught in the river's cycle, with all three meeting key figures who have also gathered at the river. For Huck, this meeting is with the escaped slave Jim, with whom he forms a bond that 'would ultimately make the culture more responsive to the voices of African-American writers in the twentieth century.'<sup>23</sup> Bruce's or the kid's encounters are not quite this nationally significant, but they shape the boys' personal narratives in just as profound a manner.

Bruce's key riverside meeting is with Loonie. They first encounter each other when Bruce heads to the river to swim and sees Loonie pretending to drown in order to scare some girls on the river bank, an act Bruce attempts to better after dismissing it as 'easy' (15). Bruce acknowledges that this 'was the first of many such days and we were friends and rivals from then on. It was the beginning of something' (15).

The kid finds no such friendship at the river. With a face 'curiously untouched behind the scars' (4), violence has clearly become a way of life since fleeing Tennessee. At the river he meets 'all races, all breeds' (4) raising hell along the river.

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<sup>23</sup> Shelley Fisher Fishkin, *Was Huck Black?* (New York: OUP, 1993), p. 5.

Many of them are sailors, who he fights ‘with fists, with feet, with bottles or knives’ (4). Amongst this faceless mob of violent acquaintances, the kid forges two fleeting but significant relationships. The first is with a ‘Maltese boatswain’ who ‘shoots him in the back with a small pistol’ (4), and the second is with the tavern keeper’s wife who tends to his wounds.

The kid’s encounter with the Maltese boatswain is not singled out for its violence (which is understated, compared to the rest of the novel), nor for the fact that he was shot with a concealed weapon from behind. Instead, the shocking focus of this encounter are the witnesses turning to ‘look away’ as the kid ‘leans against the bar with blood running out of his shirt’ (4). We next hear that ‘He lies in a cot in the room upstairs for two weeks while the tavern keeper’s wife attends him. She brings his meals, she carries out his slops’ (14).

These relationships are different in length. Bruce’s key encounter with Loonie forges a friendship that lasts for years and occupies most of the novel. The kid’s encounters with figures on the Mississippi last minutes and occupy only a few moments of the narrative. Despite this difference, both encounters change the boys’ immediate and life-long trajectories, shaping how they view the world.

Although the tavern keeper’s wife arrives quickly enough to save the kid’s life, she does not rescue his view of humanity, with the kid stealing away in the night after realising that ‘he has no money to pay her’ (14). We are not given any information on what occurred between the boy and the woman, but she presumably knew that this child had no money and was merely caring for him out of compassion: an emotion seemingly absent from the kid’s experience. The encounter with the boatswain has a catastrophic effect on the kid, with the narrator claiming: ‘only now is the child finally divested of all that he has been. His origins are become as remote as is his destiny and not again in all the world’s turning will there be terrains so wild and barbarous to try whether the stuff of creation may be shaped to man’s will or whether his own heart is not another kind of clay’ (4). This experience at the river sets the child loose again at the mercy of the fluvial cycle. The kid’s only option after running from the tavern is to sleep on the riverbank that has been his school in learning the ways of men ‘until he can find a boat that will take him on’ (4). He makes a quick escape, taking a raft down to the Texas coast. Here, the harsh ‘raw wind’ of the Atlantic blows him back inland, and unknowingly toward the judge. From there, he will be

moulded through the rest of the novel by the Glanton Gang's murderous quest for scalps (5).

Bruce's meeting at the river also has a profound effect on how he views the world. Both Bruce and Loonie embrace the fluidity of the river, using it to take them away from the stupefying tameness of Sawyer into an underwater world where the simple denial of oxygen encourages them to compete in flirtations with drowning 'until often as not we'd scare ourselves' (15). This satisfies their desire for adventure at first, but eventually it simply fuels their hunger for more. As they push themselves underwater they gain a sense that they are large fish in small ponds. The murky river in which they can still see the 'river gum roots' of their town instils a desire to swim in bigger, deeper, clearer and more dangerous waters. Bruce confides: 'I wanted to swim where I could see the bottom, to be where those long, creaking breakers trundled in from the south so I could dive down and see them pass overhead' (19). This desire lures both boys out to the coast, and into meeting their future surf mentor, Sando, who pits Bruce and Loonie against each other in surfing increasingly ugly and dangerous waves. Ultimately, this competition leads Bruce to a dangerous frame of mind in which he risks treating everything in his life as something to be conquered and claimed.

As Bruce and Loonie are enveloped by their riverine ecology and pushed through the fluvial cycle, their personal routes slowly reveal their entanglements with the broader history and economy of their nations. It is in these moments that the novels begin to invite political explorations of their geographies.

Entanglement of the personal and the political The Mississippi that flows through *Blood Meridian* connects with *Huckleberry Finn* through an early, but rarely discussed, depiction of slavery. The only sights we are told the kid witnesses during the entire year between running away from home and taking to the Mississippi are:

Blacks in the fields, lank and stooped, their fingers spiderlike among the bolls of cotton. A shadowed agony in the garden. Against the sun's declining figures moving in the slower dusk across a paper skyline. A lone dark husbandman pursuing mule and harrow down the rainblown bottomland toward night. (4)

The powerful picture of nameless 'blacks' and their 'spiderlike' hands, portrays slaves as living tools whose only relevance is to dumbly pick at cotton. The scene stands alone as the novel's only explicit glimpse of the Atlantic slave trade, but it is a moment strangely alluded to in other parts of the novel. The most immediate allusion is one that could easily be ignored. As the boy finishes his river journey and begins to move north, we are told: 'A week and he is on the move again, a few dollars in his purse that he's earned, walking the sand roads of the southern night alone, his hands balled in the cotton pockets of his cheap coat' (5). This juxtaposition reveals that in following the kid downriver, we have also followed the economic journey of cotton from boll to coat. Pointedly, the coat is also cheap, a product of an economy built on the backs of slaves.

This moment deepens the river's significance to the novel by expressing the river's centrality not only to the kid's evolving mindset, but also to a nation that is built on the back of slaves and slave-reliant industries such as cotton. The cotton industry turns the river into an extension of the middle passage by transporting slaves and cotton as well as irrigating cotton fields, and by hosting the towns and cities in which a cheap cotton jacket may be purchased.<sup>24</sup> Despite its fleeting appearance, this scene extends Christine Chollier's claim that, of all McCarthy's works, *Blood Meridian* is 'the novel that best exemplifies the substitution of violence for exchange.'<sup>25</sup> This moment intertwines the personal, economic and political strands, exposing that violence is not substitution for exchange, but that exchange is itself as violent as anything else in the novel. With this in mind, the violence of *Blood Meridian* might not be revealing the 'reintroduction of attitudes foreign to, or established prior to, or antagonistic to the foregrounding of, market economies', but showing that such violence was always present in the market economy, only rendered somehow acceptable through the formalisation of slavery (176).

In *Breath*, the river also entangles the personal life of Bruce with the broader political questions and concerns simmering within Australia. After the boys have first

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<sup>24</sup> Yvonne Reddick provides an expanded analysis of rivers as extensions of the middle passage in her essay "This was a Conradian World that I was entering": Colonial and Postcolonial River-Journeys beyond the Black Atlantic in Caryl Philips Work' *Wasafiri*, 31:3 (Sept 2016), 34–41.

<sup>25</sup> Christine Chollier, "'I Aint Come Back Rich That's For Sure": The Questioning of Market Economies in Cormac McCarthy's Novels', *Myth, Legend, Dust: Critical Responses to Cormac McCarthy*, ed. by Rick Wallach (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), pp. 171–176 (p. 174).

made their way from swimming in the Sawyer to surfing in the sea, they stand on Sando's veranda and see, for the first time, the river from a distance:

The estuary was like a wide, shining gut that was fed by the river as it coiled back and back on itself into the blue-green blur of the forest beyond the town. I'd never thought of the river as an intestine but then I'd never viewed the country from this angle before and seen just how shaggy its animal contours were. (41)

Bruce becomes conscious for the first time that the connection he has always felt with the ocean is part of a broader ecological weave, central to which is the river in which he learnt to swim. It is upon this realisation that the forest is first brought into focus as a key component of the river system that nurtured Bruce. Shortly after seeing the forest from this perspective, Bruce recalls his journeys into the woods on the edge of Sawyer, which are feared by the townspeople as a place that 'creaked and groaned' (60), having the power to 'set the hair up on the back of your neck' when the wind blew (60), and where 'your brain refused to accept the fact that you were alone' (60).

This short scene feels uncomfortable in the novel, written with a ghostly sense of the supernatural that only appears at one other point, where Bruce goes to the old quarantine station for a school trip and begins to grasp the history that his town is built within:

It felt like I was in an outpost of a different era. It wasn't only the colonial buildings that gave me such a sense, but also the land they were built on. Each headstone and every gnarled grass tree spoke of a past forever present, ever-pressing, and for the first time in my life I began to feel, plain as gravity, not only was my life short, but there had been so much of it. (136)

This realisation begins to spook Bruce in the station's mortuary, where he asks his friend Queenie if she believes in ghosts. She replies that she does, because: 'Down on our beach, you hear things at night [...] People's voices' (137). These two scenes are tied together by a ghostliness that is related only through their occurrence at either end of the intestinal river, indicating a political undercurrent that remains

otherwise hidden. The quarantine station gives us the strongest hint as to the identity of the ghosts of the beach and the forests.

Quarantine stations were constructed with the aim of preventing contagious diseases from entering the nation on the ships and bodies of migrants and animal stowaways. Too late in being implemented and never entirely successful when they were, quarantine policies failed to prevent the spread of disease entirely. The most damaging effect of this was the death of many Aboriginal Australian peoples particularly vulnerable to such alien diseases.<sup>26</sup> This history connects the ghostly quarantine station with the eerily empty forest via the river, serving as a reminder of the history that has rendered this forest, and many areas of the Australian interior, supposedly empty. This possibility is reinforced in Bruce's observation that the residents of Sawyer do not feel like they belong in the forest, hinting at the complexity of their status in a landscape haunted by the absence of a people who belonged to the land and to whom the land belonged. Through Bruce's increasing awareness of his surroundings, he begins to see the difficult layers of history within his own geography: a house made from karri tree, a karri forest strangely empty of any native inhabitants, a river leading out to a colonial quarantine station, and the ocean which both brought the pioneers who shaped this history and in which Bruce personally hopes to surf in order to escape the mundanity of life in Sawyer. All of this stems from interactions with the river's hydrological cycle, and because of this cycle, none of them can be completely forgotten. Bruce later notes that any talk of 'putting it all behind,' in any context, be it personal or political, is the talk of a 'politician' (240).

As the riverine ecology connects personal and national politics, the narratives remain focused on Bruce's and the kid's own trajectories through this fluvial cycle. As both boys are shaped and changed by their experiences, they progress through a cycle, both working their way down river before eventually being pushed back inland where we see them in their later years.

Huck never makes it to the sea in Twain's novel, but he does reach the objective that the ocean signified: Jim's freedom and his own sense of adventure. After returning home, there is a definite sense that Huck has experienced a coming-of-age; his journey along the river has taught him many things about the world in which he

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<sup>26</sup> Robert Hughes, *The Fatal Shore* (London: Vintage, 2003), p. 91.

is growing up, learning about the slave trade before explicitly rejecting it after deepening his friendship with Jim. Twain makes it clear that Huck's evolution is a continual and on-going cycle. When he arrives back home, Huck delivers his dreams of another adventure in the novel's final comic line: 'But I reckon I got to light out for the Territory ahead of the rest, because Aunt Sally says she's going to adopt me and sivilise me and I can't stand it. I been there before' (263). Marx finds this final sentence problematic, claiming:

Huck's decision to go west ahead of the inescapable advance of civilization is a confession of defeat. It means that the raft is to be abandoned. On the other hand, the jubilation of the family re-union and the proclaiming of Jim's freedom create a quite different mood. The tone, except for these last words, is one of un-clouded success. I believe this is the source of the almost universal dissatisfaction with the conclusion. One can hardly forget that a bloody civil war did not resolve the issue. (439)

We can sympathise with this objection. The granting of his freedom does not easily heal the torment inflicted upon Jim in the novel's final few chapters. The flaw of Marx's critique lies in its assumptions that the novel would complete the politically metaphorical messages he assumed to be drifting in the river of the text. This is a completion that the novel's ending makes clear cannot be achieved, reminding us that we are being told the tale by Huck, a growing but still naive child. His penultimate sentence forces this home when he flippantly draws the story to a close by claiming: 'there ain't nothing more to write about, and I'm rotten glad of it, because if I'd known what a trouble it was to make a book I wouldn't a tackled it and ain't agoing to no more' (281). Thus, we might read the ending and its farce as a sign of the incompleteness of Huck's journey through the fluvial cycle and into maturity.

Twain never finished writing the novel's sequel, *Huck Finn and Tom Sawyer Among the Indians*, and so we will never know how Huck's journey inland may have directed Jim's story and whether it would have resolved or compounded Marx's problems with the ending. In spite of this sense of incompleteness, we can see something of the same concerns that shaped Twain's riverine novel in the work of Herman Melville. Particularly, we can see in Melville's poem 'John Marr' a return to the source and a sense of a man looking back on his life that Twain never wrote

for Huck, and a contribution to the literary environment that has shaped the political and ontological concerns that McCarthy and Winton draw from the river.

### **Melville and the Return to the Source**

Published in 1888, three years after *Huckleberry Finn*, Melville's collection of poetry *John Marr and Other Sailors* sees Melville focus back on the sea from which he wrestled *Moby-Dick*, this time from the perspective of a man nearing the end of his life. The collection opens with a prose/verse hybrid that recounts the early years of the titular John Marr, a retired sailor now living on a North-American prairie. Marr has clearly had a colourful life worthy of its own bildungsroman, but the narrator grants these years a single sentence, divulging only their most important events: that he, like the kid, was born to 'a mother unknown', spent time at sea 'under diverse flags', and was forced to retreat back to land after being wounded by 'pirates of the Keys'.<sup>27</sup> Despite the excitement of this life at sea, Melville focuses on Marr's 'adventurous move' inland to a 'frontier prairie' where he gets married and works as a carpenter (263). The map of Marr's coming-of-age is fluvial in its pattern: a move from being a child inland, crossing the shadow line at sea, and returning to the land a man. Curiously, the narrative adopts this return to land, which may seem like the end of a story, as the beginning.

Marr's life on the prairie is quickly thrown into disarray as his 'wife and infant child' die of illness and he is forced to bury them in a coffin 'put together by his own hands' (263). Following this tragic event, the poem begins to turn away from the prairie toward the sea of Marr's memory, diving into the ocean of his past in the hope that it might cleanse him of his grief. As we saw in the introduction, the prairie is not only devoid of companionship and happiness for Marr, but also ecologically deserted. He observes that the exodus of bison and influx of men has left the prairie 'green and blossoming indeed, but almost as forsaken as the Siberian Obi' (265). This awareness of the florally blossoming but ecologically damaged prairie leads Marr to transform the land back into the ocean, flooding this 'bed of a dried-up sea'

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<sup>27</sup> Herman Melville, 'John Marr', *The Poems of Herman Melville*, ed. by Douglas Robillard (London: Kent State University Press, 2000), 263 (All subsequent references are from this edition).

by transforming in his mind's eye the gradations of the plain into 'swells' of an 'ocean becalmed' (266). In flooding the plains, Melville sees a 'growing sense of environment' which 'threw him more and more on retrospective musings' (267). From this now watery landscape emerges the community he formed at sea, with the ghosts and spirits of his shipmates dead or far-away, offering him community and a final communion as he recalls their old songs to comfort him in his grief:

Once, for all the darkling sea,  
You your voices raised how clearly,  
Striking in when tempest sung;  
Hoisting up the storm-sail cheerily,  
Life is storm—let storm! You rung. (269)

The symbolic power of water to heal is something that both McCarthy and Winton introduce in the later movements of their texts, as both Bruce and the kid turn towards it in an attempt to soothe the scars of their adolescence.

*Blood Meridian* turns to the healing power of the sea in the novel's closing few chapters, where we find the kid not pushed to the desert by harsh Atlantic winds, but drawn to the Pacific in his escape from the judge. As he and Tobin retreat from the judge in the shadows of the Laguna Mountains, the kid emerges on the West coast of America in San Diego. The kid does not seek medical attention, as Tobin does, but an engulfing view of the Pacific:

Loose strands of ambercolored kelp lay in a rubbery wrack at the tideline. A dead seal. Beyond the inner bay part of a reef in a thin line like something foundered there on which the sea was teething. He squatted in the sand and watched the sun on the hammered face of the water. Out there island clouds emplaned upon a salmoncolored othersea. Seafowl in silhouette. Downshore the dull surf boomed. There was a horse standing there staring out upon the darkening waters and a young colt that cavorted and trotted off and came back. He sat watching while the sun dipped hissing against the sky. The surf boomed in the dark and the seas black hide heaved in the cobbled starlight and the long pale combers loped out of the night and broke along the beach.

He rose and turned toward the lights of the town. The tidepools bright as smelter pots among the dark rocks where the phosphorescent sea crabs

clambered back. Passing through the salt grass he looked back. The horse had not moved. A ship's light winked in the swells. The colt stood against the horse with its head down and the horse was watching, out there past men's knowing, where the stars are drowning and whales ferry their vast souls through the black and seamless sea. (303–304)

This description is a key moment in the text, marking a key point in the kid's rejection of the judge and all that he has seen and taken part in during his time traveling through the desert. Whereas the kid chose to watch 'the dim shore rise and fall' (5) on his first encounter with the sea, the ocean now captivates him as he sits to watch the sun set and listen to the roar of the surf. The scene presents us with the same problem we encounter in many other sections of the novel where the kid is not directly communicating: we can only guess as to what he is thinking. Instead of direct access to his mind, the narrator's description of the vista reflects the chaos of the kid's mind. As in 'John Marr', the sea blurs with the desert. The Pacific is described in the hot and violent language one would expect from a boy whose eyes have been filled with the sight of blood scorching on the desert floor: the sea's rippled face looks like the 'hammered face' of metal forged in tide pool 'smelter pots', all heated by a sun 'hissing against the sky.' Despite the overlaying of the desert's violence upon the sea, we are left with the sense that the ocean contains the power to appease it, extinguishing the fire of stars, cooling the sun in its hissing decline, and harbouring the vast souls of whales. *Breath* contains a similar moment, where Bruce seeks solace not in the sea that comforts Marr and captivates the kid, but the desert.

Bruce's push away from the ocean begins with his failure to surf the largest, ugliest, and most dangerous wave Sando and Loonie have attempted: the Nautilus. This failure and the resulting alienation from Loonie and Sando causes a brief and painful affair with Sando's wife, whose own love of breath-denying risk manifests itself in her taste for erotic asphyxiation. Shortly after their affair ends it is revealed that Eva is pregnant, supposedly with Sando's child. At this, Bruce's connection with his three friends is severed. Shortly after, we are told briefly that Bruce's life encounters a series of disasters: his father dies, he quits university and gets married but quickly divorced. Throughout this time, he tries to mend his mental damage by separating himself from those around him. His first attempt occurs after university, when he holes up 'in a caravan on a sheep station' (232). He tries for a second time,

after the divorce, putting himself 'away for a spell' in hospital (236). Neither seem to work, but his third and final attempt is different: spurred by the funeral of his mother, he attempts not only to remove himself from people, but from his geography, driving 'east, as far away from the sea and the city as possible' (237).

During his escape inland, Bruce finds himself in the company of a defrocked priest determined to help him:

We lived beside a dry salt lake that rippled and swam against itself all day. Perched and cracked as it was, it seemed the lake was always full, never really empty at all. Long after I straightened out and he gave me back my keys, I stayed on—six months in the end. The old man slept inside on a steel cot and I rolled out my swag under the pulsing stars on the dry lakebed. During the day we sat in the ragged shade of his verandah while things rose up off the salt before us. We laughed at every shimmering mirage in shared disbelief. The priest said he hadn't touched a drop in fifteen years, that he'd gotten beyond magical thinking. But the salt lake kept him on his toes. And I saw what he meant. It was full of surprises. (241)

Bruce sees the sea that enticed him as a boy, in a dried salt lake that swims and ripples with surprises. Like the kid, we are not given access to what these soothing visions might be. While Bruce's attraction to the desert landscape, and its ability to help heal him from his experiences at sea, is fairly explicit—and in this sense similar to John Marr—the sea's healing effect on the kid is more cryptic.

The first indication of the kid's attraction to the sea is seen in the parallel between him and the horse as they look out to sea for the first time. As the foal gallops around, the horse, like the kid after his desert experience, just stares at the sea. This scene is not dwelt upon or made immediately relevant, but its effects are felt throughout the rest of the kid's life, as he seems to find some safety in the coast. In the brief description of the next twelve years he is said to travel to 'remote places' (313), yet we are only told of his travels close to the coast. The notable sights of these years are 'ships from the land of China in the small harbours', 'that dark and lonely coast where the steep rocks cradled a dark and muttersome sea', and San Francisco burning against 'the black waters of the sea where dolphins roll through the flames' which he sees as he heads 'south' along the coast (313). No journey away from the West Coast

is mentioned, leaving us to assume that these years have been spent hugging the coastline he first saw after leaving the desert and the judge. With this change in geography comes a change in character: the kid spends these twelve years witnessing more violence, yet not partaking in it. He carries a Bible he cannot read and is seen by those he encounters as 'a sort of preacher' (312). Throughout this time, we are told 'of the judge he heard rumor everywhere' (313). Initially, this turn to water appears to achieve the same end as Marr's and Bruce's turns to the desert: it allows all three to access a state of grace that might heal their wounds. Their life beyond these encounters reveals that the extent of this healing is very different for the kid and Bruce than Marr.

At the end of Melville's 1888 collection, if we read the poems which follow the opening as songs from John Marr's past, we hear the collection's final stanza seemingly in Marr's voice:

Healed of my hurt, I laud the inhuman Sea—  
Yea bless the Angels four that there convene;  
For healed I am even by their pitiless breath  
Distilled in wholesome dew named rosemary. (299)

Marr presents the sea's healing power as both personal and ecological, by likening himself to rosemary, the flower of remembrance that requires only the faintest sea dew carried in the air to thrive and grow. Marr believes that he can, like rosemary, be healed and nourished by the faintest memory of the sea and his better life upon its waves.

In contrast to Melville's faith in the restorative powers of the ocean, the soothing encounters of *Breath* and *Blood Meridian* complicate the possibility of geography's ability to heal. Both moments of repair, looking out at the Pacific and at the salt lake, tie the plots to a complete and closed cycle: both the kid and the boy have moved inland, to the sea and back again; been changed by their experiences of adolescence; and finally found spaces in which to heal, repair and move beyond their past. But both novels continue.

In *Breath*, Bruce is explicit about the limitations of the desert to heal his old wounds: 'I didn't exactly pull myself together—I got past such notions—but bits of me did come around again, as flies or memories or subatomic particles will for

reasons of their own' (241). For years after, he recalls, 'I feared excitement. But I found ways through that' (242). McCarthy presents a similar version of the kid in the twenty-nine years that pass from leaving the desert to the end of the novel. In the first twelve years we see the kid being viewed by those who encounter him as a preacher, but we also hear that he 'was no witness to them' (312). At the end of these twelve years, he too heads for the desert, setting east on a job to protect some pilgrims returning home (313). After splitting from this party at a desert well 'seven days from the coast' the kid heads toward the mountains on the northern horizon (314). We are given no explanation why, but out here we are told of a key scene where he sees the butchered remains of the pilgrims he left. Rather than being involved in the butchery, the kid reaches out to a woman he believes to be a survivor, telling her: 'he would convey her to a safe place, some party of her country-people who would welcome her and that she should join them for he could not leave her in this place or she would surely die' (315). The discovery that she had been dead in that place for years renders his act of compassion useless.

Through these denials of a clean sense of healing, both novels move toward faltering and complicated endings. In *Blood Meridian*, the kid happens upon and is killed by the judge in a Texas bar, while in *Breath* Bruce becomes a paramedic, consoling himself with the adrenalin of his job and the moments of beauty he achieves when surfing. It is tempting to see these uneasy endings resulting from the untied political threads woven into their texts. *Blood Meridian* ends with an unflinching glimpse at the effect of expansion into the West: a buffalo boneyard in the process of being legally claimed and fenced by those who have committed the destruction (337). Similarly, the older Bruce comments on the new threat to the oceans he grew up desperately wanting to immerse himself in, watching from littered suburbs as young boys ride on polluting jet-skis to deeper waters and bigger waves, where sharks have had to be given protected status to prevent their extinction (246). The presence of a sober political interest alone does not explain the difference in tone and neatness between the novels' endings and Melville's poem, which expresses an equally stark political dissatisfaction.

As Marr mourns his wife and child, his grieving extends to the ills of Westward expansion. When burying his family, he observes that theirs is simply 'another mound, though a small one, in the wide prairie, not far from where the mound-builders of a race only conjecturable had left their pottery and bones, one common

clay, under a strange terrace serpentine form' (263). Marr goes on to condemn the change that European colonisation and American expansion has brought to the Native Americans: 'The remnant of Indian thereabout—all but exterminated in their recent and final war with regular white troops, a war waged by the Red Men for their native soil and natural rights—had been coerced into occupancy of wilds not very far beyond the Mississippi—wilds *then*, but now the seats of municipalities and states' (265). Melville goes further still, looking beyond the time of Marr toward his own, describing the approach of the twentieth century and its swallowing up of the frontier as an 'unremitting advance' (265). This advance is characterised by a gross excess seen in the 'overpopulous' nature of its cities and the unnaturally 'superabundant wheat harvest' of its agriculture, which he describes as being 'launched' warlike 'upon the world' (265). It is this catastrophe joined to the death of his wife and child that causes Melville to drift into memory and song.

Melville's resistance to any clear division between the ontological and political despair of his poem opens a more satisfying way of understanding the uneasy endings of both *Breath* and *Blood Meridian*. This becomes more apparent when we view the explicit political moments of their endings through a crucial ontological concept inspired by the river.

### Dancing, dancing

One of the most well-known metaphorical uses of the river is the claim, 'no man steps through the same river twice.' The phrase invokes the river in full awareness that the fluvial cycle embodies both man and the natural world's constant repetition, but also evolution. The phrase is a formulation of Heraclitus's philosophy of Panta Rhei, or 'everything flows.'<sup>28</sup> Manuel Broncano has noted the presence of Heraclitus in *Blood Meridian*, pointing out that some key quotations from the judge closely echo those attributed to the Greek philosopher.<sup>29</sup> The presence of a narrative that both repeats and evolves shows that the influence of Heraclitus and his hydrologically inspired thinking on the novels goes beyond allusion.

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<sup>28</sup> Manuel Broncano, *Religion in Cormac McCarthy's Fiction: Apocryphal Borderlands* (New York: Routledge, 2014), p. 5.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

The circular nature of the world is conveyed to both Bruce and the kid through personal encounters with younger reflections of themselves. *Breath* is framed by depictions of the adult Bruce attending a home where a boy appears to have committed suicide by hanging. At the end of the novel, after we have been told of Bruce's experience of erotic asphyxiation with Eva and his experience of thrill seeking in the surf, we find the truth of the boy's fate. Bruce confesses: 'I know the difference between a teenage suicide and a fatal abundance of confidence. I know what a boy looks like when he's strangled himself for fun' (245).

In the final few days of his life, we find the kid on the North Texas plains where he is now known simply as 'the man'. Here, the vacant space for a new 'kid' is filled by a fifteen-year-old called Elrod, whose age, lack of parents, and taste for violence mirrors that of the kid from the beginning of the novel. Their encounter recalls the opening of the novel in surprising ways. It bookends the presence of the slave trade in the book as Elrod and his friends accuse the man of being a slaver, which he forcefully denies, before bringing back to mind the kid's experiences in New Orleans through Elrod's claim that it is where a man can buy shrunken heads (321). This path of conversation even leads to the same outcome as the kid's path through New Orleans. The boy accuses the man of lying, and, on discovering the boy's age, the man recalls: 'I was fifteen year old when I was first shot' (321). Elrod, in turn, mocks the man by unknowingly echoing the manner in which the kid was shot and accusing him of holding the potential to do the same: 'You aint goin to shoot nobody. Maybe in the back or them asleep' (321). The man is clearly reminded of himself. We also see that, despite the journeys the kid has made, the violence he has witnessed, and the sins he has repented of, little has truly changed for him. While the man displays some level of patience with Elrod, when the boy returns in the evening to murder him, the man still shoots and kills him, albeit presenting himself first rather than shooting him in the back (322).

It is in these mirrors of their younger selves that the novel's foundational interest in circularity breaks at their surface. Despite the continuity of a hunger for risk and taste of violence brewing in these young reflections of Bruce and the kid, both end up dead: neither boy survives their anger or thrill-seeking behaviour to complete their own *bildungsroman*. These deaths are not isolated tragedies, but occur within a closing sense of suffocation that will continue to tighten beyond the protagonists' passing.

Bruce notices that the main form of circularity and repetition that his children's generation will experience is destruction. Hand-in-hand with the endangerment of sharks, and polluting of the oceans, Bruce notices a broad cultural fascination with repeat-viewing destruction. As he attends the suffocated boy, he sees flickering in the corner of the room a screensaver of the twin towers 'endlessly falling' (4). This image is mirrored at the end, when he sees on the TV a skier at the Winter Olympics destroy her knee in an accident. He is disturbed by the 'ghoulishly excitable' commentary as the footage played 'time and again' watching the woman scream in pain 'over and again' (243). For the man, the future looks even more bleak than his past, as he watches a twelve-year-old boy 'inanely armed, his eyes skittering' drift 'over the bonestrewn waste toward the naked horizon' (323).

What we are seeing is the difference that a changing ecological consciousness has had upon the concept that 'everything flows.' While for Twain and Melville, human history had indicated to them that the natural world could be bruised but not easily killed by man, for Winton and McCarthy, the possibility that man can cause complete ecological collapse is a pressing possibility. This is not to say that the most crucial concern of the texts is an explicitly environmentalist message, but that this awareness sees a shift in the concept of flow between these writers of different centuries.

Ecological stability allows the concept of flowing to be a complete and closed circle, with the neatly concluded endings of both *Huckleberry Finn* and 'John Marr' reflecting the confidence of their age best voiced by Emerson when he wrote, 'The eye is the first circle; the horizon which it forms is the second; and throughout nature this primary figure is repeated without end.'<sup>30</sup> For Winton and McCarthy, writing in a world all too aware of nature's potential end, the concept of flow is incapable of this eternal completion. In a world of such visible and palpable signs of decline, the concept of circularity transforms into a spiral. Rather than the circular ripples of a pond, which Emerson reads as symbolising 'that every end is a beginning', the circle has transformed for Winton and McCarthy into the vortex of a pond's draining, the water working its way round-and-around to its final wet gasp.<sup>31</sup> It is through this that the novels tie their political and ontological elements to their literature's ecology.

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<sup>30</sup> Ralph Waldo Emerson, 'Circles', *Emerson's Prose and Poetry*, ed. by Joel Porte and Saundra Morris (London: W. W. Norton & Co., 2001), pp. 174–182 (p. 174).

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p. 174.

Their final images show how this shapes the meaning of the texts, and their place in a broader literary tradition.

Following the encounters with reminders of their younger selves and the fate that could easily have befallen them, the narratives are brought to a close with a dance. *Blood Meridian* ends with the grotesque jig of the judge, his 'small feet lively and quick,' making him a 'great favorite' with those who watch and clap him (335). The older Bruce, struggling with injuries, dances on his surfboard when he is at the beach with his daughters:

I slide down the long green walls into the bay to feel what I started out with, what I lost so quickly and for so long: the sweet momentum, the turning force underfoot, and those brief, rare moments of grace. I'm dancing, the way I saw blokes dance down the line forty years ago. (246–247)

In these dances, the novels end by explicitly offering and resisting metaphorical translation. The judge is bloated with allegorical value through his talk of 'the blood of war', and his supernatural aura and menacing dance is almost a depiction of the phrase 'to dance with the devil' (331). Meanwhile, Bruce's dance, which could speak of so much, denies any meaning beyond the beauty of dance in itself, with Bruce's final words in the novel claiming that it is important his daughters see him as 'a man who dances [...] who] does something completely pointless and beautiful, and in this at least he should need no explanation' (247).

These endings and dances knowingly flirt with political and ontological messages, from the extinction and endangerment of animals, to the damage caused to ecosystems, to the claiming of land with bloody histories and by bloody means. Both also speak of the ontological concerns of grace, redemption, and the inescapability of violence and hurt. Yet, what concerns these authors at the end are not the individual thematic lines which have been woven intentionally or not throughout the ecology of their novels, but their momentary conjoining in a place.

The geographer Jon Anderson writes that surfed waves are assemblages, which he defines as 'metaphorical and literal places that, at any moment, emerge in time and space from the web of flows and connections meeting at a particular node.'<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Jon Anderson, 'Relational Places: The Surfed Wave as Assemblage and Convergence,' *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 30 (2012), 570–580 (p. 574).

He also argues that the act of surfing a wave takes it beyond being an assemblage to being a convergence: 'Although this convergence is transient, the emotion formed through it lingers and becomes part of the worldview and aspiration of those who experienced it. These experiences, and the wish for further transient convergence become the "still point" around which surfers orient their lives.'<sup>33</sup> Through this interaction, the wave, which is a symbol of the finiteness of nature by being the expiry of a ripple on the shore of an increasingly polluted sea, is given a significance that echoes beyond its own existence. This is clearly the case for Bruce, whose convergence with the surf provides him with the significant moments—grace and peace—he has been seeking. We might also see the dancing final scene of *Blood Meridian* as a land-based convergence.

The scene can be read as an assemblage. Precisely placed as a unique collection of trajectories in a specific time: it is set in a bar, a location almost defined by its transient coming-and-goings, on a night when the kid sees meteors overhead, just as on the night of his birth, and where he re-crosses paths with the judge. Further, for the reader, the saloon, with its whores, fights and its familiarly alien elements of the Western genre, is marked as a particular moment and location in American history. Like the surfed wave it also becomes more than merely an assemblage. As the judge's dance builds we enter a rhythm: 'He never sleeps. He says that he will never die. He dances in light and in shadow. And he is a great favorite. He never sleeps, the judge. He is dancing, dancing. He says that he will never die' (335). The hypnotic rhythm of the text decontextualizes the judge, whose dance is slowly removed from the saloon to an eternal dancehall of light, shadow, and sleeplessness. The reader is taken with him, like the surfer, out of the particular scene to feel its connection to something larger. What Steven Shaviro has called a 'complicitous joy' and Georg Guillemin a 'strange euphoria' in reading this moment is the same as what Anderson identifies as the surfer's feeling of being 'stoked,' a 'feeling of intense elation that ensnares a board rider.'<sup>34</sup> McCarthy's novel breaks like a wave as the judge's momentarily eternal dance is broken by the bold words 'THE END' (335). This ending is in turn revealed to be an illusion when we are greeted

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p. 583.

<sup>34</sup> Steven Shaviro, '"The Very Life of Darkness": A reading of *Blood Meridian*', *Perspectives on Cormac McCarthy*, eds. Edwin T. Arnold and Dianne Luce, rev. ed. (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 1999), pp. 145–158 (p. 146); Guillemin, p. 101; Anderson, p. 576.

with another, smaller wave of text in the epilogue. The epilogue, in turn, ends with a sense of grim continuation by concluding its description of a man fencing the West, and indeed the novel, with the words: 'Then they all move on again' (337).

Through these moments of assemblage and convergence, McCarthy and Winton end at moments that entangle without tying the political and ontological narratives. These narratives end with a greater sense of political urgency than either of their literary ancestors, lacking both Twain's optimism for the future and Melville's faith in nature to provide healing, seeing its increasing need of healing from man. Any faith that man is an improving subject within a cyclical renewal of life and nature has transformed into awareness that man is actively turning the cycle of renewal into a spiral of destruction. The greatest achievement of these novels is that in their own pirouetting endings, on the deck of the surfboard and the boards of a Texan Saloon, neither novel is overburdened by the urgency of their political concerns or the weight of their ontological musings. Instead, these dances, which occur on the edges of fluvially engaged literary geographies and narratives, take the works out of their context, granting them an almost ecological perspective from which to celebrate the beauty, grace, violence and darkness of man in the world.

## Lines: From Sea to Shining Sea

O beautiful for spacious skies,  
 For amber waves of grain,  
 For purple mountain majesties  
 Above the fruited plain!  
 America! America!  
 God shed his grace on thee  
 And crown thy good with brotherhood  
 From sea to shining sea!

O beautiful for pilgrim feet  
 Whose stern impassioned stress  
 A thoroughfare of freedom beat  
 Across the wilderness!  
 America! America!  
 God mend thine every flaw,  
 Confirm thy soul in self-control,  
 Thy liberty in law!

Katharine Lee Bates, 'America The Beautiful'<sup>1</sup>

Lawrence Buell suggests that Australia and America's entanglement with Europe manifests itself in their national traditions' embrace of the outsider figure. Buell attributes this to 'an after-effect of Euro-settler diaspora conditioning its subjects to conceive themselves as denizens of a frontier or periphery rather than as a centre of anything.'<sup>2</sup> Although Tim Winton and Cormac McCarthy follow Twain's lead in writing fiction that is centred on its own ecology, their persistent interest in the

<sup>1</sup> Katharine Lee Bates, 'America the Beautiful', *America the Beautiful and Other Poems* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Co., 1911), p. 3.

<sup>2</sup> Lawrence Buell, 'Antipodal Propinquities? Environmental (Mis)Perceptions in American and Australian Literary History', *Reading Across the Pacific Australia–United States Intellectual Histories*, ed. by Robert Dixon and Nicholas Birns (Sydney: Sydney University Press, 2010), pp. 3–22 (p. 6).

outsider figure suggests a continued interest in acknowledging the significance of connections between their New World geographies, and the Old World of their ancestors. Works such as McCarthy's *Child of God* (1973), *Blood Meridian* (1985), and the Border Trilogy, as well as Winton's *An Open Swimmer* (1982), *In the Winter Dark* (1988), and *Dirt Music* (2001) focus on figures at the geographical and social edges of communities that are also often on the fringes of their nations. The presence of the outsider figure is also a paratextual feature of their work, with the authors sharing a reputation as literary outsiders. Both are known to eschew literary hubs and communities in favour of the western geographies that inspire their fiction.<sup>3</sup> This reputation has been embraced by Winton, who famously acknowledges that his work has been shaped by growing up aware that, as an aspiring novelist, he was 'on the wrong side of the wrong country in the wrong hemisphere.'<sup>4</sup>

Despite adopting—or having thrust upon them—this public identity as outsider authors of outsider books, both writers have, ironically, become influential figures writing novels that have become canonised in their national literary traditions. This paradoxical association with the outsider figure has contributed to critiques of their novels that occasionally stray close to *ad hominem* accusations that the authors are socially and politically regressive. Robert Dixon reads Winton's *Cloudstreet* as bound to baby-boomer conservatism.<sup>5</sup> Christine Granados criticises McCarthy's works for relying upon 'stereotypes and archetypes' but evidences this by accusing the 'Rhode Island-born' McCarthy of wearing his publicity-shy life in El Paso 'like a fashionable sweater.'<sup>6</sup> This apprehension about the author's embrace of the outsider is legitimate, but their investigation is unsophisticated. The legitimacy of these concerns is better served through an investigation of McCarthy's *Outer Dark* (1968) and Winton's *The Riders* (1994), whose outsider figures complicate Dixon and Granados' accusation of their regressive conservatism.

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<sup>3</sup> Kylie Northover, 'Look Who's Talking', *The Sydney Morning Herald* (30 July 2012) <[goo.gl/IOcM1g](https://goo.gl/IOcM1g)> [Accessed 04 September 2016]; Tim Adams, 'Cormac McCarthy: America's Great Poetic Visionary', *The Guardian* (20 December 2009) <[goo.gl/nx3dS3](https://goo.gl/nx3dS3)> [Accessed 04 September 2016].

<sup>4</sup> John Tague, 'The Big Kahuna: Tim Winton's new novel explores why the young heed the call of the surf', *The Independent* (3 May 2009) <[goo.gl/mw2iYj](https://goo.gl/mw2iYj)> [Accessed 04 September 2016].

<sup>5</sup> Robert Dixon, 'Tim Winton, *Cloudstreet* and the field of Australian Literature', *Westerly*, 50 (2005), pp. 240–260.

<sup>6</sup> Christine Granados, 'Cormac McCarthy doesn't know the American south-west', *The Guardian* (14 April 2010) <<https://goo.gl/IVFswi>> [Accessed 21 July 2016].

Initially, both works heighten the critical suspicion of the writers' politically regressive valorisation of the outsider. The protagonists are given their outsider status partly along national and economic lines, but most crucially through their inability, or unwillingness, to articulate themselves. Culla Holme's communicative isolation is partly economic, with the reader learning early in the narrative that he cannot read or write.<sup>7</sup> But it is not solely this that isolates him, with his equally inarticulate sister being welcomed and helped by those she meets on her journey. What separates them is Culla's often sour tone and clipped rudeness (84, 233). Scully is made an outsider less by his inability than his unwillingness to communicate the distress he feels about his wife's unexplained abandonment of him and his daughter. Even when given the opportunity to confide in his closest friends, he obeys an 'iron impulse [...] to shut up and get on with it, to stop feeling and start acting'.<sup>8</sup> Both men fit the moulds of the uncommunicative masculine figures of the Western, whose silence, Jane Tompkins argues, 'establishes male superiority and silences the one who would engage in conversation'.<sup>9</sup> The troubling masculinity of such figures is further examined in chapter three. This chapter explores how the position of the novels within their oeuvre and the context of their composition prompts a more subtle deployment of the outsider figure.

Critical struggles with both works have meant that they loiter on the edges of Winton and McCarthy's oeuvres. Critical engagements with *Outer Dark* often end up with more questions than answers, or with uncomfortable and unsatisfactory attempts to explain it as allegorical.<sup>10</sup> Matthew Guinn has proposed that these difficulties arise because the novel actively defies criticism.<sup>11</sup> *The Riders* is exceptional for being simultaneously one of his most internationally praised novels, having been shortlisted for the Booker Prize in 1995, and also one of the least critically discussed. Only a handful of scholarly articles have engaged with the novel in the twenty-two

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<sup>7</sup> Cormac McCarthy, *Outer Dark* (London: Picador, 2010), p. 8 (All subsequent references are to this edition).

<sup>8</sup> Tim Winton, *The Riders* (London: Picador, 2006), p. 115 (All subsequent references are to this edition).

<sup>9</sup> Jane Tompkins, *West of Everything: The Inner Life of Westerns* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 59.

<sup>10</sup> John M. Grammar, 'A Thing Against Which Time Will Not Prevail: Pastoral and History in Cormac McCarthy's South', *Southern Quarterly*, 30:4 (1992), pp. 19–30.

<sup>11</sup> Matthew Guinn, 'Ruder forms survive: Cormac McCarthy's atavistic vision', *Myth, Legend, Dust: Critical Responses to Cormac McCarthy*, ed. by Rick Wallach (Manchester: MUP, 2000), pp. 108–115 (p. 114).

years since its publication, and the most comprehensive publication on Winton's work, 2014's *Tim Winton: Critical Essays*, addresses it only indirectly.<sup>12</sup>

This exceptional critical position of both works corresponds with their exceptional geographical position, with both novels being written in or from the writers' European experiences. Winton spent time living in Ireland, France and Greece between 1987 and 1988, an experience which inspired him to write Fred Scully's journey across Europe to discover why his wife has left him and his daughter.<sup>13</sup> McCarthy spent 1965–67 travelling through Ireland, England, France, Switzerland, Italy, and Spain before briefly settling in Ibiza.<sup>14</sup> It was during this period that he revised and completed *Outer Dark*, the brooding tale of Culla and Rinth Holme, an incestuous brother and sister, as they separately journey through Appalachia to find the tinker who has taken their infant child.<sup>15</sup> Shared plots in which outsiders attempt to locate and repair their fractured sense of home—or literally to find their Holme—suggest that these experiences influenced the development of these outsiders.

Winton acknowledges the significance of his European experience in the opening of his memoir *Island Home*, in which his reflection on his homeland starts not from within, but outside. The book opens with a memory of a walk with his son through Ireland. During the walk, he realised that: 'I assumed our mounting fractiousness was the result of cultural fatigue—the perpetual bafflement at local customs and manners—but the real source was physical confinement and an absence of wilderness.'<sup>16</sup> Prompted by Winton's observation, this chapter is alert to how both authors' experience of Europe may have unsettled their bearings, and sparked a geographically focused exploration of home from an outsider perspective. This attention does not build a defence of the outsider figure and his politically troubling baggage. Instead, it proposes that the outsider has a more nuanced presence in these two novels, enabling an exploration of the outsider's position between the Old and

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<sup>12</sup> Lyn McCredden and Nathanael O'Reilly, eds., *Tim Winton: Critical Essays* (Crawley: UWA, 2014).

<sup>13</sup> Tim Winton, 'The Island Seen and Felt: Some Thoughts About Landscape', talk delivered at the Royal Academy (15 November 2013).

<sup>14</sup> Marty Priola, 'Biography', The Official Cormac McCarthy Society Website, <[cormacmccarthy.com/biography](http://cormacmccarthy.com/biography)> (4 August 2013) [Accessed 27 August 2016].

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Tim Winton, *Island Home* (London: Picador, 2015), p. 5.

New Worlds. To unravel this, I will chart a reading of both works against Kathy Bates' 'America the Beautiful'.

Originally penned as a poem, 'America the Beautiful' has evolved into a patriotic anthem second only to 'The Star-Spangled Banner.' The popular music charts testified to the continuing appeal and relevance of the song when Whitney Houston successfully re-released her versions of both songs in the weeks following 9/11.<sup>17</sup> It is a stereotypically patriotic anthem that seems to confirm the worst of international suspicion that the USA still clings to a vision of itself as an exceptional nation with a God-given destiny. I open this chapter with the poem not because it is particularly good, but because it illustrates the persistent, if clichéd and contentious, exceptionalist values of the American cultural tradition from which McCarthy and Winton draw inspiration. It is the song's geographically symbolic atmosphere that makes it such a powerful hymn for American exceptionalism: with the images of impassioned pilgrims forming a path of freedom through the wilderness by the grace of God articulating clichés both celebrated and derided within contemporary America. The song's key symbolic power stems from the line; all of its components, the journey west, the pilgrim song, the treading of paths, and the impassioned stress of feet contribute to an optimistic line that points toward not only the west, but also the future and the nation's manifest destiny. These are also features that are crucial to *Outer Dark* and *The Riders*, with their narratives being constructed from journeys west, paths, roads, boots, and mud.

Tracing the geophysical presence of these features throughout the narratives helps us realise that, unlike Bates' symbolic deployment of them, the lines and paths they tread are, as Robert Macfarlane notes, 'linear only in a simple sense.'<sup>18</sup> As the protagonists tread these lines, their outsider status allows the novels to articulate how their nations' historic relationship with Europe has influenced their identities and affected their sense of home.

## Journeying West

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<sup>17</sup> The re-release was number 21 in Billboard's hot 100 singles of 2001, *Billboard* 113:52 (29 Dec 2001), p. 41.

<sup>18</sup> Robert Macfarlane, *The Old Ways* (London: Penguin, 2012), p. 22.

The two seas of ‘America the Beautiful’ signify the past and future: the old Atlantic of the British Empire, and the ‘shining’ Pacific of America’s future. The song’s signature line ‘from sea to shining sea’ both describes a march away from the Atlantic and ties the poem to its colonial heritage, being adapted from the Virginia charter of 1612 in which King James I granted the colony ‘the land throughout from sea to sea.’<sup>19</sup> The seeming inescapability of such references to colonial pasts, even when attempting to deny their influence, leads Paul Giles to describe the USA and Australia as existing in ‘a triangular relationship with Great Britain.’<sup>20</sup> This triangular relationship is also exposed and examined through *The Riders* and *Outer Dark*’s westward-wandering plots.

*The Riders* is structured around the protagonists, Scully and his daughter Billie, as they make two trips west. The first journey occurs before the novel’s events, with Scully and Billie voyaging from Australia across Europe and settling in Ireland with their wife and mother, Jennifer, as she searches for a more satisfying life and career. The second journey forms the plot of the novel and begins when Jennifer never returns from selling their house in Australia, abandoning Billie at some point on their journey back to Ireland. Scully and Billie’s journey west, retracing their original steps from Greece to Amsterdam in search of their mother, exposes their position as outsiders in the European landscape. The continent is consistently painted in terms of its unfamiliarity, with Scully finding the very sensation of walking upon it alien, being ‘too soft, too spongy underfoot’ (53). This feeling of alienation heightens as his journey leads him to perceive Europe through increasingly exhausted and booze-stained eyes.

*Outer Dark* offers a more ambiguous and un-chartable journey west as Culla Holme searches for his sister Rinth. In turn, she searches for the tinker who has taken their infant son, abandoned by Culla in the woods. Their journeys intersect with the path of a mysterious triune who travel the region killing without aim. The tale’s dense woods and Southern inflections indicate that they are journeying through Appalachia, but the precise locations are left ambiguous. We are only given the vague directions of Culla and Rinth’s journey, told at various times that they travel north

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<sup>19</sup> William Waller Henning, *Henning’s Statutes at Large 1619-1669* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1969), p. 88.

<sup>20</sup> Paul Giles, *Antipodean America: Australia and the Constitution of U.S Literature* (Oxford: OUP, 2014), p. 6.

and south, but mainly west (4, 27, 219). The east is only mentioned as the direction from which the sun rises to chase Culla west across the land and into the outer dark (150). The novels' western journeys lend the narratives a political weight that challenges Kathy Lee Bates' nationalistic optimism about her nation's march into the west.

*Outer Dark* is immediately connected to the history of the United States' Western expansion through its Appalachian setting. The mountains and the thick forests that enshadow the novel also formed an intimidating gateway for those answering the call to 'Go West' and pursue a better life in the plains beyond.<sup>21</sup> The towns and paths that lead through and interrupt the dense woods of *Outer Dark* indicate the region's economic development beyond a western frontier but the development is neither total nor without victim. Development has made it a place where 'shiftlessness is a sin' (49) and slaves labour 'in the gloom' (44) in order to maintain the nation's rising economic trajectory. It is not just slaves who suffer at the hands of this modernity. Characters like Rinty and Culla, in poverty of work or education, or ill-suited to this modernising economy, are left on the fringes of society, or, like the tinker, 'rocked and shot at and whipped and kicked and dogbit' (199).

As the western journey of *The Riders* stumbles through the west of Europe rather than Australia, it forms more of an ancestral journey home. As Scully responds to Pete's question about his Irish ancestry, 'Well, bog-Irish maybe a long way back. Desert Irish by now' (18). Scully is only in Europe reluctantly, with his presence a result of Jennifer's belief that her creative identity could only be nurtured away from Australia (40). His homesickness requires reflections on elements of Western Australia that he does not miss, reflections that correspond with *Outer Dark*'s sober view of western expansion. He reminds himself that he experienced only two ways to live in Western Australia. Primarily, he has been 'ridden, paid out on ruthlessly or ignored' as a labourer in construction, farming, or fishing, a career path which has given him a scarred face and wonky eye after being beaten by the captain of a lobster boat (9). The second option was to work with 'the real bastards', 'whitebread heroes [...] men who'd murder you with words for the sheer pleasure of it' (35). Scully even wonders if he agreed to buy the farm-house in Ireland because it was subconsciously a way for him to buy back the life that was robbed from his father

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<sup>21</sup> Hugh Brogan, *The Penguin History of the USA* (London: Penguin, 2001), pp. 221–222.

when 'the suits slipped in' and took his farm before swooping in again upon his 'quick decline' (46).

These stark elements of the West as a place of economic and financial struggle challenge its historical associations with promise and prosperity that was propagated by material such as 'America the Beautiful'.<sup>22</sup> Although these perceptions are critical, they do not prompt the novels to give a subversive or revisionist view of their nations' histories courtesy of their European perspective. Instead, they explore how the difficult realities of their western geographies have been informed by a historic European gaze that decreed their lands naturally wild but culturally barren.

Nathanael Hawthorne famously agreed with this European assessment of the New World colonies, explaining that lack of culture was a symptom of sparse history:

No author [ . . . ] can conceive of the difficulty of writing a romance about a country where there is no shadow, no mystery, no picturesque and gloomy wrong, nor anything but a commonplace prosperity, in broad and simple daylight, as is happily the case with my dear native land [ . . . ] Romance and poetry, ivy, lichens, and wallflowers need ruin to make them grow.<sup>23</sup>

The novels respond by considering how these assessments rely on misunderstandings of the American and Australian geographies and a false dichotomy between geography and culture. They expose how their nations' geographies do not replace a lack of history but bring their deep layers of history and culture to the surface.

*The Riders* responds almost directly to Hawthorne's assessment as Scully expresses his own admiration for European architecture so weathered as to have become indistinguishable from the landscape:

Scully had long thought that architecture was what you had instead of landscape, a signal of loss, of imitation. Europe had it in spades because the land was gone. The wildness was no longer even a memory. But this . . . this was where architecture *became* landscape. It took scale and time, something strangely beyond the human. (49)

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<sup>22</sup> For Western Australia, the false notion of prosperity was in its very founding, with Captain James Stirling exaggerating the suitability of the Swan River and filling the heads of English migrants with 'promises of Arcadia.' (Hughes, p. 575)

<sup>23</sup> Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Marble Faun* (Oxford: OUP, 2008), p. 4.

Where Hawthorne saw the architectural history of Europe as superior to America's vast tracts of wild landscape, Scully simply sees difference. He admires the architectural bones of Europe, but longs for the vast wild spaces of Australia. This difference rises to the surface of the novel through a small but crucial poetic description of Western Australia encountered toward the end of the book:

Out of the rumours of places, of the red desert spaces where heat is born, a wind comes hard across the capstone country of juts and bluffs, pressing heathland flat in withering bursts. Only modest undulations are left here. Land is peeled back to bedrock, to ancient, stubborn remains that hold fast in the continental gusts. (241)

The rhyming opening line defies Hawthorne's claim that poetry needs ruins to grow. This poetry emerges from the mysterious 'rumours of places' and, clings to 'ancient stubborn remains' which 'hold fast in the continental gusts.' These remains are not a man-made ruin, but a growing natural monument to the island's unique geological construction, the Pinnacles of Western Australia.



Figure 2.1: The Pinnacles

The narrator conjures the emergence of the Pinnacles over tens of thousands of years, with the calcification of sandstone around fossilised roots, and revealed only as the 'continental gusts' slowly sweep away the sand that envelops them.<sup>24</sup> These structures could easily fool a visitor into believing they were ancient weathered ruins or standing stones. In reality, they are hypnotic examples of a continental stability that gives the young nation a skin of deep geological history. Julie Laity writes: '[in] Australia, certain landscape elements are exhumed surfaces that developed well before the onset of aridity at about 0.91 million years ago.'<sup>25</sup> The accessibility of this history, which predates any European ruin, provides the novel with a deep geological context for the country's human history.

Immediately following the description of the pinnacles, the omniscient narrator describes an equally beautiful but chaotic scene:

Fish rise as blown sparks from the deep itching with the change. Sand, leaves, twigs, seeds, insects, and even exhausted birds rain down upon the fish who surge in schools and alone, their fins laid back with acceleration as they lunge and turn and break open the water's crust to gulp the richness of the sky, filling their bellies with land. And behind them others come, slick and pelagic to turn the water pink with death and draw birds from the invisible distance who crash the surface and spear meat and wheel in a new falling cloud upon the ocean. Out at the perimeter a lone fish, big as a man, twists out into the air, its eye black with terror as it cartwheels away from its own pursuer. There is no ceasing. (241-242)

The scene's significance is cryptic, being entirely separate from the plot of the novel. When considered in the geological context of the Pinnacles, it appears to establish the idea that the 'chase' and its violence are an integral part of nature. The final line, 'There is no ceasing', indicates that this single moment of ecological turning, as the food chain reveals itself in a violent flurry, has occurred over the hundreds of thousands of years to which the Pinnacles have stood witness. The scene also shimmers with potential metaphors for the violence of European discovery, colonisation, and settling of Australia, as various creatures 'descend' from an

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<sup>24</sup> Matej Lipar, 'Pinnacle syngenetic karst in nambung national park, Western Australia', *Acta Carsologica*, 38:1 (2009), 41-50.

<sup>25</sup> Julie Laity, *Deserts and Desert Environments* (London: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), p. 1.

‘invisible distance’, ‘spearing meat’, spilling blood, and twisting in ‘terror’. These shimmers are tantalising, but they are also cold. We could extrapolate from such a metaphorical reading a belief similar to that held by many nineteenth-century Americans, including Walt Whitman: conflict between colonial and indigenous peoples, even the destruction of native peoples, are disturbing, but inevitable when seen in the context of geological and evolutionary history.<sup>26</sup> *Outer Dark* plays with a similar proposal in its own attempt to reassess how American geography manifests history differently to Europe.

Julie Laity observes that ‘the tectonic stability of Australia contrasts sharply with the youth and tectonic instability of arid North America.’<sup>27</sup> This contrast infiltrates *Outer Dark*, with Appalachia feeling more rapid and mobile than Winton’s deep-time evocations of Australia’s geology. Places are introduced and left in a matter of pages, animals burst from the forest only to disappear in seconds, while houses and buildings seem ever on the brink of being digested by nature. As with Winton’s text, we see a geographical pace manifest most precisely in an isolated poetic moment near the end of the novel.

This moment focuses on the hanging body of the Tinker after being killed by the triune. The scene describes the body over a series of seasons being consumed by the forest. First vultures come and ‘leave him naked of his rags and flesh’ (247). Mandrakes ‘pierce his breast and flower in a green boutonniere’ (247). Seasons of wind and snow loose his bones, which fall to the ground below. Finally, all that is left is ‘his bleached and weathered brisket hung in that lonesome wood like a bone birdcage.’ All of this goes unnoticed by those who ‘passed that way’ (247). In contrast to *The Riders*’ stable Australian geography, this more tectonically active and fertile land digests rather than preserves.

These scenes sense their antipodal geological foundations rendering human history minuscule. Against the steadiness of the Australian geology, human movements and settlements appear fleeting, while the rich instability of the Appalachian landscape quickly and easily digests the artefacts of human presence. Human history is not irrelevant in either work, a perspective that would connect them with troublingly dispassionate views on the struggles of indigenous peoples after the arrival of white settlers. What these distinctly poetic scenes provoke is a

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<sup>26</sup> Ed Folsom, *Walt Whitman’s Native Representations* (Cambridge: CUP, 1994), pp. 55-99.

<sup>27</sup> Laity, p. 2.

consideration of how America and Australia's unique geological constructions embrace their history and cultures differently to Europe. It is this sensitivity to the land that prompts both stories to explore how the key to understanding these contrasting geographies is an appreciation of various types of line.

## Lines

In *Lines: a Brief History* (2007), Tim Ingold conveys the broad importance of lines: 'What do walking, weaving, observing, singing, storytelling, and writing have in common? The answer is that they all proceed along lines of one kind or another.'<sup>28</sup> Appreciating the diversity of the line's significance becomes crucial in both novels, with the reading of 'threads and traces' opening their characters' quests.<sup>29</sup>

After Culla abandons his child in the woods, the tinker happens across his footprints. His accurate reading of the prints gives us a deeper insight into Culla than any of his speech: 'their maker had met in this forest some dark other self in chemistry with whom he had been fused traceless from the earth' (2). Culla, wary of the potential for people to read his prints, begins to erase them from his path (122).

Scully plunges into his journey when analysing the flights that departed around the time Jennifer must have abandoned Billie. He sees a flight to Greece and concludes: 'God, it *was* a message. She needed to talk, to meet, but somewhere safe, somewhere familiar. Like the island, where things had been best' (110).

These moments of reading lines, which dramatically affect the plots, indicate an interest in the blurred divide between physical and narrative lines. This is an interest that deepens throughout the narratives and connects them to Aboriginal Australian thinking. It is also only with an awareness of such thinking that we can read the line's deeper significance.

The importance of Australian Aboriginal thinking to the intertwining of narrative and physical lines is emphasised when Ingold immediately reaches to the tradition of songlines as an example of the line's metaphysical and cultural power. Ingold describes songlines as 'the lines along which ancestral beings sang the world into existence in the Dreaming, and they are retraced in the comings and goings, as

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<sup>28</sup> Tim Ingold, *Lines: a brief history* (London: Rutledge, 2007), p. 1.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 2.

well as the singing and storytelling, of their contemporary reincarnations.<sup>30</sup> Songlines have often been misunderstood and misrepresented in Western culture, a tone set by one of the works that brought the concept into public consciousness beyond Australia, Bruce Chatwin's 1987 travelogue *The Songlines*. Although popular and admired, the book was also criticised for being occasionally simplistic and unreliable—a criticism subsequent work has struggled to avoid.<sup>31</sup>

Diana James, the head of a current anthropological research project on songlines, offers a concise illustration of songlines as she recounts the knowledge of them held by a Pitjantjatjara elder: 'When he sings he sees country with the acuity of an eagle as it soars over the desert, a detailed topographic and cultural map of the land rolling out before his mind's eye.'<sup>32</sup> These songs are not simply sung directions, but musical stories: 'It is more complicated than learning all the verses by heart [..] The song which often includes body painting and dance is sung to conjure the right image and sense of place, thus enabling the traveller to continue the journey.'<sup>33</sup>

David Nye's exploration of Native American relationships with the land opens up a potentially comparable valuing of the physical and narrative line in Navajo culture: 'These [sacred] sites are apprehended not as isolated but as integral parts of the larger landscape. When anthropologists ask about places, the replies are often organised as stories, and these tales link sacred spaces both to rituals and to the central myths of Navajo society.'<sup>34</sup> This may account for the similar resonances in McCarthy's, with Georg Guillemin noting that 'McCarthy's ecopastoralism betrays more affinity with Native American Animism (and European mysticism) than with ecopastoral regionalism of the American south or west.'<sup>35</sup> This entanglement of different traditional thinking about the lines presents a productive, but also politically awkward confluence to trace.

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 80.

<sup>31</sup> Emma Sleath, with Nadine Maloney, 'Researcher defends Aboriginal songline project', *ABC Alice Springs* (27 March 2014) <<http://goo.gl/wizxcX>> [Accessed 21 July 2016].

<sup>32</sup> Diana James, 'Signposted by Song: cultural routes of the Australian desert', *Historic Environment*, 25:3 (2013), pp. 30–42 (p. 32).

<sup>33</sup> Hannah Rachel Bell, *Storymen* (Cambridge: CUP, 2009), p. 79.

<sup>34</sup> David E. Nye, *America as Second Creation: Technology and Narratives of New Beginnings* (London: MIT Press, 2004), p. 2.

<sup>35</sup> Georg Guillemin, *The Pastoral Vision of Cormac McCarthy* (Texas A & M University Press, 2004), p. 146.

A significant concern for this chapter, and for the novels, is how the interest of both stories in extracting a sense of cultural history from the land with a sensitivity to its relationship with lines risks wrongly appropriating Aboriginal beliefs. Such an exploration could be seen as a misguided attempt to extract a contested history from a dispossessed ground and with appropriated means. Such concerns are necessary, with a difficult history of ‘researchers “taking” Indigenous knowledge and artefacts to store in institutions remote from the people and their lands [being] a raw wound for many indigenous peoples in Australia.<sup>36</sup> Even Diana James’ project on songlines, which was clearly sensitive to this history and conducted in co-operation with senior men and women from the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara lands, has been criticised by some senior men from the community of Amata.<sup>37</sup>

This sensitivity is particularly raw in the Australian consciousness with an easily accessed public vein of anxiety and even guilt over the Anglo-Australian presence. This is a feeling that has prompted the noted Australian anthropologist Peter Read to ask: ‘How can we non-indigenous Australians justify our continuous presence and our love for this country while the Indigenous people remain dispossessed and their history unacknowledged?’<sup>38</sup>

An awareness of the risk of appropriation has slipped deeply into Australian literature, affecting fictional representations of Aboriginal peoples and cultures. Kate Grenville has written about her caution in representing Aboriginal characters in her novel *The Secret River* (2005), deciding not to enter the consciousness of aboriginal cultures because she ‘didn’t know or understand enough’ and ‘felt [she] never would.’<sup>39</sup> The complexity of treading this line is evident in the criticism surrounding Winton in which he has been both criticised for not writing enough aboriginal characters, and for oversimplifying their representation when they are present.<sup>40</sup>

Within this atmosphere of caution, the artist and Ngarinyin lawman David Mowaljarlai has made significant observations on the compatibility of Aboriginal thinking about lines with the Anglo-Australian Christian tradition. When asked by

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<sup>36</sup> James, p. 37.

<sup>37</sup> Sleath & Maloney.

<sup>38</sup> Peter Read, *Belonging: Australians, Place and Aboriginal Ownership* (Cambridge: CUP, 2000), p. 1.

<sup>39</sup> Kate Grenville, *Searching for The Secret River* (London: Canongate, 2007), p. 193.

<sup>40</sup> Griffiths, Michael R., ‘Winton’s Spectralities, or What Haunts *Cloudstreet*? ’ *Tim Winton: Critical Essays*, ed. by Lyn McCredden and Nathanael O’Reilly (Crawley, WA: UWAP, 2014), pp. 75–95.

an Anglo-Australian guest whether he 'believed in God' Mowaljarlai and a fellow Ngarinyin man answered:

Old Man: Missionary gave us God ... we believe that God, little baby Jesus ....

Yeah, 'e aright. We got dance for that li'l baby.

Mowaljarlai: Y'see that Christian God, Jesus, 'e come from wunggud. I know that thing. One time I'm in hospital ... really sick ... and I'm see Jesus. I'm see the whole company of heaven. There was angels descending and upending in light ... the whole glory of God. It was really beautiful! Gala we call that thing. That light. But you know ... we don't have that milli milli ... That Bible. Our law ... 'e written in the land. Nobody can write that story ... 'e fixed in the land. We can't change that story. That's our law.<sup>41</sup>

For Mowaljarlai, the different religious strands of Anglo-Australian and Aboriginal-Australian cultures do not have to be kept entirely separate. In his mind, the Christianity brought by the 'whitefellas' culture has a place within his Ngarinyin understanding of the world. He has encountered Jesus and angels, and by singing and dancing it into their culture while remaining alert to the law in the land, it has not threatened his Ngarinyin understanding of the world.

The potential for such complimentary rather than contrasting cultural encounters is indicated by the mutual Aboriginal Australian and Western importance of lines. Narrative and physical lines are valued throughout Western culture. Ingold follows many of these: from the cultural significance of roads to our interest in, and in some cases social stratification along, genealogical lines. In the Christian worldview, Jesus is frequently understood to be setting a path for man to follow. His most crucial claim, 'I am the way, the truth, and the life. No man cometh unto the father but by me' (John 14:6, KJV), presents Jesus as treading a line which, if followed on earth, would lead to heaven. Even the idea that Jesus can be seen in the land is prompted in the Bible when Jesus responds to the Pharisees attempts to silence his preaching disciples: 'if these should hold their peace, the stones would immediately cry out' (Luke 19:40, KJV).

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<sup>41</sup> Bell, p. 55.

It is the potential for these mutualities that fascinates Winton, who claims: 'I have a particular interest in Ngarinyin thinking, which has curious and delightful things in common with much Christian mystical thought.'<sup>42</sup> Winton acknowledges this when recalling time he spent with a Ngarinyin storyteller, attributing their affinities to shared experiences of 'stories rising up from the dirt under your feet'.<sup>43</sup> But even the mutual significance of lines has made the valuing of such similarities complicated, with a history of such Christian ideas subduing rather than communing the cultures of the lands.

Both novels express an awareness of this history as they play with their nations' colonial associations with Christian spiritual realms, aligning America with the promised land—heaven on earth—and viewing Australia as the earthly incarnation of Hell. These associations emerged from their landscapes, with Tim Flannery arguing: 'The North American experience of "ecological release" encouraged its inhabitants to develop new ways of harvesting an almost unimaginable natural plenty, while the Australians found themselves facing adversity almost from the moment they entered the continent.'<sup>44</sup> These differences in climate and abundance corresponded with the classical view of Heaven being above, and Hell being below, associations that were further solidified by the British Empire's use of Australia as place of earthly punishment. The ease with which Europeans applied their set religious thinking upon these geographies, and its dark consequences, concern both novels.

This difficult history hangs over *Outer Dark*. The novel's title refers to three passages from the book of Matthew all of which deal with the same essential theme, best illustrated by Matthew 8:

And I say unto you, That many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven. But the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. And Jesus said unto the centurion, Go thy way;

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<sup>42</sup> Paul Mitchell, 'Not Real but True: Tim Winton and the Spirit of Fiction', *BreakPoint* (April 14 2008) (published 2008 on Breakpoint.org, 2006 in print) <goo.gl/jaoYbu> [Accessed 09 September 2016].

<sup>43</sup> Bell, p. 154.

<sup>44</sup> Tim Flannery, *The Eternal Frontier: An Ecological History of North America and Its Peoples* (London: Penguin, 2007), p. 291.

and as thou hast believed, so be it done unto thee. And his servant was healed in the selfsame hour. (Matt 8:11-13, KJV)

The story refers to the Jews casting the Canaanites out of the Promised Land to explain how many will also be cast out of heaven. Read in one light, we can see the story of the nativity as one of grace and forgiveness, with Jesus coming to grant the sinful access to heaven. Seen in another, it becomes a tale of damnation where the failure to follow the prescribed path shown by Jesus casts man into the 'outer dark'. The novel plays with this polarised way of viewing a 'promised land' through the transformation of agrarian weapons, meant to reap the bountiful harvests, into 'crude agrarian weapons' at the hands of the triune (35). The novel's emphasis on the violence of this harvest corresponds with the violence the story enabled, with dire consequences for native inhabitants of colonies where zealous Christians conflated religious conversion with cultural transformation.<sup>45</sup>

*The Riders* displays the same discomfort with Biblically founded colonial associations of Australia. While *Outer Dark* plays with America's association with the Promised Land, Scully experiences Australia's association with Hell, courtesy of the colonial identification of it as 'the continent of sin'.<sup>46</sup> The remnants of this association hang heavily around Scully when in the company of Europeans, who often joke about his nation's convict past. He sees himself as a visual confirmation of this association, aware that his scarred face makes him look 'like a convict', validating 'every Englishman's deep and haughty suspicion' (69). This suspicion begins as a joke, but reveals its more sinister presence when Marianne accuses Scully of beating Jennifer, going so far as to liken him to a demon whose wonky eye makes her 'think of beasts' (281). This historical association made it easier for glib and simple stereotyping of aborigines as 'lords of the soil'.<sup>47</sup> It also normalised a culture of violent 'punishment' that embittered the convict population and its ancestors to the aboriginal people, with Robert Hughes arguing that 'the cruelty of the authorities toward whites was stored up as blind resentment in the convict *lumpenproletariat*, and discharged [...] upon the blacks'.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Hughes, p. 44; Brogan, pp. 57–58.

<sup>46</sup> Hughes, p. 275.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., p. 279.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., p. 278.

Winton is not ignorant of this difficult history, or the need to be sensitive to it. In an interview with Britta Kuhlenbeck, Winton was asked if he identified with Indigenous Australian beliefs:

Well no, I don't identify with them, but I am interested in Aboriginal cultures and histories. I've been fortunate enough to have experienced some special places and to have been told stories, and I'm interested in the mutualities, the crossovers in outlook. There is no monolithic Aboriginal culture, or language, or reality. Each has its own landscape that relates almost literally geographically with others. But I'm no expert on things Aboriginal. I'm curious, I try to be respectful.<sup>49</sup>

It is this willingness to be respectfully curious that enables both Winton and McCarthy to navigate the difficult set of cultural crossovers that their nations' geographies inspire. It is also what allows us to productively read these connections out of their novels. This respectful curiosity to the diversity of the line manifests itself in the novels' as their plots are shaped not by paths but the immediately responsive act of wayfaring.

### Paths and Wayfaring

To follow a path is to follow a tradition, treading in the same tracks formed by the continued treading of people or animals. Wayfaring is an alternative mode of traversing the landscape less dictated by the past. Ingold describes a wayfarer as 'a being who, in following a path of life, negotiates or improvises a passage as he goes along. In his movement, as in life, his concern is to seek a way through: not to reach a specific destination or terminus but to keep on going.'<sup>50</sup> Philip Vannini and Jonathan Taggart develop the significance of the wayfarer to Winton and McCarthy's cross-cultural interest in lines by articulating wayfaring's relationship with knowledge and knowing:

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<sup>49</sup> Britta Kuhlenbeck, *Re-writing Spatiality: The Production of Space in the Pilbara Region in Western Australia* (Berlin: Lit Verlag, 2010), p. 121.

<sup>50</sup> Tim Ingold, 'Footprints Through the Weather-world: Walking, Breathing, Knowing', *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 16 (2010), 121–139 (p. 126).

As we follow and blaze trails, like a wayfarer uncovering new directions, and abandon old routes along the way, we develop skills and accumulate lessons, revise obsolete understandings and make new observations. Knowledge is therefore a path of navigation, and knowing is therefore a way of moving. By surfing the globe, however, what we uncover is not a rigid and unresponsive environment. [. . .] wayfaring is therefore not a way of discovering inert environments 'that lie there in place without trajectories' but a way of moving along with the ways that places themselves change and move.<sup>51</sup>

This understanding of wayfaring helps reveal how Winton and McCarthy's novels remain mindful of the lines woven into their surroundings while also responding to the shifts of their cultural and geographical landscapes.

Wayfaring is crucial to Winton and McCarthy's plots. Their protagonists know that the goal of their journeys is to reunite their homes by finding their wife, child, or sister. What none of them knows is the path that will lead them there. Rinty is searching for a nameless tinker she has never seen and with no clue as to his direction, while Scully refuses to ask questions about his wife's disappearance and simply snatches blindly for clues. Through these uncertainties, the plots are shaped less by their destination than by their adaptation to the changing environments and encounters along their path. Parallel to their physical wayfaring, the protagonists encounter examples of a cultural and historical wayfaring, where the strands of different cultures and landscapes have encountered each other and adapted with different degrees of success.

When appreciating the density of human history and artefacts in Europe, Scully also senses a deep sense of belonging. He is aware of the pain buried in Ireland's history, with the burnt castle beneath his house standing testament to centuries of oppression and conflict (46). He is also aware of how fresh some of this pain is, with the local farmer recalling the atrocities committed by the IRA in the castle's ruins (27). Scully notices that what makes the history of such conflict bearable and acknowledgeable is that they have been woven into the diverse narratives of Ireland's history and culture. The ultimate symbols of this embrace are the granite tombs adorned with Celtic crosses that Scully encounters on his walks:

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<sup>51</sup> Vannini and Taggart, p. 99.

He loved those crosses with their topography of faces and plants and stories, so much more potent than the bare symbols of his Salvation Army upbringing.

There was suffering there, life lived, and beauty. He touched their lichenened veins and practised crossing himself a moment before walking on sheepishly.

(45)

The hard-line Christian narratives of Scully's Salvation Army upbringing are less appealing to him than these Celtic crosses upon which 'pre-Christian images were still just below the surface.'<sup>52</sup> These crosses embrace pagan traditions and display their history of cultural adaptation and transformation. The 'suffering' that Scully sees on these tombs speaks to the friction this history has witnessed, but it does not detract from its beauty. The accessibility of this suffering makes the cross all the more relatable, speaking of 'life lived' rather than of religious ideals of purity that the bare symbols of his childhood symbolised. Through these crosses' acceptance of other cultural influences, and expressions of human drama, they are kept alive and relevant to the land, which sustains them with 'lichenened veins.'

In contrast, *Outer Dark* sees the result of a more rigid approach to cultural adaptation as Rinthy stumbles across an old woman and her cottage:

And she could not have said to what sex belonged the stooped and hooded anthropoid that came muttering down the fence toward her. In one hand a hoe handled crudely with a sapling stave, an aged face and erupting from beneath some kind of hat lank hair all hung with clots like a sheep's scut, stumbling along in huge brogans and overalls. She stopped at the sight of the apparition. The road went in deep woods and constant damp and the house was grown with a rich velour of moss and lichen and brooded in a palpable miasma of rot.

(113)

The lichen-covered house is not the romantic architecture that Hawthorne alluded to when lamenting the struggle for poetry to grow in America, but it does tell of a 'gloomy wrong' that Hawthorne ironically believed was absent in the American landscape. Whereas the ruins Scully describes in Europe feel like they 'belong' in the

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<sup>52</sup> Malcolm Seaborne, *Celtic Crosses of Britain and Ireland* (Aylesbury: Shire Publications, 1989), p. 56.

landscape, there is something unsettling and alien about this house. The scene invokes the fairy tale: the old, 'hominoid' figure in the woods beyond reach of civilisation, stumbled upon by the innocent maiden recalls the Grimm Brothers' 'Hansel and Gretel' or 'Jorinde and Joringel'. The ominous hut and the women's potential designs are enforced in the later description of the garden as a 'grotesque configuration' with exposed roots that look 'like a gathering of the mad' (113). But the woman, it turns out, is not a witch. She invites Rinthy into her house in order to feed her, not fatten her up for cooking. She is merely kind.

What lends the house and the woman their unsettling air is that the land is being rigidly tended according to an unsuitable Christian narrative. The woman's first words to Rinthy are to deny that he has been hoeing on what she believes (wrongly) to be the Sabbath, claiming: 'I don't hold with breaking the Sabbath and don't care to associate with them that does' (114). She justifies her work by claiming that she is cultivating her garden in a religious manner, using the hoe 'to kill snakes with' (113). It is never stated, but we presume her desire to kill snakes on the Sabbath is caused by their associations with the devil. By adopting this Biblical attitude toward the snake as evil, the woman's Biblical cultivation of the land has begun to damage the land's ecology. As an old man points out later in the narrative 'even a snake ain't all that bad. They's put here for a purpose' (130). One of these purposes is to operate as a predator and maintain the food chain, which has become imbalanced: Rinthy notices a rat run free about the woman's house, a presence the woman stubbornly denies (119). It is this inept tending of the land that has followed a rigid religious principle, rather than an adaptive sensitivity to the land, that has lent the house its terrifying appearance. Not only does this horrify the reader, but it unknowingly unsettles its misguided gardener, who confesses that even she is sometimes scared in her own home (121).

What enables the Celtic crosses to achieve an adaptive sense of belonging, and makes the woman's cottage so unpleasant, is their appreciation of the lands' relationship with story. While the Celtic crosses appreciate the land's deep narratives, the woman limits her understanding of her land to a Christian belief that it was a promised land in need of Biblical tending.

It is a broad appreciation of the land and its narrative power that enables Mowaljarlai to accept the figure of Jesus into his thinking, believing that 'the mind is like a timeless, deep map in which past, present, and future experiences and

continuous contexts are recorded by all the senses as stories that co-exist in a continuous present.<sup>53</sup> The law 'written in the land' allows these things to be accessed and embraced at many points in time. This dynamic meant that although the Bible was only introduced to Aboriginal cultures through encounters with Europeans, Mowaljarlai recalls being told by Christian missionaries that Ngarinyin 'were Christian before us.'<sup>54</sup> Mowaljarlai believed that this was because '[a]lthough our story was a bit different [...] underneath it was the same.'<sup>55</sup> This understanding gives geography the power to accommodate and bind past, present and future cultural understandings of the land. Although this potential is ignored by the woman in *Outer Dark* and respected in the Celtic cross of *The Riders*, the reader sees this power in both stories when the solid linearity of time becomes fluid.

Time's fluidity appears in two key moments of *The Riders*, where Scully encounters the titular ghostly set of horsemen staring mutely at the castle below his house. The riders' physicality means they are neither ghosts nor a dream, with Scully smelling as well as seeing them, and awakening the next morning with the evidence of its reality printed in mud upon his body (80). What they signify is unclear, simultaneously prompting us to read them historically, as the men who burnt the castle, or as mythical figures, in a similar vein to Fionn mac Cumhaill. Scully's description of them prompts a reading that they are a blend of the two: 'There were about twenty of them in fancy dress. They were wild haired, cloaked and highballed. Two of them wore spattered grey chest plates and rags across their brows' (79). Their physicality, and simultaneously mythical and historical qualities, indicates that the land is conjuring a momentary distortion of time, enabling his present to encounter the past.

*Outer Dark*'s precarious relationship with time is seen at various points throughout the narrative, such as glimpses of figures on the edge of the road who 'could have been stone figures quarried from the architecture of an older time' (80). This precariousness is established at the heart of the novel via the triune, who stalk the novel as a vocal and mobile mirror of *The Riders*' mute horsemen.

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<sup>53</sup> Bell, p. 65.

<sup>54</sup> Mowaljarlai & Yutta Malnic, *Yorro Yorro: Everything Standing Up Alive* (Broome: Magabala Books, 2001), p. 118.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., p. 119.

After coming across them camping in the woods, Culla notes that they seem to be figures from another world, or another time, with the leader inspecting his boots 'like some barbaric cobbler inspecting the work of another world' (186). In the same scene, Culla appears to be transported by their presence out of time and place, suddenly hearing 'no sound anywhere in the woods or along the river. Not of owl or nightbird or distant hounds' (181). They are also explicitly of the geography, being described later as having 'risen from the ground' (238). Again, as in *The Riders* these figures are also constructions of both the location's history and folklore. Christopher J. Walsh notes the triune's resemblance to the murderous Harp brothers who roamed the region in the late eighteenth-century and Gabe Rikard points out their resemblance to The Scraggs from Al Capp's early twentieth-century comic strip *Li'l Abner*.<sup>56</sup> This strange blend lends them the same dreamlike quality as the riders of Winton's novel, with McCarthy later describing them as being 'endowed with a dream's redundancy' (239).

Although these moments reveal geography's ability to flatten time, the significance of this potential is left ambiguous in these encounters. Instead, the significance of geography's fluid relationship with history is accessed through song and dream.

### **Songs and dreaming**

Song is a significant element of Winton's wider oeuvre, with his novels frequently involving lyrical epigraphs and interruptions. *Dirt Music* (2001) is his most focused interrogation of the power of music, but *The Riders* pre-empts this focus with frequent lyrical interjections, such as a Van Morrison track on the radio and a folk-singer in a pub. The novel's narrative is also introduced and framed by song, opening after ten lines from Tom Waits' 'Tom Traubert's Blues', and its six sections being pillared by different stanzas of the traditional Irish song 'Raglan Road'.

Waits' song borrows its chorus from Banjo Patterson's 'Waltzing Matilda', a folk-song the National Library of Australia describes as 'the nation's unofficial

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<sup>56</sup> Christopher Walsh, *In the Wake of the Sun: Navigating the Southern Works of Cormac McCarthy* (Knoxville, TN: Newfound Press, 2001), p. 118; Gabe Rikard, *Authority and the Mountaineer in Cormac McCarthy's Appalachia* (London: McFarland, 2013), p. 201.

national anthem.<sup>57</sup> The song carries the signs of its own wayfaring on its back, with its central refrain 'who'll come a-waltzing Matilda with me?' answered numerous times throughout its singing, taking the song on a transformative trans-hemispheric journey to reach its treasured place in Australian culture. It is possible to follow the thread back to the song's contested melodic source, tracing one strain to the Celtic Scottish song 'Craigelee' and another to the English song 'The bold fusilier.'<sup>58</sup>

From this restless set of source material, both Waits' song and 'Waltzing Matilda' celebrate the romance and tragedy of a wanderer's life. As 'Tom Traubert's Blues' stumbles through Copenhagen, we are reminded of Scully's journey. Waits wails: 'No one speaks English, and everything's broken', before defining Waltzing Matilda in the final few verses of the song as: 'an old battered suitcase / to a hotel someplace / and a wound that will never heal.' The tragedy is even greater in Banjo Patterson's version, describing a swagman being pursued by the law for eating a farmer's sheep. Rather than be captured, the song describes:

Up jumped the swagman and jumped in the waterhole.  
Drowning himself by the Coolish tree.  
And his voice can still be heard as it sings in the Billabongs:  
"Who'll come a-waltzing Matilda with me?"

These songlines are not about home and belonging. 'Tom Traubert's Blues' portrays wandering as the tragic, if romantic, result of a broken heart, while 'Waltzing Matilda' tells of the dispossession and hardship of wandering in the Australian landscape. It is as the novel moves from these songs into 'Raglan Road', a song that initially confirms the same sense of disconnection, that it finds a lyrical sense of connection and belonging.

The novel introduces the final section with the final few lines of the song:

For when the angel woos the clay  
He'll lose his wings

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<sup>57</sup> National Library of Australia, 'Who'll come a Waltzing Matilda with me?' <<http://goo.gl/wnSfp8>> [Accessed 21 July 2016].

<sup>58</sup> National Library of Australia, 'The Macpherson/Paterson Version' <<http://goo.gl/7tOUqN>> [Accessed 21 July 2016]; National Library of Australia, 'The mainstream, popular version' <<http://goo.gl/4BVDw9>> [Accessed 21 July 2016].

At the dawning of the day. (372)

This lyric ushers in Scully's acceptance that his wife is gone, and that he might never understand why. The winged angel harks back to moments of the book such as Billie's vision of herself as 'a crying girl with wings' slumped 'in a tree like a bird' (290), Jennifer's appearance in Scully's dream as an 'angel of Death' (253), and most crucially of all, the 'descending multitudes' which invoke Australia's colonial settlement. Isolating these three lines of song transforms them from mournful into hopeful.

The novel's context turns the restrictive act of clipping wings into one of liberation. It is an act necessary for Scully whose sense of home and belonging is disrupted by his restless pursuit of his wife. The lyric also indicates that this sense of belonging can only be achieved if they learn to 'woo the clay', an act that sounds remarkably similar to the experience of raising stories 'from the dirt under your feet' that Winton shared with the Ngarinyin storyteller. In the context of the novel's broader interest with a national sense of belonging, the song offers hope that clipping the wings used in the ancestral flight to Australia might encourage Anglo-Australians to feel at home in their landscape if they appreciate the narrative significance of the land that exceeds their presence. *Outer Dark* provides a counterpoint to *The Riders'* optimism, assessing the same sense of restlessness through a framing dream.

In the final scene of *Outer Dark*, Culla comes across a blind man who says he is 'at the Lord's work' (249). Culla assumes that the man is a preacher, to which he replies: 'No. No preacher. What is they to preach? It's all plain enough. Word and flesh. I don't hold much with preaching' (249). The man's denial of preaching, even of a rigid understanding of the Bible (he does not say he believes in *the* word and *the* flesh) connects him to a form of Christian mysticism. As he recalls to Culla an experience with a 'healing preacher', an affinity with Mowaljarlai's sense of the power of story begins to emerge:

They was a bunch of us there all cripple folks and one old man they did claim had thrown down his crutches and they told it he could make the blind see. And they was a feller leapt up and hollered out that nobody knowed what was wrong with and they said it caused that preacher to go away. (250)

This story has appeared before, in Culla's dream described at the novel's beginning. In this opening dream, Culla is the man who asks if he might be healed, to which the preacher responds, 'yes, I think perhaps you will be cured', only to leave and not return (6). For this, Culla is blamed.

The two different tellings of this same story dissolves any divide between story and reality: Culla's dream is the blind man's experience. Yet, Culla does not seem to realise this. The blind man ends his story:

But they's darksome ways afoot in this world and it may be he weren't no true preacher.

I got to get on, Holme said.

I always did want to find that feller, the blind man said. And tell him. If somebody don't tell him he never will have no rest. (250)

The remarkable nature of the scene, that the blind man has found the man who hollered for healing, is never realised by Culla, who simply brushes aside the man's knowing claims that 'I spoke afore with ye' (249).

The cause of this missed opportunity is that the road on which they meet is heading into modernity. Culla brushes off the man's claim to know him by pointing out that there are 'lots of people on the roads these days' (249) to which the blind man responds: 'Yes [...] I pass em ever day. People going up and down in the world like dogs. As if they wasn't a home nowheres' (249). In turn, Culla validates the man's observation by abandoning the conversation in the need to 'get on' (250). In aiding the ease of travelling to set destinations, these improving roads hinder the act of wayfaring that *Outer Dark* and *The Riders* have relied on to sense the land's deeper narrative and cultural significance.

Perhaps this is a case where *The Riders* is not the text illuminating *Outer Dark*, but where McCarthy's novel asks questions of Winton's. Is the lyrical closure of *The Riders* overly hopeful? Has modernity numbed us to the significance of messages conveyed by the land and accessed through art, dream or song? This is something feared by Mowaljarlai, who recalled the Anglo-Australian disregard for the ties between geography and story when Western Australia denied the Ngarinyin application for rights to their land in 1984: 'We had all our stories recorded in that

milli milli (official documents). We didn't get our land back [...] What more do we have to prove?<sup>59</sup> This concern is developed through the protagonists' encounters with the firming of pathways, such as railways, flightpaths, and most importantly roads. As they encounter these modern lines, the novels begin to expose a tension between their embrace of the line as an archaic sensibility, which allows a responsive wayfaring through temporal and physical space, and its value as a rigid symbol of unambiguous progress toward modernity.

## Roads

Roads can be understood as desire lines imposed upon the earth. Their attractive ribbon of concrete and macadam makes it difficult for the walker to justify opting for a rougher, less predictable surface, with Hayden Lorimer observing that 'There is a comfort and personal security that comes in the feeling of being led, and in following.'<sup>60</sup> Some of these roads paved over and straightened the once traditional paths trodden through the wilderness by animals, and followed by Native Americans for their ability to 'shed water in rainy seasons and blow clear of snow during winters.'<sup>61</sup> Olivia Barr notes that the rigid straightening of these roads relied on a triangulation, resulting in 'a process of abstraction' that meant it was 'no longer necessary physically to walk the land.'<sup>62</sup> The abstraction of these roads that enabled them to become straight is, according to Tim Ingold, 'a phenomenon of modernity.'<sup>63</sup> This process of abstraction and straightening standardises the mistakes, and their import, of the old woman in *Outer Dark*, bringing with them a 'relentlessly dichotomising dialectic of modern thought.'<sup>64</sup> This is a mode of thinking that promotes binary oppositions 'with mind as against matter, with rational thought as against sensory perception, with intellect as against intuition, with science as against

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<sup>59</sup> Bell, p. 19.

<sup>60</sup> Hayden Lorimer, 'Walking: New Forms and Spaces for Studies of Pedestrianism', *Geographies of Mobilities: Practices, Spaces, Subjects*, ed. by Tim Cresswell and Peter Merriman (London: Ashgate, 2011), pp. 19–34 (p. 29).

<sup>61</sup> Joseph Amato, *On Foot: A History of Walking* (New York, NY: NYU Press, 2004), p. 130.

<sup>62</sup> Olivia Barr, 'A Jurisprudential Tale of a Road, an Office, and a Triangle', *Law and Literature*, 27:2 (2015), p. 211.

<sup>63</sup> Tim Ingold, *Lines: A Brief History* (London: Routledge, 2007), p. 155.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., p. 152.

traditional knowledge, with male as against female, with civilisation as against nature.<sup>65</sup>

Arnold argues that this dichotomising was used by Anglo-Americans to justify their treatment of native peoples. Acts of dispossession were rendered acceptable through foundation stories that presented the colonists as the only people who might correctly nurture the land courtesy of their technological superiority. They would tell how “Americans” transformed a wilderness into a prosperous and egalitarian society. Their dramatic action focuses on transforming an uninhabited, unknown, abstract space into a technologically defined place. They valorise particular man-made objects, such as the American axe or the railroad, that made this transformation possible.<sup>66</sup> A similar attitude was present from early European-Aboriginal encounters, with Robert Hughes recalling the claim of one naval surgeon that the Aborigines’ ‘only superiority above the brute [.] . . .] consisted in their use of the spear, their extreme ferocity and their employing of fire in the cookery of their food.<sup>67</sup>

These narratives are not consigned to the past any more than they are to national boundaries, with the land that has been returned to Native and Aboriginal peoples still coming under threat from those seeking riches. This has come most commonly from those who believe the best use of the land is to mine the minerals beneath its surface.<sup>68</sup> As much as these narratives indicate a general disregard of Aboriginal culture and history, they also betray a modern American and Australian political mindset that values a healthy economy more than a healthy ecology.

Such prioritising is a hallmark of modernity, with Paul Gilroy claiming: ‘modernity is understood as a distinct configuration with its own spatial and temporal characteristics defined above all through the consciousness of novelty that surrounds the emergence of civil society, the modern state, and industrial capitalism.’<sup>69</sup> We see elements of three characteristics in *Outer Dark* and *The Riders*, but they all essentially draw back to industrial capitalism.

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Arnold, pp. 3–4.

<sup>67</sup> Hughes, p. 273.

<sup>68</sup> Ezra Rosser, ‘This Land is my Land, This Land is Your Land: Markets and Institutions For Economic Development on Native American Land’, *Arizona Law Review*, 47 (2005), 245–312; O’Faircheallaigh Ciaran, ‘Negotiating Cultural Heritage? Aboriginal-Mining Company Agreements in Australia’, *Development and Change*, 39:1 (2008), 25–51.

<sup>69</sup> Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (London: Verso, 1999), p. 49.

As we have seen from the beginning, both *Outer Dark* and *The Riders'* views of the west are made more sober than Bates' through an awareness of an economic and social polarity fuelled by a focus on financial capital. This is built throughout both novels. We discover that Scully's experience of these hardships has meant that 'money always made him nervous' (55). He even wonders if the castle near his house in Ireland wasn't burnt because the Irish working on the land had suffered 'six hundred years of [...] looking up from their work to see the severe Norman outline of that sentry at the head of the valley.' (46).

In *Outer Dark*, Culla is frequently dogged by questions about his place within a rudimentary economy. The first squire he meets accuses him of running from something solely because Culla, interested only in being paid with a night's board, does not enquire about how much money he would be paid for chopping wood. The squire reminds Culla that 'shiftlessness is a sin' and that one must work 'daybreak to backbreak for a Godgiven dollar' (48). In this occasion, as in others throughout the novel, Culla has to remind the squire 'It ain't no crime to be poor' (47). The full significance of economic modernity within the stories is only traceable when following the physical marks it imprints on the land.

In *The Riders*, Scully continually observes how the Irish landscape has been stripped of its wilderness. Roads, towers, gatehouses and manors 'of old' stand in the place of forests and woods (87-88). As he begins his journey to find Jennifer, he is suspicious of how this taming is being made global by international flights. Scully fears 'how easy it was, plonking down the magical, scary credit card and moving from place to place' (110). With this fear comes an awareness that the ease of his journey is economically dependent, only possible 'As long as the card didn't melt and the magic didn't evaporate' (110). The reality of this becomes clear at end of the novel, when the card does melt as Jennifer drains the bank balance. Suddenly, the world becomes impossible to navigate without money, and Scully is forced to steal from an acquaintance to complete the final leg of his quest to find his wife (315).

*Outer Dark* also encapsulates the sense of world in rapid economic development, moving from muddy paths through fantastical forests, to the seemingly busy roads on which increasing numbers travel by cart. The first road that both Culla and Rinty follow into a town that bears the fresh and muddy footprint of trade: 'He reached the town before noon, mud slathered to his knees, wading through a thick mire in which the tracks of wagons crossed everywhere with channels of milky gray

water, entering the square among the midday traffic, a wagon passing him in four pinholes of flickering mud' (37–38). The economic value of the roads is made more explicit, and solid, as the novel progresses. Holme later walks in a road with 'the tracks of commerce [...] fossilised in dried mud all about him' (135). The roads develop further into 'ironhard rails and fissures' (190), suggesting the railway tracks that would help stitch together the East and West Coasts. The cause of suspicion toward these firm tracks is indicated when the sound of a cart's wheels is described as 'so laboured and remorseless as should have spoken something more than mere progress upon the earth's surface' (71). The language of laboured remorselessness indicates that this is a progress that exceeds the spatial and becomes economic, imprinting a remorseless labour upon the land. This is developed by both novels' awareness that modernity is not simply ecologically or economically threatening, but also has an intimate history of connections to racism and colonialism.

The associations between labour and slavery linger uncomfortably in Europe, with Scully's labouring likened by more than one character to 'working like a nigger' (43). Scully, presumably conscious of his position as an outsider, chooses to wince but 'let it pass' (43). He responds with his own attempt at protestation, erasing racist graffiti he finds on a phonebox with a coin (103). There is a sense of irony, even of futility, in the idea that racism might be erased with the very symbol of economic development that allowed it to develop. *Outer Dark* strengthens the same connection between labour and slavery when the first squire's slave sits and peels corn, with the sound of the shells hitting the bucket described as 'ringing like coins' (50).

These roads reveal that the novels' concerns exceed their historical relationship with Europe. They expose a deeper anxiety about not only how their nations' past entanglements with Europe have complicated their national sense of identity, but how the dichotomising modern line and its connections to economic notions of progress threaten to smother any attempt to repair such damage. They are also broad-brush presences that symbolise the historical and political power of modernity. To see how the threat of modernity is imposed, and to find any chance of altering it, both novels continue this investigation by breaking it down and analysing it through a smaller, more intimate symbol of modernity: the boot.

## Boots

Mike Michael alerts us to the significance of the boot when criticising Ingold's conception of lines woven through an open world, arguing that 'The "purity" of [Ingold's] vision lies in its unity, that is, the seamlessness of humans and environment. Yet, integral to this integrity, especially in modern societies, are a huge array of entities that mediate the relation of bodies to nature.'<sup>70</sup> For Michael, the key technology that mediates this interaction is not the road, which too clearly subdues nature, but the more subtle mediation of the boot.

The boot is technologically and economically significant, Michael argues, because developments in production methods and materials have created better, cheaper boots that allow more people to reach more places more easily. Michael expounds the many effects of this development in technology: 'even as they take us out of modernity to experience the sublime, or attain seemingly basic affordances, they carry with them the very essence of modernity.'<sup>71</sup> These technological advances allow us to get further into nature, but with the sad result that '[a]s the body and nature are brought together, the latter becomes endangered.'<sup>72</sup> The cause of this endangerment is not those lone walkers reaching new places, but a result of modernity producing technologies that develops this individual freedom into a capital network that 'incorporates the global: goods mediate between distributed heterogeneous networks that encompass globalised systems and the global environment.'<sup>73</sup>

Anxiety about the implications of networks built around such mundane technologies is expressed in *Outer Dark*, where boots have a significant role in maintaining the master-slave relationship and sense of dominance. The squire who employs Culla to chop wood is a domineering figure whose pride and authority appears to come from his footwear, with Holme noticing: 'his figure reared silently out of a pair of new veal boots' (45). When Culla steals them, the Squire's authority is diminished through his inability to move so freely and confidently around his farm. It is in this situation where the subtle play of power, which has seen the squire

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<sup>70</sup> Mike Michael, 'These Boots are Made for Walking...: Mundane Technology, the Body and Human-Environment Relations', *Body and Society*, 6:3-4 (2000), 107–126 (p. 112).

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 118-119.

<sup>72</sup> Michael, p. 120.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 119.

dominating his slave, is brought into question. The squire is reduced to 'fumbling' about, 'not telling [his slave] to hurry or anything quite so useless', sitting in his carriage waiting in 'furious immobility' and a 'throb of violent constraint' (50).

Scully encounters some of the contemporary ramifications of this technologically determined power-play when experiencing how it also enables the Old World to assert a sense of superiority over the New. Although translating most encounters of this attitude as simple snobbishness, Scully experiences the deeper levels of racism that they betray in one particular encounter:

Jean-Louis had a romantic European fascination for wild places and people. He defended France's right to test nuclear bombs in the Pacific and yet turned purple at the thought of roo-tail soup. Scully liked to shock him and his friends with redneck stories told against himself and his country. Chlamydia in Koalas, the glories of the cane toad. The wonders of the aluminium roo-bar. For a while he felt almost exotic at Marianne's parties, but it wore off in the end, playing the part of the Ignoble Savage. (278)

Scully relates this casually enough, admitting that he utilised the ignorance of Jean-Louis for his own entertainment. What is at stake is less amusing. Jean-Louis is, after all, using this idea of the 'exotic' and 'savage' to justify France's detonation of nuclear bombs in the Pacific Ocean. This defence of such immense destruction emerges from an awe of European technological power, but is rendered acceptable by a vacuum of ignorance about the Pacific that is filled by an exoticising 'romantic fascination' for 'wild places'.

Michael's writing reveals the significance of the boot to Jean-Louis' romantic notions when positioning them as an important technology in the quest for the sublime. For the sublime to be appreciated, Michael argues, 'both nature and body must behave: nature must not be so violent, that is, so life-threatening as to distract from the sublime; the body must not be in so much pain as to disable contemplation of the nature.'<sup>74</sup> Yet, by attaining the sublime with such ease, we begin to rob it of its value. Thus, 'To speak of the sublime is to simultaneously speak of standardisation, consumption, damage, and repair.'<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Michael, p. 110.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., p. 121.

This unsettles McCarthy and Winton's position as authors whose novels develop the sublime and romantic associations of their coastal and desert geographies. Their works are only a small part of this process, yet there is a sense of discomfort about their role in further popularising their geographies. In a Q&A session at the Royal Academy, Winton revealed a light side of this anxiety. When asked what his favourite parts of Western Australia were, and which parts featured most in his books, he simply responded: 'oh, I don't want to say. I don't want you lot traipsing all over it. I hear Sydney's lovely though.'<sup>76</sup> This sense of discomfort arises from both writers' awareness of how curious Western visitors with misguided romantic notions about the country have led to damaging lines being engraved upon the land.

Winton's *Dirt Music* touches upon the troublesome history of Western mapping and surveying of Aboriginal lands. When Lu Fox meets two Aboriginal men in the Kimberly, one of them throws Lu's map into a fire. One of the men, Menzies, tells Lu: 'Just trouble, maps. You can't really blame him. Like they suck everything up. Can't blame a blackfulla not likin a map, Lu.'<sup>77</sup> But it is McCarthy's *Blood Meridian* that provides the most concise and powerful rendering of the lasting history of damage caused by the cocktail of romantic fascination, ease of access, and a sense of cultural superiority.

In one of the novel's most memorable scenes, the Judge draws a Native American pictogram he finds at Hueco Tanks in Texas before chipping at it with a rock 'leaving no trace of it only a raw place on the stone where it had been.'<sup>78</sup> This act is not entirely a work of fiction, but a real, and common, occurrence. Today, Hueco Tanks National Park is littered with defaced pictograms. Most have been erased or replaced with the graffiti of nineteenth-century Anglo-Americans eager to make their own mark superior to that of the Native Americans who came before them. In some places, the graffiti is so plentiful, and the art so faded, it is hard to see past the scrawls of names and dates to the buffalos and antelopes pictured beyond. The handful that are undefiled were spared by the inaccessibility of their locations, presumably because they were never discovered by most nineteenth-century

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<sup>76</sup> Tim Winton, 'The Island Seen and Felt: Some Thoughts about Landscape', delivered at the Royal Academy (15/11/2013).

<sup>77</sup> Tim Winton, *Dirt Music* (London: Picador, 2003), p. 312.

<sup>78</sup> Cormac McCarthy, *Blood Meridian* (London: Picador, 1990), p. 173.

European and Anglo-American visitors. They remain in their original state not because twenty-first century visitors now appreciate their value, but because the park's rangers keep their locations secret for fear of tourists defacing them. To see them, a visitor must hand in their driving licence and sign a form to express that they will not damage the pictographs before they are handed a cryptic map to guide them to their well-hidden location. They must then climb to the top of the tanks, uncover small openings, and crawl on their bellies to find these protected artefacts.



Fig. 2.2: Graffiti over Native pictographs.  
by inaccessibility



Fig 2.3: Pictograph preserved

Against this experience of modernity devaluing the narrative, cultural and historical significance of the land, both novels ask how their geographies' cultural and historical significance might be accessed. Both stories explore this possibility by stripping their protagonists of the boots that have separated them from the ground.

### Barefoot

Both works are quick to establish shoes and boots as tools that remove their wearers primarily from the constant and inconvenient presence of mud. In *The Riders* we are introduced to Scully as he scrapes 'his muddy boots on the flagstones', an almost ritual act throughout his time in Ireland (3, 17, 64). Similarly, in *Outer Dark*, Culla and other characters are frequently in shoes 'weighted' (37) with 'gouts of mud' (150,

240). As both novels progress, they begin to develop the significance of mud and develop the potential benefits of unmediated contact with it.

The significance of mud is obliquely but powerfully expressed when Scully sits down and notices a newspaper:

He put one boot up on a swampy pile of the *Irish Times* and saw beside his instep.

*Bog Man In Cheshire*

*Peat cutters in Cheshire yesterday unearthed the body of a man believed to have been preserved in a bog for centuries*

Scully shifted his foot and the paper came apart like compost. (6)

This compact reference to bog bodies exposes mud's entanglements with history and culture, and its ability to physically bring the past into the present. Primarily, it reveals the ability of mud to store and preserve human drama. One of the main news stories arising from the discovery of the Cheshire Bog Man was the archaeologists' realisation that he had met a grizzly end, having been garrotted before being embraced by the bog. The mud sustains this drama even beyond the man's death and the rediscovery of his body, with continuing disputes about how and why the man was killed.<sup>79</sup> The narrative and dramatic importance of mud is heightened with the significance of the bog-body's presence in Irish news conjuring the bog body poems of Seamus Heaney's *North*.

In *North*, Heaney summons the spirits of the bog bodies of Ireland and Europe to give voice to the troubles of Ireland as it wrestles with Britain. Heaney summons the voice of a 'bog queen' to speak to Ireland's continuing struggle with Britain. She speaks of the coldness of her preservation, becoming 'braille for the creeping influences' as 'the seeps of winter digest' her. Suddenly, she experiences a violent interruption, 'barbered / and stripped / by a turf cutter's spade', before finally 'rising from the dark'.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Chris Long, 'Lindow Man: Gruesome discovery who became an "international celebrity"', *BBC News* (3 August 2014) <<http://goo.gl/IwhfLQ>> [Accessed 21 July 2016].

<sup>80</sup> Seamus Heaney, 'Bog Queen', *North* (London: Faber and Faber, 1975), p. 33.

Through such small but charged references conjured by the mention of the bog body, the scene draws on a wealth of reciprocal, but often unseen connections between mud and those who walk upon it. Just as the bog brings past dramas into the present and the news makes it a contemporary narrative, poetry brings this past drama to provide a new perspective from which to consider the Troubles. Simultaneously, as the composting newspaper indicates, these narratives have a physical significance by returning to the earth. The high-carbon content of the newspaper paper can nourish and sustain the land that preserved the story it reported, contributing to a physically and culturally reciprocal relationship between the people and land.

After drawing our attention to mud's entanglements with the human, *The Riders* elucidates why Rinthy, who traverses the world barefoot, experiences her journey very differently to her booted brother. Where Culla frequently encounters bogs and mires, Rinthy finds 'the dust warm and soft as talc beneath her toes' (152). Along with this direct contact with the ground, nature appears to care for her, with butterflies 'attending' her and birds comfortable with her presence (102). Her journey is by no means easy, but there is a sense in which she finds peace through it, with even her final description, which potentially suggests her death at the hands of the triune, being strangely peaceful: 'and after a while, little sister was sleeping' (247). The relative kindness of the land's treatment of Rinthy seems to be a result of her equal respect for the land, and sensitivity to its many messages and signals. In contrast to the carts of commerce, which crush toads and weeds (85, 246) Rinthy steps 'softly' (246) and moves as 'delicate as any fallow doe' (246).

It is not simply the act of being barefoot that affords Rinthy her more delicate journey, as at the end of the novel we encounter a similarly barefoot Culla who is not granted the same kindness. What separates them is that while Rinthy chooses this unmediated contact, Culla is forced to accept it through the stripping of his shoes. This stripping begins after Culla nearly drowns on a sinking chain ferry and climbs into the woods on the riverbank to an encounter with the triune. The triune admire the calfskin boots as they dry and force Culla to trade them for a pair of their own 'shapeless, burntlooking and crudely mended' boots (187). These shoes strip Culla of any sense of pride and capability that he inherited from their previous owner, returning him to his social position as a penniless wanderer. He is then stripped of these boots, too, after falling into another river and again emerging on a riverbank

to an audience with the triune. While nothing is mentioned of his footwear in this scene, when we next see Culla—with the blind man in the novel's final scene—he is in direct contact with the earth.

The novel's description of Rinty as treading 'barefoot' emphasises the harmony of her un-mediated press upon the ground. In contrast, its description of Culla as having 'naked feet' implies that he perceives it to be another regrettable loss of footwear. The falseness of Culla's attitude is exposed as the scene progresses, and Culla remains ignorant of the benefits of his barefoot experience. As he leaves the blind man at the end of the novel, he finds himself in a 'spectral waste' (251). With new caution, he tries his foot in 'the mire before him' for it to grab his foot 'in a vulvate welt claggy and sucking' (251). Releasing his foot, and turning back, Culla again sees the blind man tapping down the road with his cane. Culla tries to hide at the side of the road, only for the blind man to 'turn his blind smile upon him' (252). After allowing the blind man to pass down the road without warning him of where it leads, the novel ends: 'somebody should tell a blind man before setting him out that way' (252). We are invited to read this cryptic line as a grimly ironic joke running through Culla's mind as he imagines the blind man being drowned in the mire. The joke indicates that Culla has failed to appreciate, as the preacher earlier in the novel suggested, that 'in a world darksome as this'n I believe a blind man ort to be better sighted than most' (234). Neither the blind man detecting him at the side of the road, nor that it was Culla's own sensory perception of the mire that stopped Culla from walking confidently into it, has taught him the value of feeling, rather than merely seeing, the land. As such, Culla proves himself an outsider not merely to people, but to the land, failing to see beyond the economic value of the calfskin boots that were stolen from him.

*The Riders* also closes with a different response to being stripped of shoes. In Scully's final push to find Jennifer, he and Billie are on a houseboat when he thinks he hears his wife's footfall on the street above. After seeing a figure beside the boat, he attempts to jump across to her before she flees. The scene offers a curiously contrasting focus on Scully and the woman's footwear:

On the foredeck he crouched beside an ornamental coil of rope and rotten tackle and he saw a denim leg out there in the spill of a corner light. The sharp toed boot disembodied by mist and the angle [...] He heard the toes of his

frozen socks slipping fractionally on the gritty slime of the foredeck. He gripped the searing metal rail, ready.

Then the boot turned and showed a cuban heel, two. There was a worldly groan of leather and a shift on the cobbles. Out into the loop of strangled light blurred the hair and moon flash of skin as the figure turned unhurriedly up the side street and was gone, leaving a wake of footfalls that set Scully off automatically. (370)

Scully doesn't make the jump, falling short and 'scrabbl[ing] hopelessly.' The person he seeks is more equipped for her environment than he, standing on solid ground with boots suitable for the city. By contrast, Scully's single-minded quest has reduced him to soggy frozen socks with which he can only pathetically scrabble for grip. Just as Culla turns his path after testing his foot in the mire, this humiliating and physical experience awakens Scully to the fact that he can no longer continue with his journey, and makes him decide to return to Ireland. But, for Scully, the effect of this experience is more profound, and *The Riders'* barefoot conclusion again balances *Outer Dark* by realising the possibilities of a broad sensory awareness of the land.

Waking in the night, Scully finds Billy gone and follows her footprints through the snow. He finds Billie looking at the riders, as mute and staring as they were when Scully first saw them:

He knew them now and he saw that they would be here every night seen and unseen, patient, dogged faithful in all weathers and all worlds, waiting for something that was plainly their due, but he knew that, as surely as he felt Billie tugging on him, curling her fingers in his and pulling him easily away, that he would not be among them and must never be, in life or death. (377)

This does not indicate that Scully gives up on the notion of home, but that he has discarded a belief that his home will be made complete through a dogged pursuit of his wife. Unlike Culla, who turns back on the path but does not learn from his experience, Scully has stopped pursuing Jenifer and the answers she holds, but follows the footprints and tug of his daughter.

The final line of *The Riders* reveals the potential power of being alert to the ground's impact upon feet, and sets a very different tone to the victorious march of Bates' poem. As he follows Billie back to their house in Ireland, we are told: 'It was

only when they were high on the hill, two figures black against the snow, in the shadow of their house, that Scully's feet began to hurt' (377). Scully has already tried a passionate western march seeking what he believed was his right, and it made him even more of an outsider to his daughter and his surroundings. Instead, it is treading softly and humbly, allowing himself to feel the toll past mistakes have taken on his feet, that is necessary to find his way home.

Both endings confront the reader with an alternative to the patriotic landscapes, victorious paths and confident march of 'America the Beautiful'. The reader has felt the unique dynamics that shape their landscapes, the pain ground into the earth, witnessed stories rising up from the ground. The diversity of these experiences provides a geological and cultural context that exceeds the national histories of their lands to develop identities that have been too-often defined by their relationship with Europe. But the building threat of modernity rumbling into the future broadens the novels beyond national allegories. It makes us aware that an economically defined sense of progress dulls our senses to the land and risks building on the mistakes that have troubled Australia's and America's senses of identity and belonging. The stories' barefoot endings tread different paths down a hypothetical fork in the road in which Scully succeeds and Culla fails to realise these mistakes. Both show the same conclusion to the reader: that modernity must broaden its appreciation of the line as a narrow and imposing symbol of economic progress and become sensitive to the narrative, cultural, and historical threads woven into the landscape. To fail to do so risks taking modern man outside of a reciprocal relationship with the earth, and to join Culla 'goin up and down the world like dogs. As if they wasn't a home nowhere' (249).

## Sand: Dust to Dust

4 These are the generations of the heavens and of the earth when they were created, in the day that the Lord God made the earth and the heavens, 5 And every plant of the field before it was in the earth, and every herb of the field before it grew: for the Lord God had not caused it to rain upon the earth, and there was not a man to till the ground. 6 But there went up a mist from the earth, and watered the whole face of the ground. 7 And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul. 8 And the Lord God planted a garden eastward in Eden; and there he put the man whom he had formed.

Genesis 2:4–8, KJV

Sand gets everywhere. Driving around the deserts of Australia and America, one soon realises that this frustration is faced daily by those who live there. The abundance of sand changes everything you do: from the shoes you wear to the paths you tread. Driving through many of these scorching roads you dare not open a window for a cooling breeze as your car will quickly fill with the sand kicked up by wheels and wind. The notoriously fine Pindan of Western Australia even sneaks in through the air vents, covering everything in a layer of blood-red dust. While we have so far seen how Winton and McCarthy draw their fiction from the flow of rivers, feel the tectonic movements of their nations, and followed narrative and physical lines across their landscapes, sand is perhaps the most ever-present element of their lives in the semi-arid and arid western parts of their nations. Just as sand physically imposes upon every facet of daily life in the places where Winton and McCarthy live and write, its geological and cultural significance infiltrates the cracks of their novels and influences the paths of their narratives.

There is both a cultural and scientific confusion about what separates sand from dust. In the Bible, a parallel was drawn between the two when God told Abraham that his offspring would be numerous ‘as the dust of the earth’ (Gen 13:16)

and ‘the sand of the sea’ (Gen 32:12). Technically, sand and dust are two different materials, separated by size rather than substance. However, even the technical definitions of what separates dust and sand are prone to shifting. The classification of sand by size illustrated in 1922 by Chester K. Wentworth dictated that sand could range from very coarse form at 1–2 mm diameter (making household sugar a form of sand) to very fine form, which might be between 0.0625–0.125mm.<sup>1</sup> Complications arise when appreciating Ralph Bagnold’s 1941 definition of dust as anything smaller than 0.08mm, blurring fine sand and dust.<sup>2</sup> Things get even more complicated when we consider that currently ‘a more fashionable limit is now taken to be at the silt/sand boundary of 62.5  $\mu\text{m}$ .’<sup>3</sup> These shifts are perhaps a result of the loose field definition of sand as ‘grains that are too big to be picked up by “the average surface wind”, suspended, and swept away as dust.’<sup>4</sup> Further complications arise at the sand/dust boundary when we consider how both might equally be called dirt depending not on their size, or substance, but their location, with Mary Douglas famously defining dirt as ‘matter out of place.’<sup>5</sup>

All three forms, crunching underfoot as sand, blowing into eyes as dust, and infiltrating the home as ‘dirt’, shape Winton and McCarthy’s fiction. While the presence of sand, dust, and dirt is an alien and unwelcome element to many, both Winton and McCarthy celebrate it as central to identity and home in two desert-bound novels, Winton’s *Dirt Music* (2001) and McCarthy’s *No Country for Old Men* (2006).

The title of *Dirt Music* works with Douglas’ understanding of dirt but also dissolves its negative connotations. When Georgie asks Lu what kind of music he plays, he responds:

Oh, I dunno. All kinds, I suppose. Anything you could play on a verandah.  
You know, without electricity. Dirt music.

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<sup>1</sup> Michael Welland, *Sand: A Journey through Science and the Imagination* (Oxford: OUP, 2009), p. 9.

<sup>2</sup> Ralph Bagnold, *The Physics of Blown Sand and Desert Dunes* (Mineola: Dover Publications, 2005), p. 6.

<sup>3</sup> Richard Washington and Giles S. F. Wiggs, ‘ch. 20: Desert Dust’ in, *Arid Zone Geomorphology: Process, Form, and Change in Drylands* (third edition), ed. by David G. Thomas (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), pp. 517–537 (p. 518).

<sup>4</sup> Welland, *Sand: A Journey through Science and the Imagination*, p. 11.

<sup>5</sup> Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Purity and Taboo* (London: Routledge, 2003), p. 41.

As in . . . soil?

Yeah. Land. Home. Country.<sup>6</sup>

For Lu, the concept of 'dirt music' is intertwined with the land: you might step onto the veranda carrying the matter of the 'Land. Home. Country' with you and make music with it as sandy soil flicks off stomping boots. *No Country for Old Men* embraces a similar attitude towards dirt when Sheriff Bell talks to a woman at a conference. Bell describes her as talking about 'the right wing this and the right wing that', giving the impression that she is a political liberal from a city on the East Coast.<sup>7</sup> The woman misunderstands Bell when he likens the people of his county to dirt: 'The people I know are mostly just common people. Common as dirt, as the saying goes. I told her that and she looked at me funny. She thought I was saying somethin bad about em, but of course that's a high compliment in my part of the world' (196). In both novels, the writers transform dirt into something valuable, simultaneously rejecting and enforcing Douglas' claim that dirt is 'matter out of place' by arguing that this is exactly how things should be: a conclusion easily reached by those who live and work in arid spaces where any attempt to completely separate the inside from the outside is futile.

The crossover between sand and dust, and its blurring of the division between the inside and outside of domestic space, is suitable given that dust is a crucial symbolic material in man's transition into and out of life. In the book of Genesis man is both created from and condemned to dust by God's breath, being told after eating from the tree of knowledge: 'In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return' (Gen 3:19). This is arguably the most formative moment in the cultural relationship between man and dust. From it, we can excavate three associations with dust that are carried through the Western canon. Firstly, sand and dust are particularly relevant to masculinity, with Adam being made from dust and Eve from flesh. Secondly, dust is a crucial element of a lost civilisation, with Adam and Eve cast out of Eden's perfection into a fallen world, a desert, never to return.

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<sup>6</sup> Tim Winton, *Dirt Music* (London: Picador, 2003), p. 95 (all subsequent references are to this edition).

<sup>7</sup> Cormac McCarthy, *No Country for Old Men* (London: Picador, 2007), p. 196 (all subsequent references are to this edition).

Finally, in man's physical exile from Eden, where God walked with them, to the comparative desert of the fallen world, dust has become intertwined with the severed relationship between man and God.

The Ancient Greeks raised the same associations on the extensive beaches of Troy. In *The Iliad*, sand is the stage upon which Hector, Paris, Priam and the Trojan army combat Achilles and Agamemnon over the Trojan's theft of the Greek king's wife Helen. It is also upon this beach that we see the fractious relationship between the gods and man, with the squabbling gods meddling selfishly to affect the affairs of the mortals below. Troy itself is an example of a city lost to time, with Homer writing in Book XII that, after the war finished, Neptune 'made smooth along the rip of the Hellespont / and piled the endless beaches deep in sand again.'<sup>8</sup> These three associations rooted in the Western canon by the Biblical tradition and influenced by the Greek and Roman epics blow through the Western canon, shaping literature of different periods in varying ways. A dedicated study might chart their presence and transformations through the canon: from Chaucer's invocations of the Trojan Myth, the Romantic mocking of tyrants through the ruins of Shelley's 'Ozymandias' snarling in the desert, to the decrying of colonial cruelties in contemporary fiction such as *Waiting for the Barbarians* (1980) and *The English Patient* (1992). McCarthy and Winton's work contribute to this tradition, but are less noticeably shaped by its manifestations in a 'high' cultural tradition than the sandy spaces of modern 'low' culture disseminated in the grainy celluloid of Westerns.

Since the dawn of his success, McCarthy has been hailed as a master of the modern Western. Critics such as Mark Winchell and Susan Kollin see him inheriting the literary and cinematic elements of the genre pioneered by writers and directors including Owen Wister and Samuel Peckinpah.<sup>9</sup> Stacey Peebles deepens this understanding by arguing that each of the three central men of *No Country for Old Men* 'embodies a version of the masculine ideal and displays traits that, in American narrative generally, and Westerns in particular, are celebrated as markers of

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<sup>8</sup> Homer, *The Iliad*, trans. by Robert Fagles (London: Penguin, 1991), XII:36-37.

<sup>9</sup> Mark Winchell, 'Inner Dark; or, the place of Cormac McCarthy', *Southern Review*, 26 (1990), 293-309; Susan Kollin, 'Genre and Geographies of Violence: Cormac McCarthy and the Contemporary Western', *Contemporary Literature*, 42:3 (2001), 557-588.

manhood.<sup>10</sup> Winton also believes that the great unacknowledged influence on *Blood Meridian* is Peckinpah's *The Wild Bunch*.<sup>11</sup>

Winton has not written a novel we might easily brand as a 'Western', but the genre has had a clear influence on *Dirt Music*, in which Lu looks at his North Western surroundings and 'feels like he's driving through a Western. Mesas, buttes, cliffs, gulches' (234). The observation connects *Dirt Music* to a history of Ozploitation movies like *Mad Max* (1979), *Quigley Down Under* (1990), and, more recently *The Proposition* (2005), which play on the parallels between the desolate North of Western Australia and the deserts and badlands of Western USA. The novel explores the quintessential Western theme of 'men's fear of losing their mastery' through a plot that gallops in the rhythm of canonical Western.<sup>12</sup> It is about the entrance of a mysterious and self-reliant stranger, Lu Fox, to the fishing town of White Point and the life of Georgie Jutland. She first notices him poaching Abalone from the small fishing port where her partner, Jim Buckridge, is the feared alpha male and unofficial head of White Point's community. After Lu and Georgie strike up an affair and it is discovered by Jim, Lu flees North, with Jim in pursuit to settle the score.

This relationship with the Western, a genre often accused of being 'fare for men and not for women,' elucidates how accusations of misogyny persist in disrupting the otherwise dominant praise of Winton and McCarthy's fiction.<sup>13</sup> These accusations are aimed at McCarthy primarily for his lack of female characters, with no major female protagonist beyond the possible exception of Rinthy Holme. Lyn McCredden and Nathanael O'Reilly have pointed out that there is also a 'deep vein of feminist questioning of Winton's work'.<sup>14</sup> This argument is that his women, while prominent, are too often the stereotypes of the Madonna or the whore.<sup>15</sup> This

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<sup>10</sup> Stacey Peebles '"Hold Still": Models of Masculinity in the Coens', *From Novel to Film: No Country for Old Men*, ed. by Lynnea Chapman King, Rick Wallach, and Jim Welsh (Plymouth: The Scarecrow Press, 2009), pp. 124–138 (p. 124).

<sup>11</sup> Personal Correspondence.

<sup>12</sup> Jane Tompkins, *West of Everything: The Inner Life of Westerns* (Oxford: OUP, 1992), p. 45.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 17.

<sup>14</sup> Lyn McCredden and Nathanael O'Reilly, 'Tim Winton, Literature, and the Field of Literary Criticism', *Tim Winton: Critical Essays*, ed. by Lyn McCredden and Nathanael O'Reilly (Crawley: UWA, 2014), pp. 1–15 (p. 10).

<sup>15</sup> Hannah Schürholz, '"Over the Cliff and Into the Water": Love, Death and Confessions in Tim Winton's Fiction', *Tim Winton: Critical Essays*, ed. Lyn McCredden and Nathanael O'Reilly (Drawley: UWA, 2014), p. 114.

accusation recently gained public attention when Nicolle Flint of *The Age* wrote a column entitled 'misogyny lurks in Winton's world of fiction.'<sup>16</sup> Flint complained that the majority of Winton's female characters served as 'literary devices enabling the stories of his slightly bewildered, emotionally repressed Aussie blokes to unfold.'<sup>17</sup> These criticisms echo those that have long been levelled at the Western genre in which women, when they do appear, are the apparatus of a genre which 'calls the whole soul of man into being.'<sup>18</sup>

Both novelists have been asked about these accusations, with each providing limited responses. In the much-publicised interview with Oprah Winfrey, McCarthy was asked why 'there is not a lot of engagement with women' in his novels, to which he replied: 'women are tough, I don't pretend to understand women. I don't think men know very much about women. I think they find them very mysterious.'<sup>19</sup> In an interview with *The Wall Street Journal*, McCarthy betrays an awareness of, and potentially a personal dissatisfaction with, his portrayal of women, confessing that his forthcoming book will have a female protagonist: 'I was planning on writing about a woman for fifty years. I will never be competent enough to do so, but at some point you have to try.'<sup>20</sup> Winton has also responded to these accusations publicly, answering a query about Flint's criticism: 'Throughout my long career I've been edited and published by women of the Seventies brand of feminism and never had a comment from any of them.'<sup>21</sup> These limited responses compound rather than address the problem. McCarthy's response appears to place women on a pedestal, while Winton's seems to privilege women of the Seventies brand of feminism as having the last word on misogyny. Such limited responses are unsurprising given both writers' dislike of talking at great length about the meanings and significance of their works. More importantly, their unease with the question indicates a problem with the accusation itself.

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<sup>16</sup> Nicolle Flint, 'Misogyny lurks in Winton's world of fiction', *The Age* (1st August 2013) <<http://goo.gl/uprD5m>> [Accessed 09 March 2015].

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Tompkins, op. cit., p. 15.

<sup>19</sup> Austin Allen, 'Cormac and Oprah Revisited', *big think* <<http://goo.gl/NySo69>> [Accessed 21 July 2016].

<sup>20</sup> John Jurgensen, 'Hollywood's Favourite Cowboy', *The Wall Street Journal* (20 Nov 2009) <<http://goo.gl/M7190L>> [Accessed 09 March 2015].

<sup>21</sup> Strivetoengage, 'Author Talk – Tim Winton' (28 Oct 2013) <<https://goo.gl/jtDVrc>> [Accessed 21 July 2016].

There is a comical half of Winton's response to Flint's article that is more insightful than that of his experience with female editors: 'Being called a misogynist is like doing a stinky fart in a car, you can't escape it.'<sup>22</sup> In other words, to simply label texts, and more worryingly still, authors, as either 'misogynist' or 'non-misogynist' is to both deny the subtlety of a writer's work and undervalue the diverse aims and methods of feminist engagements with literature.

When reading *Dirt Music* and *No Country for Old Men* mindful of the authors' and the Western genre's histories of gender trouble, we see both novelists adopting the genre to explore, provoke, and test 'a model for men who came of age in the twentieth century'.<sup>23</sup> This is a model defined for both novels by the sandy spaces of the Western and the Bible. Understanding this reveals that both novels are not uncritically invoking a 'nostalgia [...] closely related to the marginalisation and fragmentation of women in an emerging masculine economy of newly defined roles and responsibilities'.<sup>24</sup> Instead, they bring the feminine into traditionally masculine-focused sandy spaces as a way of interrogating, rather than enforcing, traditional ideas of gender. In both novels, this interrogation is first established through an awareness that the cultural process that binds deserts with ideas of masculinity has emerged from the same process responsible for the creation of sand.

The language used to describe the creation of sand is almost necessarily that of battle. Michael Welland describes the creation of sand in places such as Canaima National Park as 'geological violence', where ancient sandstone was heaved above the earth's surface by tectonic movements and 'began their battle with the elements, a campaign that they continue to wage today'.<sup>25</sup> Even dry and technical descriptions of sand conjure weaponry and warfare. Julie Laity describes the breakdown of sand into dust clouds as 'saltating sand grains, which break up soil aggregates by ballistic impact and overcome the otherwise strong cohesive force associated with small particles'.<sup>26</sup> This geological violence at the heart of sand's formation clarifies the three themes that are recurrent in sandy literature and art, with masculinity, lost civilisations, and separation from the spiritual all able reducible to different forms of

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<sup>22</sup> Strivetoengage.

<sup>23</sup> Tompkins, p. 45.

<sup>24</sup> Hannah Schürholz, 'Gendered Spaces: The Poetics of Domesticity in Tim Winton's Fiction', *Journal of the European Association of Studies on Australia*, 3:2 (2012), 59–79 (p. 75).

<sup>25</sup> Welland, *Sand: A Journey Through Science and the Imagination*, p. 77.

<sup>26</sup> Julie Laity, *Deserts and Desert Environments* (Chichester: Wiley, 2008), p. 231.

violence. Violence is key to the masculinity of the Western, with the desert requiring man to prove himself equal to the physical threats it presents. It is present in the rupture formed in the breaking of humanity's wholly good relationship with God, and in the destruction of cities and civilisations at the hands of the elements, time, or men. These violent connections are more substantial than scientifically validated literary metaphors, and can be seen in the history of European exploration and research of desert spaces.

As the North African deserts were a site of colonisation many of the first Europeans to explore, study, and map them were soldiers. When we think of writers and explorers who have brought the desert to the fore of the Western (particularly European) imagination, none are more emblematic than T. E. Lawrence, who was so revered for his ability to adapt to desert life and cultures that he became famous as Lawrence 'of Arabia.' But he was also a soldier whose desert exploration was undertaken with the ultimate task of helping the British Army engage and defeat the Ottoman Empire. His actions bestowed on him the legendary status of a 'Truly Strong Man', a masculine ideal revered by D. H. Lawrence.<sup>27</sup> This status was even more strongly cemented and defined by the 1962 movie *Lawrence of Arabia* which borrows many hallmarks of the Western genre, with its focus on troubled men confronting the elements and the enemy in a harsh but beautiful landscape devoid of women. Though he may be the most well-known and influential writer of the desert within the Western canon, Lawrence is not the most significant for this study. The lesser-known scientist, explorer and soldier Ralph Alger Bagnold, with his mix of scientific and biographical writings, offer a more keen insight into the complex relationship between the physicality of sand and its place in the Western imagination.

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<sup>27</sup> Norman Vance, *The Sinews of the Spirit* (Cambridge: CUP, 2009), p. 120.



Fig 3.1: Ralph Alger Bagnold

Bagnold's best-regarded scientific work *The Physics of Blown Sand and Desert Dunes* was so ground-breaking and thorough that it is still used by NASA to aid the analysis of sand dunes on Mars.<sup>28</sup> This despite the fact that the book was written in 1941, sixteen years before man would send the first satellite into space. Even more astonishing is that while Bagnold was a Cambridge educated Engineer, he was an amateur when it came to physics and geology, conducting much of his research while exploring the Sahara after the First World War. This experience ensured that he not only made his mark on the world of physics, but also on warfare, using the methods he learnt in his explorations of the desert in peacetime to create and train the Long Range Desert Group to fight in North Africa during the Second World War. The LRDG were a small group of men who Bagnold taught to survive, drive and fight in the desert in order to conduct 'piracy on the high desert' and wreak havoc among German forces who assumed the Great Sand Sea of Libya to be impassable.<sup>29</sup> The success of their raids inflated German estimates of the strength and numbers of British forces they were encountering and ultimately led German Intelligence to second-guess the information they had received about the size of the British presence in Egypt. This operation became known as 'Bagnold's Bluff,' and its influence not only on the outcome of the war, but also on desert warfare, is hard to overestimate.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>28</sup> Welland, *Sand: A Journey Through Science and the Imagination*, p. 149.

<sup>29</sup> Ralph Bagnold, *Sand Wind and War: Memoirs of a Desert Explorer* (Tucson: Arizona University Press, 1991), p. 124.

<sup>30</sup> Gavin Mortimer, *The Men Who Made the SAS: The History of the Long Range Desert Group* (London: Constable, 2015), pp. 30–41.

While Bagnold is a relatively forgotten figure of desert exploration, being most significant to the scientists who still use his work, he holds curious ties to the works of McCarthy and Winton, as well as other contemporary desert fiction. These connections come largely through his membership of the 'Zerzura club,' a group of international desert explorers who hoped to uncover the mystery behind the fabled city of Zerzura said to exist in the Libyan Desert. This led him to become friends with Count Laszlo Almasy, who went on to inspire Michael Ondaatje's *The English Patient*, which is invoked by *Dirt Music* and known to be admired by McCarthy, whom, curiously, Peter Strauss believes to be the only person 'with as piercingly blue eyes as Ondaatje.'<sup>31</sup> Amongst these chance connections, Bagnold deserves recognition for his own significant, if largely unacknowledged, contribution to desert writing.

Bagnold's major non-scientific works are *Libyan Sands: Travel in a Dead World*, about his peacetime explorations in the Libyan Desert, and *Sand, Wind and War*, his autobiography written shortly before his death in 1990. Bagnold was aware that the well of memory he drew upon in writing these works of non-fiction was tainted by the imagination. In *Libyan Sands*, Bagnold writes about the difficulty of retelling a set of voyages he shared with others: 'I can see one or two of the more meticulous of them throwing down the book in disgust were they to find even one innocent change of sequence, some elision of little happenings to make the account run better. How easy, in contrast, must be the literary task of the single traveller, with his unreeling Arab retinue and his string of discreet camels.'<sup>32</sup> Bagnold's work is certainly not fiction in the guise of autobiography, but it could be considered a precursor to today's creative non-fiction, being rich and open to literary interpretation. Bagnold encourages such a literary approach to his work in the preface of *Desert Sands*, which he opens by writing: 'As others collect their poems and finally republish them, I have collected my travels.'<sup>33</sup> Bagnold's writing expresses a writer torn between a rigidly engineered account of his life's adventures, and an expression of their more poetic and personal impact upon him. His works can break from dry technical accounts into lush invocations of the desert spaces he explored. By synthesising exceptional experiences and an unsurpassed understanding of geography into a literary form,

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<sup>31</sup> Personal Correspondence.

<sup>32</sup> Ralph Bagnold, *Libyan Sands: Travel in a Dead World* (London: Eland, 2010), p. 13.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p. 9.

such works provide a unique insight into the scientific and literary influences of these spaces upon the art of fiction.

Looming in the background of *Dirt Music*, *No Country for Old Men*, and Bagnold's autobiography is the presence of twentieth-century warfare. This is most obviously present in *Sand, Wind and War* and its unflinching portrait of the various traumatic experiences Bagnold encountered in the first world war. He recounts such bloody and grizzly scenes as a man's head and torso slide beside him in a foxhole, the ground squelching underfoot with bloody remains, and the intimacy of killing a German soldier with a Bangalor Torpedo.<sup>34</sup> This experience was tied up with masculinity for Bagnold in two ways. Firstly, he was there because his father had been an officer in the Royal Engineers and his grandfather had been a British officer in the Indian Army. It was standard for a man of that time, and of an officer's class, to follow the family tradition.<sup>35</sup> Secondly, Bagnold reflects on the impact of the war on the men of his generation, noting at the end of the book: 'I saw in the newspaper a diagram of the United Kingdom age distribution of males. The effect of the 1914–18 war stood out starkly. The regular curve had a great bite taken out of it, centred on my generation.'<sup>36</sup> For a man who had spent his life studying the intricacies of cause-and-effect, the wider implications of this loss for a nation which called initially on volunteers to fight the war was obvious: 'The war did not kill off the average of my generation, it took the best, the most responsible and at the same time the most venturesome elements of all classes. These were the individuals who would have, during mid-century, provided needed stability and common sense to our country.'<sup>37</sup> Bagnold goes one step further to reflect that: 'To a lesser extent, the loss must have extended to the next generation.'<sup>38</sup> In many ways, the late twentieth and early twenty-first century settings of both *Dirt Music* and *No Country for Old Men* outwork the way that this loss extended into the next generation.

## Desert Warfare

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<sup>34</sup> Bagnold, *Sand, Wind, and War*, p. 29.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p. 19.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p. 198.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p. 198.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., p. 199.

The war and physical violence is more subdued in *Dirt Music* than in McCarthy's blood-gilt thriller, but it is still the source of the novel's action. The series of events which leads Fox to run away is enabled by the fact that he makes his living poaching in order to sell to Go, a man who feels he has a right to buy from the black market because of having 'been through war. And then South China fuckin sea and Malaysia camps and Darwin' (29). More directly, on the other side of the narrative, we find that Jim Buckridge's gruff and threatening demeanour, which has found him the respect of the White Pointers, is inherited from his father, Big Bill, who is 'not merely a man's man, but a bastard's bastard whose ruthless cunning was not confined to fishing' (37). This menacing personality worked its way into Jim's life through his father's experiences of the Second World War, with Jim explaining to Georgie: 'He was a prisoner of the Japanese. Tortured to death. Think that's what turned the old man, made him so hard—he never got over it. By the time I came along that was all I knew, this scary vicious bastard' (398).

*No Country for Old Men* provides a more direct encounter with the after-effects of war with almost all of the central male characters having fought in either Vietnam or the Second World War. Ed Tom Bell, Sheriff of Terrell County, served in World War Two and was decorated for a misrepresented act of bravery: a shame he carries with him and which contributes to his desperate attempts to care for his community. We also discover that the novel's protagonist, Llewellyn Moss, a welder who sets the novel's course by taking a satchel of money from the bloody scene of a drug-deal gone wrong in the desert, also fought in Vietnam as a sniper. The primary antagonist, mysterious hit man Anton Chigurh, has a curious proficiency for his job—including the ability to give himself complete medical care after being shot with a shotgun—that implies an experience of soldiering. Even more minor characters such as Carson Wells, another hitman hired to find Moss and the money, fought in Vietnam. Their wartime experiences are significant elements of their character, shaping their actions. Bell believes their mutual experience of war will make Moss easier to predict. When asked by his deputy if he thinks Moss knows what will pursue him for taking the money, Bell replies: 'He ought to. He seen the same things I seen and it made an impression on me' (94). Although many of these men have experienced war themselves, they are also shaped by the impact of war on their families' and nations' idea of masculinity.

While Lu does not mention whether or not his father had fought in the war, his influence weighs upon him as a spiritual, if not military, soldier. Lu describes his father converting to Protestantism 'like a hard man into a cold bath' (375), preparing the way for an exploration of a man's idolising his father's muscular Christianity of *Eyrie* (2014) that will be explored further in chapter four. Sheriff Bell, who experienced the horrors of war directly, admires his law-enforcing and soldiering male ancestors, saying at the opening of the novel 'I always liked to hear about the old timers. Never missed a chance to do so' (64). His reverence for these men, particularly those lawmen who were able to maintain the law without carrying a gun, pervades the novel. Bell continually measures not only his time as Sheriff against theirs, but his own strength and value as a man. When Bell is asked at the end of the novel whether he thinks his father was a better man than him, he replies: 'yessir. I do' (279).

These experiences of violence and the admiration of an established soldierly muscularity extends beyond the characters and their families, forming a network of masculine codes for the places in which they live. White Point is described as a place initially populated almost exclusively by male 'returned soldiers, migrants and drifters' (16) and was a place 'beyond the reach of the law and the dampening influence of domesticity' (17). It became a place where 'men worked and drank in a world of their own making' (17). Even as time moved on and 'their women came, they did not, on the whole, bring a certain civilizing something' (17). As money comes into the town after an economic boom, there is only the illusion of calming civility. Wealth makes the wives of the newly rich fisherman think 'of themselves as gentry' while masking the still-present masculine violence by hiding 'shiners beneath their duty-free makeup' (18).

In *No Country for Old Men*, Bell constantly configures his experience of Texas in relationship to past masculine codes of violence and honour, measuring the ways in which times have changed. One thing is clear: while the state may have moved from men shooting with revolvers on horseback to gangs with machine-guns in 4x4s, the violence has remained and is a key factor in the state's conservatism. It is a place where the 'harsh land' has put men in charge. Bell traces this back to the settlers' first presence in the land, saying that 'Two generations in this country is a long time. You're talking about the early settlers. I used to tell em that havin your wife and children killed and scalped and gutted like fish has a tendency to make some people

irritable' (195). As a result of this consistent threat, a combative and defensive masculinity has always been close to the people's heart.<sup>39</sup>

It is in these codified contexts that the novels express their central moments of masculine trauma. For Sheriff Bell, this trauma is not the action of the novel, but the experience of his undeserved medal, where he ran away from the battlefield rather than stay to hopelessly defend his wounded comrades. Moss' survivors guilt is first indicated through a boar-tusk necklace that he wears for a 'dead somebody' (225), presumably a deceased comrade. We are also granted an insight into this sense of guilt at the end of the novel when Bell informs Moss' father of his son's death and is told of how, upon returning from Vietnam, Moss had gone to visit the families of his dead comrades only to see in their faces a reflection of his own feelings, that they were 'wishin he was dead [...] In place of their own loved one' (294). Even Wells is seen to carry trauma from his wartime experiences. As Chigurh shoots Wells in the head, we are told that among a handful of memories that splatter on the wall behind him are 'the faces of men as they died on their knees before him. The body of a child dead in a roadside ravine in another country' (178).

In *Dirt Music*, the precise source of Jim's trauma is unseen. We assume it was the beatings by his father, as well as an awareness of the things his father was doing among the community, including dispensing his own rough justice against those who offended him—justice that often resulted in missing persons (121). This trauma manifests itself most sorely in the guilt he feels about the way he treated his wife, who died of cancer in the years before the narrative begins. What he suffered at the hands of his father, combined with the knowledge that nobody else in the community could touch him, led to reckless behaviour, of which a drunken tryst with Lu's sister, Sally Fox, weighs most heavily on his mind.

Lu's trauma lives in the memory of a freak car accident when he and his entire living family—his brother and sister-in-law, Darkie and Sally Fox, along with his nephew and niece, Bullet and Bird—were driving along in their Ute. As they neared the end of their drive, the vehicle suddenly skidded in the dirt, and rolled over, killing everybody but Lu. Lu's guilt stems dually from the fact that he alone survived the crash and a belief that he killed his niece. He confesses to Georgie, that Bird 'lived

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<sup>39</sup> For more about this interpretation of constructions of masculinity and their relationship to wartime, see: Robert A. Nye 'Masculinities in War and Peace', *The American Historical Review*, 112:2 (April 2007), 417–438.

for a while. On machines' but that doctors 'kept shoving all these forms into my hands [...] They wore me down' (157). Lu refuses to see his decision to stop life-support as merciful, instead accusing himself of making it out of 'convenience' (157).

The masculine codes of their surroundings make the male characters suppress their trauma and, as the eventual release of this pressure propels their plots, the narratives explore the deep and complicated cause for this suppression in their desert geographies.

After the First World War, Bagnold studied Engineering in Cambridge with many other young men returned from battle. Bagnold observed that the war had instilled in them 'a dangerous capacity for spontaneous combustion' (36). For Bagnold, as for many of his contemporaries, his main priority in Cambridge was getting back 'the lost three years of my youth' (36). After he graduated, he returned to the army, where he discovered his love for desert spaces, claiming 'Egypt fascinated me from the start, just as Dartmoor had done when I was a boy.'<sup>40</sup> The cause for this sense of familiarity was that: 'Both had the strange aura induced by the physical presence of the remote past and also great, bare, trackless, expanses where the careless might well get lost.'<sup>41</sup> This made the desert a space where Bagnold might experience the adrenaline, adventure and comradeship of the war, but also retreat from his memories of combat and into the happier times of his childhood. This core of Bagnold's attraction to sandy spaces is betrayed in his startling recounting of a trip to the North African sand seas:

In 1929 and 1930, during my weeks of travel over the lifeless sand sea in North Africa, I became fascinated by the vast scale of organization of the dunes and how a strong wind would cause the whole dune surface to flow, scouring sand from under one's feet. Here, where there existed no animals, vegetation, or rain to interfere with sand movements, the dunes seemed to behave like living things. How was it that they kept their precise shape while marching interminably downwind? How was it that they insisted on repairing any damage done to their individual shapes? How, in other regions of the same desert, were they able to breed 'babies' just like themselves that proceed to run on ahead of their parents? Why did they absorb nourishment and continue to

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<sup>40</sup> Bagnold, *Sand Wind and War*, p. 51.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p. 51.

grow instead of allowing the sand to spread out evenly over the desert as finer dust grains do?<sup>42</sup>

Bagnold describes the sand dunes as though they were former soldiers. They are 'marching interminably downwind', keeping their shape and formation as they go. It is the four questions that Bagnold asks of these marching sandy soldiers that is most revealing. They need little alteration to sound like the questions we may ask of men returning from the horrors of war: How do they keep going? How might they repair their damage? How are they able to have functioning families? How is it they maintain their form in the face of overwhelming violence? It was perhaps not purely the scientific questions raised by the dunes that Bagnold spent the rest of his life attempting to answer.

Like Bagnold, the trauma of men of *Dirt Music* and *No Country for Old Men* is something rarely accessible via explicit dialogue and narration. Instead, it is accessible through the way in which the novels project it upon the desert to which they are drawn.

By contrast to the sea, which is the only place Lu admits to being 'happy' (127), the land has become a site of violence within which he sees his own mental trauma reflected back at him. When he flies, he looks down and sees the landscape as a violent land littered with 'wens and scars and open wounds', a 'high skeletal disarray of the sandstone ranges where rivers run like green gashes toward the sea' and 'out at the horizon the jagged, island-choked coast' (299). The land is also tied to his father, with his decision to retreat to the north arising from his memory of 'the north the old man spoke of with pride and fear in his voice, the rugged stone ranges, the withering heat' (221). There is good reason that the land has become the reflective site of his trauma, with Lu acknowledging its potential, and history, of inflicting damage upon him. In one strongly McCarthy-esque scene, Lu sees the land as 'like some dormant creature whose stillness is only momentary, as though the sun blasted, dusty hide of the place might shudder and shake itself off, rise to its bowed and saurian feet and stalk away at any moment' (236). Lu sees the living and malevolent potential of this land because it was its very dust that killed his father. As an asbestos miner, the dust had gathered in his lungs, cutting them to shreds with every breath,

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<sup>42</sup> Bagnold, *Sand Wind and War*, pp. 103–104.

eventually leaving him drowning in a hospital bed 'like a man being held down in a tub of water' (229).

The land also brings traumas back to the men of *No Country for Old Men*. The novel opens with Moss using the skills he honed as a sniper in Vietnam to hunt, shooting at an antelope from long range—a hobby we discover he maintains to escape his life as husband and welder. It is on this trip that he discovers the money, but on a return trip to give water to a wounded man, he encounters a party charged with retrieving it. The ensuing chase brings back a fear he'd had before 'in another country' (30).

Sheriff Bell, like Lu Fox, sees a potentially malevolent personality in the land that inflicts hardship on its inhabitants: 'This country was hard on people. But they never seemed to hold it to account. In a way that seems peculiar. That they didnt [...] This country will kill you in a heartbeat and still people love it' (271). For all that the country threatens death through the snakes, scorpions and heat, and all the human violence it harbours, Bell still journeys into its heart to investigate the increasingly grizzly crimes of the drug trade. When asked if he loves the country he responds: 'I guess you could say I do' (271). However, Bell seems to misunderstand the relationship with the desert when he asks: 'How come people dont feel like this country has a lot to answer for?' (271). Although the people of Texas may not ask the question, Bell clearly believes it contains the answers. His dedication to his position as Sheriff and continual investigations into the desert conveys a man who is searching for the answer to human violence as much as the individual crimes in his state. It is a place, after all, where Bell encounters Anton Chigurh, 'a true and living prophet of destruction' (3), a grim John the Baptist whose unrelenting violence baptises people in a more bloody truth. The same is true for Lu Fox, who, despite the violent associations of the land, believes that his pilgrimage through the rich deserts of the North to the isolation of the coast may provide him with some deeper understanding of why the family he loved have all left him behind. Turning to Ralph Bagnold's scientific writing suggests why the protagonists are attracted to sand and dust-strewn landscapes in their quests for answers.



Fig. 3.2: extracting a car from soft sand

### Chance, Luck, Law

The result of Bagnold's research in the desert was wide-ranging, producing *The Physics of Blown Sand and Desert Dunes*, upon which almost the entire study of the physics of sand is built. One particular discovery had a great impact outside of this field and speaks intriguingly to both *Dirt Music* and *No Country for Old Men*. While examining the sizes of sand grains in random samples, Bagnold discovered that the distribution of sizes was not as chaotic as he had expected. He observed that, 'The results soon suggested the interesting likelihood that the grading of all naturally deposited sands tends towards one simple law.'<sup>43</sup> Bagnold later explained that when he would draw up his results 'On log-log paper, all of the analyses that I did, unlike what one would expect from the accepted probability distribution, looked more like hyperbole.'<sup>44</sup> The fact that the data was consistently hyperbolic in shape suggested that there was a continual, undiscovered law driving the sand particles into some unrealised pattern. This discovery by Bagnold was pursued further by Ole Barndorff-Nielsen who explored the mathematics behind this pattern, discovering:

Not only that the hyperbolic distribution suggested by Bagnold could be fully expressed by a referee to a type of function well known to applied mathematics

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<sup>43</sup> Ralph Bagnold, *The Physics of Windblown Sand and Desert Dunes* (Mineola: Dover, 2005), p. 113.

<sup>44</sup> Anders Leiff and Ole E. Barndorff-Nielsen, 'Blown Sand' (Aarhus University, 1984) accessed on Youtube. Uploaded 10 Feb 2012, <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u73mtDZXZV8>> [Accessed 21 July 2016].

but rather surprisingly the same mathematical formula described a considerable number of imperial distributions from quite different fields of distribution, for instance, distribution of contents of gold per ore, of accelerations in the turbulent atmospheric field, of lengths of beans, of personal incomes in Australia, besides size distributions of sand deposited by winds or by water.<sup>45</sup>

The discovery was called Hyperbolic Distribution and Bandorff-Nielsen developed its foundational theory into an understanding of Generalised Hyperbolic Distribution which has been used not only to predict the distribution of windblown sand, but also to model financial markets.

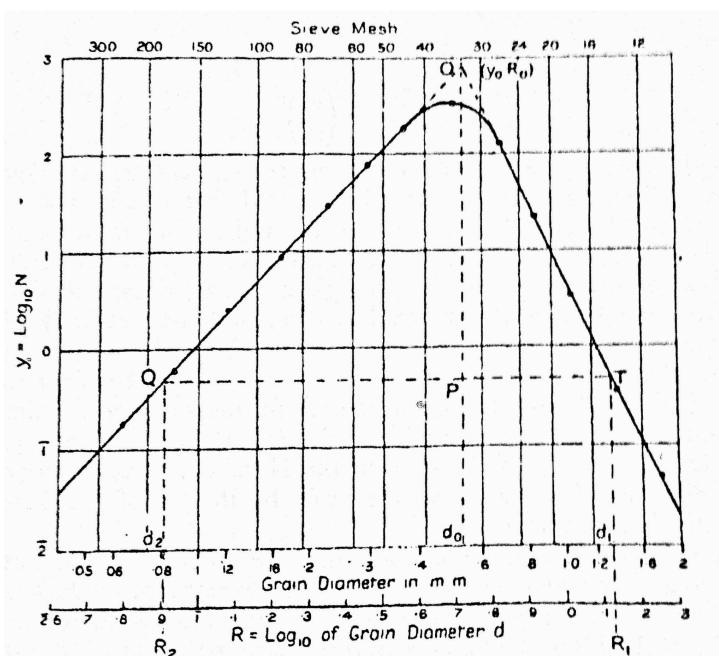


Fig 3.3: Bagnold's Log Diagram

For Bagnold, this was confirmation of his belief in the Hermetic philosophy that 'Everything happens according to a law. Chance is but a name for a law unrecognised.'<sup>46</sup> His time in the sand had helped reveal that beneath even the most random events and distributions was some mathematical system underpinning an almost supernatural form of order, which, if understood, man could use to model

<sup>45</sup> Leiff and Bandorff-Nielsen, 'Blown Sand'.

<sup>46</sup> Ralph Bagnold, 'The Nature and Correlation of Random Distributions', *Proceedings of the Royal Society of London A*. 388:1795 (8 August 1983), 273–291 (p. 273).

and predict future events. This discovery not only solidified Bagnold's faith in hidden natural laws, but also further dismantled his belief in God.

Bagnold explains, in a bold invocation of the First World War, how his experiences of human violence dismantled any present faith in the Christian God:

We lived a weird, otherworldly life among shell holes and rotting, fly-covered corpses. We got used to it. At my age I had known no other kind of adult life. We worked for the very urgent present, looking ahead no further than the next hoped for period of blissful relaxation. Our future seemed unlikely. That life appears to have caused me no lasting harm, but it left me a realist without a reverence for dead bodies, and with a cynical disbelief in the so-called 'sanctity of human life,' a concept which stems from the monstrous, absurd conceit that Man was made in the image of God. What monumental arrogance on the one hand, and what utter impudence on the other.<sup>47</sup>

Bagnold sees this 'cynical disbelief' as a result of the war alone, but he was writing his recollections in the late 1980s, and it is hard to believe that his later life and research did not solidify this view. Bagnold's quest for understanding in the desert enables surprising and particular insight into both novels, as they re-live, replay, and to a certain extent riposte the conclusion found in Bagnold's writing.

As for Bagnold, Lu and Bell's traumatic memories give rise to a focus on their geography in the belief that it may contain some answers and explanations. What Bagnold's research alerts us to is that what both Lu and Bell also seek is to understand whether their lives have been governed by chance, luck and law, with the answer also having significant implications for their spiritual and religious beliefs. As they look at the violent potential and scarred surfaces of the land reflecting their own wounds back at them, they begin to question the goodness of the God supposedly responsible for its creation, and who presided over the events that wounded them.

For Lu, the death his father as a result of asbestosis, the freak death of his mother who was impaled by a tree, and even the crash that killed the rest of his family indicate that life is governed by blind and sometimes cruel chance. This challenges his inherited faith in the natural world as holy:

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<sup>47</sup> Bagnold, *Sand, Wind, and War*, p. 198.

Holy? He always wanted to believe it, and it felt instinctively true from a thousand days spent dragging a stick through the dirt while crows cleared their throats benignly at him and those stones whined upon the hill. But there she is in the end with a tree through her. And the old man all that time dying with those blue fibres in his lungs. God's good earth. Tilting away from him. Sliding beneath the tyres of that old ute and then suddenly catching, biting enough for it to roll and send the kids out into the paddock like flung mailbags. The world is holy? Maybe so. But it has teeth too. How often has he felt that bite in a slamming gust of wind. (361)

Bell also begins to believe that the Christian God he grew up learning about in Texas may not be as loving and nurturing as he may once have believed. When he looks out at the desert, he sees a distant creator coldly laying the laws of a violent and dangerous world:

He stood there looking out across the desert. So quiet. Low hum of the wind in the wires. High blood weeds along the road. Wringers and sacahuista. Beyond in the stone arroyos the tracks of dragons. The raw rock mountains shadowed in the late sun and to the east the shimmering abscissa of the desert plains under a sky where raincurtains hung dark as soot all along the quadrant. That god lives in silence who has scoured the following land with salt and ash.

(45)

For both Lu and Bell, the violence that they see in their desert landscapes does not dismantle their long-held belief in the God who created the land, but provides evidence that this God is neither good nor benevolent. These moments of doubt in divine goodness emerge from and contribute to a survivor's guilt that continually wrestles with their own luck: why is it that while their friends and family died, they were spared?

Both Lu and Bell see their lives as being the result of luck. Lu begins to believe what the White Point Community have long suspected: that the Fox family are cursed by bad luck. The power of this belief is so strong that Jim Buckridge believes he caught this bad luck from Sally Fox 'like some kind of disease' (400). Bell sees his survival as the result of good luck, saying: 'Me I was always lucky. My whole

life. I wouldn't be here otherwise. Scraps I been in' (91). Even this good luck weighs heavily on Bell's shoulders, making him wonder why God smiles on him over his comrades despite having not 'give[n] the good Lord all that much cause to smile' (91). Like Bagnold, the pressure of the protagonists' profound encounters with luck or chance drives them to search for the underlying laws that have dictated their fate.

When we are introduced to Lu and Moss, they are pursuing a self-imposed law, living a self-reliant existence entrusting their own ability to face the natural and human forces that confront them. Lu goes off-grid and survives on the edge of the law by poaching, living 'by force of will' (52). Moss has a similarly hand-to-mouth existence, working as a welder and living in a trailer with his wife. He is a man proud of his ability to deal with situations, with Carla Jean expressing confidence that he can 'take care of hisself' in the face of the cartels who seek their money (127). Bell, meanwhile, pursues the law of the land as though redemption can be found upholding the law as a Sheriff. The most curious approach is Chigurh's, who seeks to control the randomness of life in a way that echoes Bagnold's discoveries in the desert.

Chigurh adopts an almost religious reverence of the hidden mathematical laws underpinning nature. His guidance is provided by the coin toss, allowing those victims in his periphery vision, such as Carla Jean, one last chance at survival by asking them to call his flip of a coin. When confronting a gas-station clerk who irritates him, Chigurh explains that the passage of the coin, which has been in circulation for twenty-two years, is not random, but has instead been traveling: 'to get here. And now it's here. And I've got my hand over it. And it's either heads or tails. And you have to say' (56). For Chigurh, a coin's passage and the result of its toss reveals a path of only apparent chance. It reveals a hidden course that he must follow, and to deviate from which, he believes, would be to 'make myself vulnerable' (259).

In *Dirt Music*, Jim adopts a mentality akin to Chigurh's, believing that he can somehow control or align himself with the hidden forces dictating his life that he believes is more than just luck. When asked directly by Georgie about the role of luck in fishing, Jim makes it clear that he does not believe in such things: 'Knowledge, he said. Seamanship. Experience. Good data and record keeping. A bit of lateral thinking and instinct maybe. Bad fishermen need luck' (321). Instead, he sees things such as his wife's death and freak enormous fishing catches as omens to

which he must respond. He decides that the only way to remove himself from this stream of exceptional bad luck is to take Georgie to find Lu, explaining to her that this belief started on the death of his first wife:

It felt like judgement. Not just for that but every other mongrel thing I ever did to my wife, anyone. Some kind of judgement that wouldn't let up until I changed.

You can't possibly *believe* that, said Georgie with a shudder.

But I do, he said.

It's vile.

I'm not proud of it, he said.

I don't mean that, I mean the way you're seeing the world. Like some vengeful balance sheet.

I reckon that's how it is. (400–401)

Like Chigurh, Jim believes in something lurking behind the figure of luck that is neither spiritual nor blind chance. It is something indefinable. And his way of dealing with it is to slip into the stream that he believes these moments of extreme fortune or misfortune are prompting him.

Both Chigurh's and Jim's beliefs are grim and morbid reductions, adaptations and spiritual infusions of hidden physical laws that Bagnold's work in the desert has helped uncover. When Bagnold looked behind the seemingly random and found surprising mathematical trends, Chigurh and Jim look behind the figure of luck and see a moral accountant with vengeful balance sheets. Despite these differences, the conclusions of Chigurh and Jim's beliefs are not entirely removed from Bagnold's own fear of the potentially grim results that discoveries such as his may inspire.

We experience a level of discomfort with Bagnold's claim that his wartime experience caused him to doubt 'the sanctity of human life' when he describes dining with a Japanese official. Bagnold recalls that as they dined, beggars would occasionally come to the window and be moved on, causing the official to boast that he had 'got rid of' some recently (92). Bagnold's reflections on the experience are somewhat flippant: "Got rid of" meant they had been liquidated. However, he was an excellent host' (92). The joke is an odd one, and it paints Bagnold in an unfairly

cold light. What we find in his earlier writings is a concern about what the world might become were human life reduced to a form of puzzle to progressively solve.

Amongst his continual praise of the possibilities of science, and his position as a man whose own research contributed to revealing the hidden mechanics of the world, Bagnold displays a surprising level of anxiety about what may happen if all of these rules are uncovered:

Perhaps a long time hence, when all the earth's surface has been seen and surveyed, there may be nothing left to find. Fancifully, we can picture the excavator rummaging about with his pick in the last yard of unexamined soil. Behind him we catch a glimpse of experts, microscopes and notebooks, while in front, very near now, stand the locked gates in the city's misty walls.

The pick is withdrawn. The time has come at last when the experts can close their notebooks, for there is nothing else unfound. We see Zerzura crumbling rapidly into dust. Little birds rise from within and fly away. A cloud moving across the sun makes the world a dull and colourless place. (218)

This description that ends *Libyan Sands* is one of those startling moments of Bagnold's writing. The anxiety is clear: that everything about the physical universe will eventually be known. And with this, something will die. It seems to be more than a sense of joy, or wonder that dies. The falling darkness and the flight of the birds hints at something darker, almost apocalyptic.

*Dirt Music* and *No Country for Old Men* contain scenes that startlingly enact this fear. In *Dirt Music*, Bagnold's anxiety is enacted in one of Winton's signature poetic chapters, removed from the plot, where Georgie dreams that she is watching Lu uncovering the secret cables and pipes that keep the world turning:

She saw Lu fox kneeling in a urinous haze. The sun was a penny. He dug in the earth with the bushfire sky behind him. He paused a moment and beckoned. Georgie squatted alongside him to see the black steel pipe beneath the surface with its rash of valves and taps. Saw him twist each in turn. One spewed numbers, another laughter. And there were little jets of every odour: your mother, the smell of the back of your arm, food, shit, decay, soap. She heard the cries of children, saw photosynthesis. Chunks of information spurted out like sausage meat. From one tap there was just salt and from the next the

smell of freshly-minted money. Lu went forth like a dog digging, with a spray of dirt fanning from between his thighs, until he revealed an infernal network of pipes beneath the earth that seemed to leach and store and ferment every moment of time and experience from beneath their feet. Everything that ever happened was there. She didn't understand why or who did this or what became of it.

She began to cry from bewilderment and anxiety. (336–337)

To see all of this in something as cold and unappealing as an ‘infernal network of pipes’ in a ‘urinous haze’ against a ‘bushfire sky’ gives the scene an apocalyptic tone reminiscent of Bagnold’s dark vision of complete understanding.

*No Country for Old Men* develops this environmental darkness into a human evil, presenting the potentially awful things that might be explained as justifiable in a world devoid of mystery or uncertainty and run on cold logic. Chigurh confronts Carla Jean with the coin toss at the end of the novel:

I had no say in the matter. Every moment in your life is a turning and every one a choosing. Somewhere you made a choice. All followed to this. The accounting is scrupulous. The shape is drawn. No line can be erased. I had no belief in your ability to move a coin to your bidding. How could you? A person’s path through the world seldom changes and even more seldom will it change abruptly. And the shape of your path was visible from the beginning.

She sat sobbing. She shook her head.

Yet even though I could have told you how all of this would end I thought it not too much to ask that you have a final glimpse of hope in the world to lift your heart before the shroud drops, the darkness. Do you see? (259)

For Chigurh, life is a complex set of figures behind which lies a simple algorithm. Like the graphs of Hyperbolic Distributions, Chigurh believes that life is a series of choices, dots upon a graph, through which ‘The shape is drawn. No line can be erased’ and from which ‘the accounting is scrupulous.’ Yes, there are decisions to be made, but their outcomes are precise and unchangeable. Chigurh follows these laws just like coins in people’s pockets, becoming a tool for the outworking of this philosophy’s judgement. Occasionally, as he does with the storekeeper early in the

novel, and Carla Jean, Chigurh allows these invisible rules to determine whether people live or die. The owner of the petrol station calls the coin correctly and thus, Chigurh believes, he was meant to live. Carla Jean, however, calls the coin incorrectly, revealing that her time is up. Chigurh makes it clear that the coin flip is not arbitrary: he claims to know the outcome, in Carla Jean's case at least, before it is flipped. The toss is merely to offer them a glimpse of the previously invisible logic that he and they have both followed to a point where their fate will be decided.

What is exceptional about these scenes, and in the two novels in general, when compared to Bagnold's work, is their inclusion of the feminine figure. In both scenes by Winton and McCarthy we see that this desire to understand, to break the natural world down to its facts and figures, is a masculine pursuit. In both, the masculine 'understanding' of the world's fine inner workings, correct or not, reduce the feminine to tears. We might view this as evidence that McCarthy and Winton stereotype the feminine. The Coen Brothers' adaptation of the novel expresses this discomfort by changing Carla Jean's passive acceptance of Chigurh's logic into a moment of resistance, making her refuse to call the toss and assert that 'the coin dont have no say. It's just you.'<sup>48</sup>

The presence of the sobbing woman might be taken to reinforce Schürholz's belief that Winton's 'ambivalent female portrayals' work to 'recentralise masculinity'.<sup>49</sup> Such readings are especially easy to support when we consider that the Western genre 'asserts male dominance' through similar moments of women breaking, with Jane Tompkins noting that in the Western, 'when the crunch comes, women shatter into words'.<sup>50</sup> However, these scenes cannot be taken in isolation. Read within a broader context, they can be understood as drawing the feminine into an attempt to understand these sandy geographies.

## The Feminine in the Desert

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<sup>48</sup> *No Country for Old Men*, dir. by Joel Coen & Ethan Coen (Paramount Vintage, 2008).

<sup>49</sup> Schürholz, "'Over the Cliff and Into the Water': Love, Death and Confessions in Tim Winton's Fiction', *Tim Winton, Critical Essays*, ed. by, Lyn McCredden and Nathanael O'Reilly (Crawley: UWA, 2014), pp. 96-121 (p. 114).

<sup>50</sup> Tompkins, pp. 59, 62.

Winton's *Dirt Music* plays around with the notion of gender. Not only are the names of the two central characters, Georgie and Lu, androgynous, they also contain characteristics stereotypically associated with their opposite gender. In many ways, it is Georgie who fits the John Wayne masculine mould, being the adventurer who has tested herself against the elements and seen more of the world through her extensive trips and adventures at sea and in the Middle East. Lu, on the other hand, fits into the less present Western mould of the woman, being described as 'domesticated', emotional, and being more prone to tears than Georgie. Indeed, when the two first sleep together, it is Lu who shatters into tears (78). In playing around with these expectations, there is an acknowledgement that some attributes may be masculine, and some feminine, even if males do not necessarily have a monopoly on masculinity or females to femininity. Georgie observes:

So many other men were mostly calculation. Jim Buckridge, even Red. The chief impulse of their lives was management. It wasn't exclusively a male thing but, God knows, men had it in spades. Most of her life she'd had it, too, just living by will, achieving and maintaining control. But Lu was pure, hot furling. Emotion cut off and backed up . . . He was a man trying to live like a man, by force of will. But it was against his nature. (415)

This observation begins to expose how the novel's interest in gender is more complicated than critics such as Flint assert. It shows that the narrative is not promoting the form of masculinity that Lu embodies, but questioning his self-imposed expectation of masculine codes.

McCarthy also plays with our expectations of the masculine and the feminine. Firstly, while Carla Jean shatters into sobs when facing Chigurh, women, in general, do not shatter into words. Instead, the speaking is done almost entirely by men. Although Moss, Chigurh and Bell are all 'men of action' who speak in the clipped and abrupt tradition of the Western, they are all talkers. This is especially true of Ed Tom, who privileges the reader with his thoughts and concerns as though we are his most intimate of friends. Moss, also, while more sparing with his words than Bell, seems fond of talking. But it is Wells who shatters most humiliatingly, futilely attempting to cut a deal with Chigurh and delay his inevitable death to a point where

his captor tells him 'You should admit your situation. There would be more dignity in it' (176).

Just as men can clearly 'shatter into words' in McCarthy's novel, so too can women be figures of action. This is no more clear than when Carla Jean threatens Tom Bell after he tells her of Moss' death: 'You say you're sorry one more time and by God if I won't get my gun and shoot you' (247). This is a threat the Sheriff does not believe to be a bluff, deciding to 'take her at her word' and leave (248).

Although aware of and playful with the stereotypes of masculine and feminine figures, both narratives do attempt to articulate a difference between the masculine and the feminine. For both works, this crucial difference is seen in the different perceptions of the spiritual, with women and girls frequently perceiving broader truths that elude the men around them.

In *Dirt Music*, the character that seems to have the greatest understanding of the world is Bird, Lu's deceased niece who we only encounter through Lu's memory. Although she is partly exceptional because she is a child, her brother Bullet is not given the same aura. Bird 'was perfect. Funny, fey, sharp' (105). After her death, Lu found notes with 'sorry' written upon them that Bird pushed through the floorboards. These messages from beyond the grave make Lu wonder if, even then, she was aware of the coming disaster that would kill her: 'Did she know something See her death? And his failure?' (105). Lu even recounts a scene in which she believes she has seen God: 'A dot. A dot in a circle, sort of. When I close me eye and poke it with me thumb he floats across the sky. Right into the sun, even. No one else can go in the sun, right?' (110). Lu almost believes her, because 'if anyone saw God it would likely be her. Bird's the nearest thing to an angelic being' (110).

In McCarthy's novel, the figure most in touch with the divine is Bell's wife, Loretta. Bell continually praises Loretta in the ways one might expect of a husband—calling the day he met his wife 'the luckiest'—but the reader also sees that she is the only character who seems to have a wholly positive influence in the world (91). In a book of unrelenting hardness there is a crucial scene where Bell explains that Loretta is the county cell's cook and jailer:

I dont believe you could do this job without a wife. A pretty unusual wife at that. Cook and jailer and I dont know what all. Them boys dont know how good they've got it. Well, maybe they do. I never worried about her being safe.

They get fresh garden stuff a good part of the year. Good cornbread. Soupbeans. She's been known to fix em hamburgers and french fries. We've had em come back even years later and they'd be married and doing good. Bring their wives. Bring their kids even. They didnt come back to see me. I've seen em to introduce their wives or their sweethearts and then just go to bawlin. Grown men. That had done some pretty bad things. She knew what she was doin. She always did. So we go over budget on the jail ever month but what are you goin to do about that? You aint goin to do nothin about it. That's what you're goin to do. (159)

Through Loretta we glimpse possibly the only figure of grace in the novel. Only through her do we see the possibility for the world to be improved by turning bad to good. From men who had done bad things, Loretta has helped them become good men, with families. And, as their shattering into tears suggests, clearly, they consider the kindness and care of Loretta has been instrumental in their turning.

This association of the feminine with a heightened spiritual acuity is rooted in the Bible, particularly its portrayal of the male disciples' miscomprehensions of larger truths. This is most famously seen when a woman washes Jesus with perfume:

There came unto him a woman having an alabaster box of very precious ointment, and poured it on his head, as he sat at meat. But when his disciples saw it, they had indignation, saying, To what purpose is this waste? For this ointment might have been sold for much, and given to the poor. When Jesus understood it, he said unto them, why trouble ye the woman? For she hath wrought a good work upon me. For ye have the poor always with you; but me ye have not always. For in that she hath poured this ointment on my body, she did it for my burial. (Matt 26:7–22, KJV)

The male disciples do not realise the significance of what they are seeing. They see the perfume and break it down into money, money to be used to good ends but not as significant as the larger value of the act.

This Biblically-rooted interest in the spiritual perceptiveness of the feminine also alerts us to an association between the feminine with the nurturing and graceful potential of water, rather than the violence of sand. The last thing Birdie ever says to Lu is a childlike observation of water's ability to support the human, asking 'Lu,

how come water lets you through it?' (114). It is Georgie, however, who is most consistently described as having an affinity for water, not just a love for it: she is an accomplished 'sailor, diver and angler' (6) who is drawn to early-morning swims, and who is drawn to drink in her darker moments. She is also a nurse who recalls the sanctity of washing and binding a corpse, a process that led her to find 'a pure part of herself' (175). We see less of this in Loretta, being a considerably less present figure in the novel than Georgie. But a central part of her graceful caring of the inmates is her preparation of 'fresh food' from the garden that she nurtures. This is a small moment in the novel, but a significant one. It is not only the most substantial moment in the novel's drawing of Loretta, but also the only moment in the parched desert of the narrative in which either the troubled or the land is nurtured.

Men, by contrast, either fail in their attempts to wash and water, or achieve them only to achieve more violent ends. Moss first gets in trouble when he decides in the evening after finding the money to return to the scene and take water to an injured survivor (24). By the time Moss reaches him, he has already died. Similarly, Chigurgh is competent in bathing and dressing wounds, but he only does so for himself and only to continue his pursuit of the money.

The men of McCarthy's novel continually ignore the nurturing wisdom of the women to their peril. The costliest of these moments is when Moss phones Carla Jean from the hospital, and she tells him to come home:

Llewelyn, I dont even want the money. I just want to be back like we was.

We will be.

No we wont. I've thought about it. It's a false god.

Yeah. But it's real money. (182)

Again, the masculine breaks down what Carla Jean sees as a false god into individual currency. His intentions are good, wishing to provide a better life for himself and his wife, but they will also lead them both to their death. The ignoring of women's grace and wisdom extends into the criticism that engages with *No Country for Old Men*.

In his essay 'Grace and Moss's End', Dennis Cutchins criticises the Coen Brothers' decision to not depict Moss's death. He takes particular issue with the result that we do not see Moss surrender his weapon in a futile attempt to save the female hitchhiker he picked up earlier in the novel. Dennis ignores Loretta's

association with grace, arguing that it is Moss' single act of self-sacrifice that would be the most important moment of grace for the story.<sup>51</sup> Yet, to present Moss' act as one of grace ignores the fact that Moss picked up the hitchhiker knowing the Chigurh and the cartel are pursuing him. In the scenes where Moss is with the hitchhiker, we get the sense that Moss uses her as an audience for his masculinity. He begins to talk in a tone we have not heard before, surprising the reader through the masculine clichés he utters, such as 'I could tell you, but then I'd have to kill you' (220) when asked what was in the satchel. More surprisingly still is his response to the girl's questioning whether he was sorry he became an outlaw, where he states only that he is 'Sorry I didn't start sooner' (220). Having already been hospitalised by his decision to take the money, having tried to back out of it by calling Wells, and knowing that Chigurh is seeking to kill his wife, we can only hope that this is some performative bravado. Yes, Moss eventually sacrifices himself for the girl, but he lacked the foresight and wisdom to see the inevitable outcome of picking her up. This ignorance of the spiritual acuity and wisdom of the narratives' females continues into their conclusions.

### Shattered Laws

Both novels end in moments where men's codes and laws are shattered, revealing their inability to either protect or direct the protagonists' lives. In *No Country for Old Men*, Moss' faith in his ability to meet the violence coming his way is broken when he is shot dead by the cartel and Chigurh kills his wife. Chigurh's coin-toss is revealed to not protect him from seemingly random and violent acts when he is hit by a car after obeying the coin and killing Carla Jean. Bell, failing to protect Moss or Carla Jean, and losing trace of Chigurh, believes that he is no longer able to uphold the law of the county as he once had, and retires. In *Dirt Music*, Jim realises that helping Georgie find Lu does not prevent him from bad luck when their plane stalls and crashes when flying away from both Coronation Gulf and their attempt to find Lu. Lu, in rescuing Georgie from the wreckage, realises that he cannot survive

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<sup>51</sup> Dennis Cutchins, 'Grace and Moss's End in *No Country for Old Men*', *From Stage to Screen: No Country for Old Men*, ed. by Lynnea Chapman King, Rick Wallach, and Jim Welsh (Langham: Scarecrow Press, 2009), pp. 155–172 (p. 165).

alone by sheer force of will. The aftermath of these moments provokes mixed responses from the reader, initially appearing to justify rather than challenge the suspicions about gender representation that follow both authors.

The final few lines of *Dirt Music* seem to confirm criticism that Winton's work both stereotypes the female, and uses them primarily to allow the masculine story to continue. After Lu saves Georgie by breathing for her while underwater, he washes up on shore having nearly drowned and in need of CPR. As Jim and Red, look on, they tell Georgie 'you're the nurse', to which she responds, 'yes . . . this is what I do' (461). Even when Lu is breathing into Georgie, her life is configured in terms of Lu's future, with the reader being told that she 'drank his hot shout and let him swim up her for the rest of her life' (459).

*No Country for Old Men* is drawn to a close with a more indecipherable but equally discomforting scene. With Bell new to retirement, he tells us two dreams. First, he recounts the dream of the house in which he abandoned his wounded comrades during the war, and in particular he talks of the stone trough outside the house which 'stayed pretty much full' of water and must have been a hundred or two hundred years old' (307). Bell has been thinking of that trough recently, and the man who 'had set down with a hammer and a chisel and carved a stone water trough to last ten thousand years. Why was that? What was it he had faith in?' (307). The only thing Bell can think of is that 'there was some sort of promise in his heart' (308) and that 'I would like to make that kind of promise. I think that's what I would like most of all' (308). The final image, which seems unconnected, is a dream he had about his father. In the dream, Bell finds himself 'in older times and I was on horseback going through the mountains of a night' (309). His father then rides past him silently, almost ghostly, with a 'blanket wrapped around him' and his 'head down' 'carryin fire in a horn the way people used to do' (309). The novel then ends with Bell telling us: 'And in the dream I knew that he was going on ahead and that he was fixin to make a fire somewhere out there in all that cold and I knew that whenever I got there he would be there. And then I woke up' (309).

Critics debate the ending, with some, such as David Cremeen, believing that 'what matters are the timeless elements like stone and fire and all that they

symbolically imply.<sup>52</sup> Others, such as Steven Frye, are more persuasive in writing of the book's ending as one surprisingly personal and intimate:

While it may merely reflect Bell's desperate hope amid the hard reality of the world, it emerges from his memory of fatherhood and it tallies with his deeply fulfilling experience of marriage. The novel, then, for all its evocation of malevolence and brutish reality, concludes on an intimation of possibility and light, linked vaguely to the divine, perhaps, but firmly to the redemptive power that grows from the bonds of human community.<sup>53</sup>

Even this conclusion seems misplaced in its interpretation of the dream as hopeful. Instead, the ending reveals that Bell, despite the failure of attempting to uphold the law in the example set by those lawmen before him, is still looking to the past and his masculine icon to prepare a fire for him 'in all that dark and all that cold' (309). This hope is felt purely 'in the dream' (309), an illusion that is shattered in the melancholy concluding sentence of the novel: 'and then I woke up' (309). The feeling of hope is confined to the dream because, as the narrative has continually shown the reader, it is the women of his life who have kept him together and given him warmth.

Like *Dirt Music*, this ending surprises and frustrates the reader. It seems to confirm suspicions that McCarthy's work sidelines females. This is especially true for critics who conflate Bell's voice with McCarthy's.<sup>54</sup> But the narrative neither presents Bell's thoughts as McCarthy's, nor presents them as correct. Characters such as Tom Bell's uncle, who question his romanticised view of the past, make it clear that Bell's voice is not one we are necessarily meant to agree with. Instead, the ending is simply a sympathetic portrait of a man who feels unequipped for the future, and unable to accept the past. His dreams about his father, and his struggle to see the warmth already in his midst, correspond with an interest that McCarthy once expressed in a letter to Gary Wallace, claiming of mankind: 'our inability to see spiritual truth is our greatest mystery'.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> David Cremeann, 'Cormac McCarthy's Sheriff Bell as Spiritual Hero', *From Stage to Screen: No Country for Old Men*, ed. by Lynnea Chapman King, Rick Wallach, and Jim Welsh (Langham: Scarecrow Press, 2009), pp. 21–33 (p. 28).

<sup>53</sup> Steven Frye, *Understanding Cormac McCarthy* (Columbia, SC: South Carolina Press, 2012), p. 164.

<sup>54</sup> Joyce Carol Oates, 'The Treasure of Comanche County', *New York Review of Books* (20 Oct 2015) <goo.gl/kGftlf> [Accessed 11 September 2016]; William Deresiewicz, 'It's a man's, Man's World', *Nation* (12 September 2012), 38-41.

<sup>55</sup> Gary Wallace, 'Meeting McCarthy', *Southern Quarterly*, 30:4 (1992), 134-139 (p. 138).

Ralph Bagnold's work again prompts a more nuanced reading of both works' complicated endings through a moment in which Bagnold, like Bell, seems to miss some broader, if not spiritual, truth. His autobiography ends similarly to both novels, with a sense that something has been left unseen by the masculine figure. Throughout his autobiography, the reader is aware that his wife, Plankie, gets no meaningful attention. Indeed, Bagnold's entire life story contains a surprising lack of intimacy with people. Initially this can be shrugged off as unsurprising in a biography of a man with so many stories to tell. But this disconnection is made significant during his closing words, in which he recounts a conversation with his sister, the novelist and playwright Enid Bagnold. She once said to her brother, 'we both in our different ways have a bit of genius', to which he responded, 'the difference between us is that you are interested in people and I am more interested in things' (200). This recollection leads into the final line of Bagnold's autobiography: 'On reflection, I have been more involved with "things"—with science and exploration—but people have been an important part of my life as well' (200). This insistence leaves the reader in a strange place, as it is out of line with the rest of his autobiography, which continually privileges objects, events and things over people. It ends the biography, and his life's writing, on a note of melancholy, reminding us of his earlier claim that the war left him with a 'cynical disbelief in the sanctity of human life.' It raises the possibility that his time in the desert never entirely cured him of a period in which human life seemed too fragile a thing in which to invest the hope of a future.

The insistence of the valuing of people in the face of contrary evidence alerts us to Bell's insistence of the goodness of his wife, and of her centrality to his life. Before recounting his final dream, Bell gives us the final description of his relationship with Loretta:

Then she came round behind my chair and put her arms around my neck and bit me on the ear. She's a very young woman in a lot of ways. If I didnt have her I dont know what I would have. Well, yes I do. You wouldnt need a box to put it in, neither. (305)

Bell continually insists on Loretta's goodness to him, and to the people around her, but he does not seem to entirely believe or absorb this goodness. After the main

thrust of the story has been completed, we discover that Bell has never told Loretta the true story behind his bronze star, how he ran away in the night and left his wounded comrades behind (276). Bell is afraid that this truth will fracture his relationship with his wife, transforming him in her gaze from a masculine war hero into a coward. Rather than confess the truth, Bell has spent his life attempting to atone for his lie by facing the violent crimes of his border county as Sheriff, admitting that: 'I thought that maybe I could make up for it and I reckon that's what I have tried to do' (278). We even discover that Bell and Loretta had a daughter, who died at a young age. Bell confides at the end: 'I talk to my daughter. She would be thirty now [...] I know that over the years I have give her the heart I always wanted myself and that's alright. That's why I listen to her. I know I'll always get the best from her' (285). In this touching revelation of Bell's openness with his daughter, we also discover that these conversations are another secret he keeps from his wife, saying: 'I dont think she'd say I'm crazy, but some might' (285).

The uncomfortable ending of *No Country for Old Men*, with Bell's insistence on but non-acceptance of his wife's goodness, is a prompting of man's failure to embrace the potential of the feminine to balance and soothe the masculine desire to control and overcome. Insistence does not indicate the key to *Dirt Music*'s faltering ending, but the idea that the masculine desire to break things down into constituent parts is to miss a greater spiritual truth does.

In the final few lines of the novel, it is Red who proposes that Georgie's performing the kiss of life on Lu is the act of a nurse. Although the scene ends with Georgie as life-giver, Lu's earlier act of breathing into her makes the act one of mutual sustaining. This earlier event disrupts the idea that Georgie's claim, 'this is what I do', is a response to Red's categorisation of her as 'a nurse', as it is the same phrase Lu utters before diving down to pull her from the plane. As well as exceeding the medical in order to embrace the idea of a romantic unity, the kiss gestures toward the power of bringing the masculine and feminine together in a way that *No Country for Old Men* does not.

Lu and Georgie's kiss invokes the Biblical origin of man created by God's breath of life into dust, but adds moisture to the scene. They 'drink' the other's breath, with Georgie allowing Lu to 'swim' into her life. Throughout the Bible, dust and sand are significant materials, but made most powerful when combined with liquid. Jesus adds spit to dirt so as to heal a blind man (John 9:6–7). This is not a

groundless spiritual metaphor, but drawn from geophysical reality. While the sands of the Sahara provide limited sustenance in the sand-seas of North Africa, when it is blown away to fall on the Amazon, the jungle of legendary warrior women, it fertilises the land and brings about new life.<sup>56</sup> The power of combining sand and water, masculine and feminine, was foreshadowed earlier in the novel through Georgie's vision of Lu digging the infernal network of pipes:

And then he looked up, took a peck of dirt, spat on it and rolled it into a yellow pellet. He pressed it gently into her ear and smiled. It sang. Like the inside of a shell. Like a choir on a single, sustained note. Like a bee in her ear. (337)

By connecting the mutual sustaining of the kiss between the masculine and feminine, Georgie's kiss does not simply allow Lu's narrative to continue. It awakens Lu from his state of denial, in which he wrongly deludes himself that he can live through his own efforts in isolation, opening his eyes to the awareness that, unlike his masculine delusions, 'she's real' (461).

McCarthy's and Winton's representations of the feminine, through figures such as Loretta, Georgie and Bird, show the potential for the feminine to bring relief to desert spaces where men chase the ghosts of the past and attempt to wrestle understanding from the sand. By bringing these figures into the text, both novels show the reader—if not the masculine figures such as Bell—the potential for the feminine to bring an understanding denied to the masculine. This shows the need to move away from old forms of masculinity, which have emerged from and propagated conflict, to embrace the feminine. In doing so, both texts are not taking a radical step forwards in gender representation, but invoking, through a Biblical tradition and the geophysical elements of sand and water, the crucial need to recognise that the masculine and the feminine must be brought together. In *No Country for Old Men*, only the reader sees the missed potential of Bell realising this union. Dreams of his father and a sense of failure at not living up to the masculine ideal prevents Bell from fully realising the grace and warmth offered by his wife and daughter. In *Dirt Music*, Lu and Georgie's coming together via the kiss is not a moment in which the woman

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<sup>56</sup> Hongbin Yu, et al, 'The fertilizing role of African dust in the Amazon rainforest: A first multiyear assessment based on data from Cloud-Aerosol Lidar and Infrared Pathfinder Satellite Observations', *Geophysical Research Letters*, 42:6 (2015), 1984–1991.

saves the man, but in which she revives him from masculine delusions that he can overcome his trauma in isolation and rid himself of bad luck.

From these conclusions, it is also easy to see how these two authors are so open to the accusation of being ‘nostalgic’ or ‘sentimental’. But what might be seen as a wistful and regressive look to the past is perhaps confused with McCarthy and Winton’s continual interest in past tradition. From the recent, such as the Western, to the ancient, stretching back to the Bible, both novelists continually use geography to access a Biblical, literary or historical tradition that not only reveals lingering problems and concerns, but also forgotten and overlooked ways of articulating and addressing them. Understanding this dynamic in their fiction helps to answer questions about how McCarthy and Winton elude the crude concepts of misogynist/non-misogynist, or conservative/progressive. In turn, this also raises questions about how both novelists, whose popularity and influence straddle the late twentieth and early twenty-first century, sit within the concepts of modern/postmodern/post-postmodern that vacillate wildly between sceptical and sincere belief in the potential for progress and nostalgia for the past.

## Concrete: Neighbours, Home and Away

25 And, behold, a certain lawyer stood up, and tempted him, saying, 'Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?' 26 He said unto him, 'What is written in the law? How readest thou?' 27 And he answering said, 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbour as thyself.' 28 And he said unto him, 'Thou hast answered right: this do, and thou shalt live.' 29 But he, willing to justify himself, said unto Jesus, 'And who is my neighbour?' 30 And Jesus answering said, 'A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, which stripped him of his raiment, and wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead. 31 And by chance there came down a certain priest that way: and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. 32 And likewise a Levite, when he was at the place, came and looked on him, and passed by on the other side. 33 But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was: and when he saw him, he had compassion on him, 34 And went to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him. 35 And on the morrow when he departed, he took out two pence, and gave them to the host, and said unto him, Take care of him; and whatsoever thou spendest more, when I come again, I will repay thee. 36 Which now of these three, thinkest thou, was neighbour unto him that fell among the thieves?' 37 And he said, 'He that shewed mercy on him.' Then said Jesus unto him, 'Go, and do thou likewise.'

Luke 10 25–37, KJV

The parable of the Good Samaritan is so well known it has become a cliché, lazing in the corner of the Western consciousness as a musty furnishing of our Judaeo-Christian ethical heritage and unwanted reminder of Sunday school. The lesson of the parable is simple, but, due to the mutual antipathy between the Jews and the

Samaritans, radical in its context. Removed from this original context, the story continues to warn us that those we commonly define as our neighbours courtesy of their close proximity to our religion, nationality, or location are no more likely to be neighbourly than those we consider alien. Instead, the story asks us to remove proximity from the way in which we define our neighbour, arguing that our neighbours are those who would show their mercy and kindness regardless of difference. Tim Winton's *Eyrie* (2013) and Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* (2006), their most recent novels, can be understood as modern revivals of this parable, re-situated in the geo-political climate of their twenty-first century nations. These novels depict modern entailments of this parable, where failing to broaden our understanding of our neighbour beyond geographical proximity is shown in a global context to threaten not only the lives of individuals, but also the fate of the nation and even the world.

Both novels are, to different degrees, apocalyptic, focusing on man's place in a suffocating natural world. *The Road* fits comfortably within the post-apocalyptic genre, with the unnamed 'man' and his son, the 'boy,' struggling to survive as they follow a road from the Appalachian Mountains to the East Coast in the hope of finding safety and warmth. *Eyrie* resists the post-apocalyptic genre, may be more accurately described as a pre-apocalyptic novel. Its protagonist, Tom Keely, has retreated from life after his marriage collapses and his career as an environmentalist disintegrates after speaking an ugly truth on live television. In the eyrie of his apartment, perched on the top of a run-down block of flats optimistically named The Mirador, he meets an old friend, Gemma Buck, and her young grandson, Kai. Keely is immediately fascinated by the boy, whose signs of autism or Asperger's Syndrome seem to blend into something prophetic through his predictions of ecological destruction and firm belief that he will never grow old.<sup>1</sup> Both narratives echo Ralph Bagnold's fear of an apocalyptic darkness that may cover the world through their depictions of an apocalypse signalled by birds. In *The Road*, the mysterious event that turned the world to ash is shown as ecologically encompassing, with the boy mourning the absence of crows and saying to his father: 'there are no crows are

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<sup>1</sup> Tim Winton, *Eyrie* (London: Picador, 2013), p. 310 (all subsequent references are from this edition).

there? [...] Just in books.<sup>2</sup> The coming ecological devastation is also made clear in *Eyrie* when Kai expresses his belief that 'the birds in the world will die' (141). It is Keely's experience as an environmental campaigner that turns these strange thoughts into something plausibly prophetic.

The explicit focus on apocalypse makes both narratives unique within their authors' oeuvres, carrying their fiction away from their more well-trod geographies into unfamiliar spaces. Gone are McCarthy's brooding deserts and forests thick with life, replaced by the grey landscape of the road as it snakes past ruined buildings, charred cities, and forests made threatening by their lifelessness. The beauty and mystery of the Western Australian landscape is replaced in *Eyrie* by the suffocating noise and commotion of Fremantle that only allows the Indian Ocean into the novel as 'silver glimpses' between buildings (374). This shift in literary geography and a burning focus on ecological insecurity has led both novels to be read as significant contributions to an explicitly ecocritical tradition of fiction. Sophie Ratcliffe writes that a central theme of *Eyrie* is 'how words fail in the face of environmental or emotional damage', and *The Road* has been infamously praised by George Monbiot as 'the most important environmental book ever.'<sup>3</sup>

Some critics have been dissatisfied with this diagnosis of the novels' concerns as principally environmental. Paul Sheehan has cited the hidden cause of the ecological breakdown in *The Road* as a caution against reading the novel to draw a green message from its pages, arguing that the 'effects are of greater import than causes.'<sup>4</sup> Sheehan also resists that less common, but still popular, interpretation of the novel as principally concerned with the spiritual condition of the USA, claiming: 'although there is surfeit of religious allusions filling out the interstices of the novel, the questions they raise concerning faith and belief acquire a more critically directed political orientation as the narrative unfolds.'<sup>5</sup> Sheehan argues that *The Road* poses a fundamentally humanist question: 'how much can be pared away from human

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<sup>2</sup> Cormac McCarthy, *The Road* (London: Picador, 2007), pp. 167–168 (all subsequent references are from this edition).

<sup>3</sup> Sophie Ratcliffe, 'Tim Winton's Environmental Hangover', *Times Literary Supplement* (28 May 2014) <<http://goo.gl/A8Iveq>> [Accessed 21 July 2016]; George Monbiot, 'Civilisation ends with a shutdown of human concern. Are we there already?', *The Guardian* (30 October 2007) <<https://goo.gl/S0Rdn8>> [Accessed 21 July 2016].

<sup>4</sup> Paul Sheehan, 'Road, fire, trees: Cormac McCarthy's post-America', *Styles of Extinction*, ed. by Julian Murphy and Mark Steven (London: Continuum, 2012), pp. 89–108 (p. 91).

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 90.

existence for it to still qualify as “life”?”<sup>6</sup> While Sheehan posits this as the central question, he often moves uncomfortably between exploring the green/political readings of the novel and the spiritual/religious readings. From this, he concludes that the novel reveals two opposing and yet blurred views on life in a ‘post-political and post-religious’ America: nihilism and fundamentalism. Sheehan argues that these choices are not prophetic, but indicative of ‘the road we have already taken’ (105). Sheehan’s enlightening but occasionally disorienting study highlights the difficulty of navigating a text which clearly operates, like much of McCarthy’s other works, at the intersection of the humanist, spiritual and political, but with a far greater sense of urgency than we have seen before. This urgency, which is also present in *Eyre*, can lead critics to read the novels as narrowly defined political treatises rather than literary fiction.

Focusing on ‘the neighbour’ helps to escape reading either works as treatise, opening their narratives up to being read as crisis fictions for which their unique temporal and geographical positioning allows diverse questions to be asked of their current society. McCarthy moves from the past to the near future, while Winton relocates from portraying lives on the edge of society—geographically and politically—to focusing on Keely’s more politically and socially central life in the heart of Fremantle. The society these twenty-first century novels are embedded within have been defined by economic and political crisis as well as ecological crisis, with the financial crash of 2007 and the collapse of the World Trade Centre in 2001 contributing to a globalised atmosphere of crisis. The presence of these other crises have been observed in *The Road* by critics such as Mary Zournazi, but largely ignored in *Eyre* beyond nods to the liminal presence of Keely’s high-powered banker sister via phone calls from across the world as she watches the world ‘choking on a bone’ (37). This chapter argues that the smoke of these three crises prompts and informs their exploration of the concept, definition and geography of the neighbour in twenty-first century.

In his seminal work *A Sense of an Ending*, Frank Kermode notes that there is a long history of potentially world-ending crises. Kermode observes that, throughout this tradition, the ‘major instance’ of crisis was always perceived to be that crisis

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 91.

facing the moment of writing, warning us against scoffing at past and unfulfilled earth-shattering crises because ‘many of them felt as we do. If the evidence looks good to us, so it did to them.’<sup>7</sup> Kermode argues that the truest significance of these senses of endings lies not in their accuracy (or inaccuracy), but in how their rendering is ‘inescapably a central element in our endeavours towards making sense of our world.’<sup>8</sup> Kermode believes that the adaptability of fiction has made it an invaluable form of expression throughout this continuing cycle of crises: ‘Fictions are for finding things out, and they change as the needs of sense-making change [. . .] fictions, if successful, make sense of the here and now, *hoc tempus*.’<sup>9</sup>

Analysing *Eyre* and *The Road* as recent ‘senses of endings’ alerts us to how the novels do more than engage with their particular crises, but also develop fiction in order to engage with rapidly changing environments. This awareness prompts us also to read both narratives as developing Winton and McCarthy’s long-standing resistance to being categorised within a literary movement or epoch.

Despite having a clearly defined and accepted literary genealogy, their position among contemporary writers and movements is unclear. Critics have long struggled to formally position McCarthy’s work, with suggestions that it might be considered late modernist, postmodern, or even post-postmodern coming from varying sections of the scholarly community.<sup>10</sup> The same can be said of Winton, whose work similarly defies clear periodisation within the literary language of ‘modernities.’ It is tempting to see the range of categorising possibilities as reflecting an academic desire to firmly place works in a linear and formal understanding of the Western canon rather than the necessity of such organisation to access insightful ways of understanding the novels and novelists. If Kermode is right that successful fictions adapt to represent the crises of their time, it is understandable that critics wish to chart their evolution as their work transitions from the classically cold-war postmodern era, standing alongside the works of Thomas Pynchon, Philip Roth and Don DeLillo, into a post-9/11, post-financial crash, and more globally warmed century.

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<sup>7</sup> Frank Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the theory of fiction* (New York: OUP, 1967), p. 95.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 94

<sup>9</sup> Sheehan, p. 39.

<sup>10</sup> David Holloway, *The Late Modernism of Cormac McCarthy* (London: Greenwood Press 2002); Mark Steven, ‘The late world of Cormac McCarthy’, *Styles of Extinction*, ed. by Julian Murphy and Mark Steven (London: Continuum, 2012), pp.63-87; Linda Woodson, ‘Mapping The Road in Post-Postmodernism’, *The Cormac McCarthy Journal*, 6 (2008), 87-97.

The tethering of crisis, form, and the neighbour is at the root the Good Samaritan story. Being a parable, it embodies the potential for story to represent crisis and tragedy in a way that explores and develops our relationship to each other. What is less clear is how the spatial thematic concern of neighbours that critically shape both narratives can be productively combined with the more strictly temporal concern of placing the fiction within a historical literary context and monitoring its evolution through twenty-first century moments of crisis. This becomes especially complicated considering Kermode's suspicions of the spatial within literary criticism. He believes that the critic engaging with crisis fiction must 'abandon ways of speaking which on the one hand obscure the true nature of our fictions—by confusing them with myths, by rendering spatial what is essentially temporal—and on the other obscure our sense of reality by suggesting that fictions represent some kind of surrender or false consolation.'<sup>11</sup>

Kermode's valuing of the temporal over the spatial in fictional crises, which he proposed in 1967, is prophetic of a problem that Doreen Massey believes is present in broader contemporary culture, lamenting 'How easy it is to slip into ways of thinking that repress the challenge of space; and how politically significant spatial imaginaries can be.'<sup>12</sup> Massey attributes this contradiction, between the power of the spatial and the ease with which it is repressed, to a consistent confusion in the contemporary understanding of globalisation that unconsciously holds two opposing beliefs: 'that this is the age of the spatial with the contradictory, but equally accepted, notion that this is the age in which space will finally, in fulfilment with Marx's old prophecy, be annihilated by time.'<sup>13</sup> Massey finds this contradiction is enabled by the influence of digital technology, particularly the Internet, on our idea of globalised space. She argues that this influence has helped breed two key aphorisms: '(i) that there is no longer any distinguishing between near and far and (ii) that the margins have invaded the centre.'<sup>14</sup>

Such aphorisms have long gripped understandings of how we might define fiction in a 'globalised world'. David Foster Wallace, whose 'E Unibus Pluram' has become a touchstone article for discussion of what Anglophone literature might look

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<sup>11</sup> Kermode, p. 124.

<sup>12</sup> Doreen Massey, *For Space* (London: Sage, 2005), p. 87.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 90.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 92.

like after post-modernity and its entangled love affair with irony, betrays a reliance on this aphorism. Wallace writes: 'Today, when we eat Tex-Mex with chopsticks while listening to reggae and watching a Soviet-satellite newscast of the Berlin wall's fall—i.e., when damn near *everything* presents itself as familiar—it's not a surprise that some of today's most ambitious Realist fiction is going about trying to *make the familiar strange*.'<sup>15</sup> Such an observation abides with the aphorism Massey warns against. It also opens Wallace's understanding of postmodern America to Paul Giles' criticism for its assumed belief in 'American space as a level playing field where the electronic media operate in all zones simultaneously.'<sup>16</sup>

To counter this oversimplification of the changing nature of space, Massey argues that:

Space is more than distance. It is the sphere of open-ended configurations within multiplicities. Given that, the really serious question which is raised by speed-up, by 'the communications revolution' and by cyberspace, is not whether space will be annihilated but what kinds of multiplicities (patterning of uniqueness) and relations will be co-constructed with these new kinds of spatial configurations.<sup>17</sup>

The crucial value of this potentially bewildering concept is Massey's explanation that cyberspace has enabled an explosion of new and open-ended spatial configurations. These new configurations can be texting a friend as we randomly bump into them on the street, reading the real-time commentary on a basketball game in America to avoid conversing with the stranger sat next to us on the bus, or even allowing a recently exiled prince from a far-off nation to choose *us* to entrust his fortune to for safe keeping if we can provide him with our bank details. Such an understanding of how cyberspace and communication technology has impacted our concept of space doesn't, as Wallace does, portray the outside coming in, but reveals our increasing entanglement with many and diverse people and spaces from varying distances to ourselves.

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<sup>15</sup> David Foster Wallace, 'E Unibus Pluram', *A Supposedly Fun Thing I'll Never Do Again* (London: Abacus, 2013), p. 52.

<sup>16</sup> Paul Giles, 'Sentimental Posthumanism: David Foster Wallace', *Twentieth Century Literature*, 53:3 (2007), 327–328.

<sup>17</sup> Massey, p. 91.

Wallace's use of space may be criticised by Giles and Massey on account of its 'flatness' or as the result of homogenous assumption, but his work still gestures toward the potential value of understanding literature's temporal developments in relation to changes in space. The value of his work lies in his predictions about what may follow the postmodern writers, and its significance to McCarthy and Winton. Wallace hypothesised that

The next real literary 'rebels' in this country might well emerge as some weird bunch of anti-rebels, born oglers who dare somehow to back away from ironic watching, who have the childish gall actually to endorse and insatiate single-entendre principles. Who treat of plain old untrendy human troubles and emotions in U.S. Life with reverence and conviction . . . The new rebels might be willing to risk the yawn, the rolled eyes, the cool smile, the nudged ribs, the parody of gifted ironists, the 'oh how *banal*.' To risk accusations of sentimentality, melodrama.<sup>18</sup>

I have tracked, throughout the thesis, such accusations of sentimentality, and seen mixed feelings toward the 'reverence and conviction' McCarthy, and particularly Winton, pay to old 'untrendy human troubles'. They are also, surely, among the most frequently satirised of writers. McCarthy's work has inspired numerous satires such as Bunny Truman's fictional interview with Cormac McCarthy in *The Paris Review*.<sup>19</sup> His work has also been criticised by Will Self for being 'a writer easily parodied' before, in a moment of unintended irony, offering a failing attempt at such parody: '*Later, they took the horses up on the mesa and shot aimlessly at the sagebrush.*'<sup>20</sup> There is even a website dedicated to producing a crowd-sourced parody of a Tim Winton novel 'Sunburn on the Groyne' in which the editors tick all the boxes Wallace predicted the future generation of writers may be accused of: 'Commenters should aim for Australian or Western Australian schmaltz, in the style of our most famous literary son, master dispenser of literary cheese and fake WA nostalgia Tim Winton.'<sup>21</sup> Wallace's argument is, in a sense, that the next step forward for literature

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<sup>18</sup> Wallace, 'E Unibus Pluram', pp. 81-82.

<sup>19</sup> Bunny Truman, 'Cormac McCarthy, The Art of Fiction No. 223', *The Paris Review*, [〈goo.gl/12FNck〉](http://goo.gl/12FNck) [Accessed 27 August 2016].

<sup>20</sup> Will Self, 'Will Self considers the Coen Brothers', *The Guardian* (11 February 2011) [〈https://goo.gl/Qkn01N〉](https://goo.gl/Qkn01N) [Accessed 21 July 2016].

<sup>21</sup> [theworstoferth.com/wintoning/](http://theworstoferth.com/wintoning/) [Accessed 02 August 2015].

may be accused of being a stylistic step backward, into a repressed form of what has already been. While McCarthy and Winton might, and have been—as I outlined in chapter three—accused of taking this step back in a variety of stylistic and thematic ways, this step manifests itself in *The Road*'s and *Eyrie*'s material settings.

I have so far focused on the coast, deserts, forests and rivers as the spinal geographies upon which many of their novels are constructed, but *Eyrie* and *The Road* are built, for the first time in the novelist's oeuvres, on the back of concrete: from the concrete highways and cities whose monolithic qualities allow the man and the boy to trace their way through a delicate and dying natural world, to the hot and bustling paving slabs of Fremantle above which Keely perches in his concrete eyrie to survey a nation dismantling itself. The appropriateness of concrete to these texts is manifold with its blunt and brutal material appearance matching the unflinching nature of the texts, but it is primarily relevant as a material embodiment of the modern. As Adrian Forty writes, 'Concrete is *modern*. This is not just to say that now it is here, where before it wasn't, but that it is one of the agents through which our experience of modernity is mediated. Concrete tells us what it means to be modern.'<sup>22</sup> Following Ingold's thinking on lines, we can understand the modern associations of concrete as tied specifically to the concept of modernism, enabling the architecturally dominant straight lines so revered by modernist artists, such as Rothko or Mondrian, as a symbol of unambiguous progression.<sup>23</sup> Such clean, straight, optimistic lines are mere memories in the concrete roads and buildings of *Eyrie* or *The Road*, which are cracking, disintegrating, and growing old. The Mirador, built as a grand 'harbinger of progress' has become an 'old hulk', while the roads that symbolise so much promise and freedom in modern American mythology melt and break in the onslaught of fire and cold, becoming 'segments of road' littered with dead trees (3). Through this disintegration, the dominant concrete structures are just reminiscent of the fragmented line as the straight, which Ingold suggests is 'emerging as an equally powerful icon of postmodernity.'<sup>24</sup> Because these fragmented lines emerge unpleasantly from the disintegration of the straight, we can read the novels as neither modern nor postmodern, but as fictions emerging from the ruins of both.

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<sup>22</sup> Adrian Forty, *Concrete and Culture: A Material History* (London: Reaktion Books, 2012), p. 14.

<sup>23</sup> Tim Ingold, *Lines: a brief history* (London: Routledge, 2007), p. 167.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

These concrete locations speak to the heart of the temporal and spatial concerns. Modern concrete is the material that is so often present when we think of understanding our relationship to our neighbours on a geopolitical scale: whether it conjures images of egalitarian social housing, aggressive military bunkers, capitalist malls or the isolationism of the Berlin Wall, the use of concrete so often reflects who we believe to be our neighbour and how we wish to treat them. If we are to understand the unity behind the seemingly fragmented complexity that presents itself in these two urgent examples of crisis fiction, we might explore them best through the literal and figurative materiality of concrete.

### Slipped Moorings

In his book *Concrete and Culture*, Forty writes that our simultaneous repellence and fascination with concrete stems from its relationship with ‘the usual category distinctions through which we make sense of our lives – liquid/solid, smooth/rough, natural/artificial, ancient/modern, base/spirit.’<sup>25</sup> Forty argues that concrete defies these distinctions ‘slipping back and forth between categories.’<sup>26</sup> Of particular interest to *Eyrie*, *The Road*, and the moments of crisis they address is how concrete manages to move between liquid/solid and ancient/modern. These two distinctions are tied together, with the ‘straight line’ of the modern only possible by concrete in its solid form, with its liquid form reminding us of the ancient, rudimentary, and less solid material, mud. In chapter two, I explored mud as present in McCarthy and Winton’s work as a material of potential, harbouring and delivering stories and connections with the history of its land. In these works, the narratives reveal an anxiety about such rudimentary materials, fearing that, in the face of crisis, both solidity and modernity may slip into chaotic instability.

Both novels’ relationships with 9/11 are forged primarily through their invocation of two of the most famous and circulated images from news story’s following the event, both of which found part of their power in the sudden instability of the famously modern and solid New York backdrop. In *The Road*, the landscape and its inhabitants are living in an environment of constant swirling ash. This simple

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<sup>25</sup> Forty, *Concrete and Culture*, p. 10.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

and recurring image invokes the many images that emerged from New York on September 11<sup>th</sup> when the city was filled and its inhabitants covered in dust and ash from the fallen towers. This was most famously captured in a photograph of Marcy Borders, or the ‘dust lady,’ taken by photographer Stan Honda and circulated through various news outlets around the world. This dustiness eventually kills the man, with his lungs slowly deteriorating, coughing up increasing amounts of blood as we follow him on his journey. The toxic effect of concrete dust is one of the many distressing after-shocks of 9/11. Many first responders and members of the public who were engulfed in the dust cloud that hung in and over lower Manhattan, including Marcy Borders, have died and are dying of cancers that have been linked to the harmful asbestos and chemicals in the dust.<sup>27</sup>



Fig. 4.1: The Dust Lady



Fig. 4.2: The Falling Man

Keely’s consistent concern that some of the Mirador’s less stable residents, particularly his neighbour, may jump from the top floor invokes another infamously distressing image of 9/11, Richard Drew’s ‘Falling Man,’ which became the cover of *The New York Times* on the 12<sup>th</sup> September 2001. The photograph of a man falling from the World Trade Centre in a disturbingly peaceful pose against a backdrop of the

<sup>27</sup> Nadia Khomami, ‘Marcy Borders, 9/11’s “dust lady” dies of stomach cancer’, *The Guardian* (26 August 2015) <<https://goo.gl/fELciu>> [Accessed 21 July 2016].

skyscraper's concrete horizontal pillars became one of the most circulated images of the event, and was cemented into the fictional discourse of 9/11 by Don DeLillo's 2007 novel *Falling Man*. A similar image is powerfully rendered in Keely's recurring fear and dreams that Kai, who plays and balances all too fearlessly against the walkways of the Mirador, will fall to his death. The connection between this feared fall and 9/11 is further solidified by the brief attention given to the 'War on Terror' later in the novel when Keely tries to cover up his blacking out while at his mother's house by claiming to have tripped on her rug and joking: 'It's fine. It's these bloody Afghans, they're all trying to kill us.' (287). While an isolated and largely insignificant joke, its unexpected presence grabs our attention. It calls to mind the similarly marginal presence of 9/11 in the novel written prior to *Eyrie*, *Breath* in which the adult Bruce Pike notices in the suffocated teen's bedroom that his 'computer goes through a screensaver cycle of the twin towers endlessly falling'.<sup>28</sup> In *Breath*, this inclusion helps place a broader political narrative of risk and addiction at the edges of the text. *Eyrie* brings this concern closer the narrative centre.

The disparity between the looming presence of 9/11 in *The Road*, and its more subtle background presence in *Eyrie*, is partly because the event is overshadowed by the still smoking wreckage of the global financial crisis, which struck six years before its publication and a year following the publication of *The Road*. As such, the images of skyscrapers and of falling men, while echoing the events of 9/11, are refracted through the more contemporary images of 'brokers leap[ing] from skyscrapers' (76). Despite Keely seeing the world choking on a bone, the situation remains, for him, 'panic abroad' fed to him by 'the news cycle' from the safe remove of the Internet (160). 'Here at home', Keely notes, there is 'hardly a ripple', thanks to the 'endless reserves of mining loot' making the people of Western Australia feel 'safe as houses' (54). This feeling of safety is an illusion central to the novel. Despite West Australia's distinctly modern flourishing from a globalised system of capital allowing them to reap the reward of their mining industry, Keely still sees the state, and the source of its wealth, as archaic. He describes the state's attitude toward mining with a distinctly ancient edge, likening it to Goliath, a 'Philistine giant eager to pass off its good fortune as virtue' (6). Beneath the state's veneer of wealth and modernity lie persistent concerns for those to whom wealth does not trickle down. It is these people

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<sup>28</sup> Tim Winton, *Breath* (Picador: London, 2008), p. 4.

whom the novel focuses upon, with central characters such as Gemma struggling to make a living and care for her grandson whose drug addicted and petty-criminal parents are reduced to threatening their own family to support another fix. Even characters at the periphery of the novel, such as the unnamed but often heard inhabitants of the Mirador, and Conan the homeless man, lead lives that attest to the financial and social hardships not cured by the state's financial wealth.

Although *The Road* was published before the economic crash, the event resonates with the novel's depictions of the man and boy's homelessness, and their central quest to find somewhere habitable. The 2007 financial crash dramatically deepened the USA's homeless problem, with the 35,974 people sleeping in New York shelters on an average October night in 2007 rising to 60,060 by April 2016.<sup>29</sup> Mary Zournazi noticed the significance of homelessness not in the novel, but in John Hillcoat's movie, claiming: 'Hillcoat's realism is achieved through a cultural and visual memory, that is, familiar images that we have seen in different contexts for instance, the shopping trolley that the main characters cart around is a reminder of the homeless in every city.'<sup>30</sup> This, and the characters' ill-fitting, makeshift costumes, which Zournazi also explores as reminiscent of the urban homeless, is lifted from the novel's description of the man and boy's clothing as 'rags' (28) and the shopping cart as their most crucial tool. The fear faced by some of those on the post-apocalyptic road, while in a very different context, is also distressingly of-this-world. Eli's fear that the man and boy may simply wish to torment and harm him, as he says others have done, is one experienced by those who risk their lives at the hands of the cold and the cruel every night they sleep on the streets (172). This was a fear many initial survivors of the novel's disaster attempted to avoid by reverting to leaving messages in cairns, reminiscent of the hobo signs used to discretely warn and advise other hobos. In the post-apocalyptic climate, they are used to convey 'hopeless messages to loved ones lost and dead' (192).

What these two crises, and the often-discussed environmental crisis that concerns both novels, have contributed to is a contemporary and international political conversation increasingly dominated by the subject of immigration. Both

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<sup>29</sup> Coalition for the Homeless <<http://www.coalitionforthehomeless.org>> [Accessed 21 July 2016].

<sup>30</sup> Mary Zournazi, 'Afterword: Acts of kindness—reflections on a different kind of road movie', *Styles of Extinction*, ed. by Julian Murphy and Mark Steven (London: Continuum, 2012), pp. 145-155 (p. 146).

narratives resonate with this global situation, particularly *The Road*, which builds a world where shifting lives are all that remain, with survivors of the world-ending event being described as 'migrants in a fever land' (28) and the man and boy identifying as 'refugees' (83). Within this global-scale unsettling of people's homes, in both *The Road* and in the contemporary examples of mass immigration, we find a simultaneous change in neighbourhoods and an unsettling of people's understanding about who their neighbour is.

We glimpse the poisonous elements of a neighbourhood with a globally shifting demographic in *Eyrie*, when Keely observes: 'The city had become a boho theme park perched on a real estate bubble, and behind every neglected goldfish facade and vacant shopfront was a slum landlord counting pennies, lording it over family and bitching about refugees' (19). Within this large-scale disruption of the home, and of the concept of the neighbour, we find that the fear of an uncontrollable instability, which we have charted through both novels, is present in the language deployed by various elements of society to address what has been labelled a 'global migrant crisis'.<sup>31</sup>

In 2015, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees claimed that 'worldwide displacement was at the highest level ever recorded' with 'one in every 122 humans' now being classed as 'either a refugee, internally displaced, or seeking asylum'.<sup>32</sup> This has given rise to the language of physical uncontrollability, with the UN high commissioner describing the escalating numbers as an 'unchecked slide', revealing the 'inability' of the international community to 'build and preserve peace'.<sup>33</sup> The language is further enforced in the dialogue that surrounds the refugee 'crisis' in Europe on both sides of the political spectrum. On the right, inflammatory views of journalists and personalities, such as Katie Hopkins, display the wilful limits of international hospitality by likening immigrants to Europe as rats upon a ship.<sup>34</sup> The same language forms the messages from more compassionate quarters, such as

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<sup>31</sup> Tim Ross, David Barnett, Colin Freeman, and Robert Mendick, 'Calais Crisis: "This is a Global Migration Crisis"', *The Daily Telegraph* (01 August 2015) <<http://goo.gl/1UiN5p>> [Accessed 21 July 2016].

<sup>32</sup> UNHCR, 'Worldwide displacement hits all-time high as war and persecution increase' (18 June 2015) <<http://www.unhcr.org/558193896.html>> [Accessed 21 July 2016].

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Katie Hopkins, 'Rescue Boats? I'd Use Gunships to Stop Migrants', *The Sun* (17 April 2015) <<http://goo.gl/T95N9u>> [Accessed 21 July 2016].

the UNHCR's spokesperson for Athens, who decries their inability to help the 'sheer numbers [of migrants] flowing in.'<sup>35</sup> When connected with the increasingly publicised and global concern over home-grown terrorism that has emerged post-9/11, the language of immigration has contributed to the concept that the West is being invaded by those who may wish it harm.<sup>36</sup> In the language of some news outlets and political parties, the assumed un-neighbourly Samaritan of Jesus' parable is no longer geographically separate from us in Samaria, but potentially next door. This sense of fear and suspicion finds its ultimate manifestation in these novels through their drawing of a world that has lost its moorings to anything solidly concrete.

We are introduced to Keely in a moment which fully reveals a man who has lost his grip on life, with the entire opening chapter of the novel describing a physiological instability, courtesy of a hangover, as Keely sways and staggers around his flat. Keely sees his own condition reflected in city streets 'lying dazed and forsaken' before him (5). Keely even reflects that his job of campaigning for the protection of ecologically significant sites had been a doomed battle for security against the surging influence of industrialists, realizing he was merely 'a procedural obstacle set in their path while they yahoo on towards the spoils' (7). This instability is not simply personal but globally political, with the online bombardment of news making Keely feel 'instantly bewildered', stunning him into a confused distraction as he sits 'holding his scone like it was an IED' (52). Keely sarcastically moans that it will only be the flattening of real-estate prices that makes the people of Perth realise the 'world has slipped its moorings' (55).

*The Road* also invokes the fear of a world having lost its moorings. As the man lays awake at night:

He lay listening to the water drip in the woods. Bedrock, this. The cold and the silence. The ashes of the late world carried on the bleak and temporal winds to and fro in the void. Carried forth and scattered and carried forth again. Everything uncoupled from its shoring. Unsupported in the ashen air. Sustained by a breath, trembling and brief. If only my heart were stone. (10)

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<sup>35</sup> Helena Smith, 'shocking images of drowned Syrian boy show tragic plight of refugees', *The Guardian* (2 September 2015) <<https://goo.gl/iMyQnY>> [Accessed 21 July 2016].

<sup>36</sup> Tom Whitehead and Con Coughlin, 'Isil exploiting migrant routes to smuggle jihadists back to Britain using fake documents', *The Telegraph* (26 January 2016) <<http://goo.gl/Gzz3Ss>> [Accessed 02 August 2016].

Like Keely, the man is made to feel impotent in a world that has slipped far beyond his ability to assert any control. The only way he might be able to assert control is if his heart were more base than the world he finds himself in. This would provide him with something he may use to moor himself to, just as the blood cults have done through their acceptance of cannibalism. That, or it would provide him with the strength to end his and his son's life, as his wife had asked him to do when she realised that 'you cant protect us' (58).

Through these depictions of the world, both novels reveal that modernity, like concrete, is not as distinct from the pre-modern as we like to think. The solidity and robustness of the modern age is an illusion. As this illusion falls away in the face of crisis, with it falls any belief that modernity has solidified a more refined sense of who our neighbour is, or deepened our compassion for them. In watching these illusions slip away, Keely and the man try to find something truly solid to which they might moor their lives and their society. For both men, this search leads them to assess two significant and assumed images of solidity that have shaped their own lives, each of which are recalled by the concrete physical structures of modernity that surround them: their fathers and the state.

### **The Father and the State**

Doreen Massey captures the complicated importance of the familial in our understanding of space, and particularly in our understanding of social care and responsibility, when she writes:

My argument is not that place is not concrete, grounded, real, lived etc. etc. It is that space is too. *But there are difficulties in* 'making this argument politically active . . . Some of the difficulty may be intimately (the apposite word) connected to a cultural obsession with parent-child relationships, the focusing of the question of care primarily within family relations (Robinson 1999). Why do we so often and so tightly associate care with proximity? Even those who write of care for the stranger so often figure that relationship as face-to-face.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Massey, pp. 185-186.

Both novels display this tight bind between parental care and a broader social sense of care. For Keely, his paternal bond is forged with Kai, who adopts him as a father-like figure. This caring relationship replaces the environmental and broader social sense of responsibility that Keely abandoned after watching his career as an environmental activist disintegrate. Rather than replacing a more diffuse social care, the man's innate and primary care for his son makes him aware that he does not have a broader sense of social care. What the man treasures most about his son is that, despite the evil and hardness of the world he was born into, he continually offers kindness to those he meets along the road. For both men, these intimate experiences of occupying the space of the father figure and of caring for the child pries open their understanding of care in a spatial and political context.

As in *Dirt Music* and *No Country for Old Men*, the theme of fatherhood is a central interest of both novels, but considered with a different, more urgent register as both Keely and the man summon the memories of their own fathers to help them bear the overwhelming burden of responsibility they feel toward their children. In *The Road*, the role of the father and the limits of his ability to protect his son are of central importance, with Michael Chabon describing the novel as, above all else, 'a testament to the abyss of a parent's greatest fears.'<sup>38</sup> *Eyrie* presents fatherhood differently, with Keely's care over Kai reflecting an innate need to feel necessary rather than the biological draw of caring for one's offspring. Toward the end of the novel, Kai tells Keely that he believes Keely can save him and his grandmother from danger, to which Keely confesses: 'the idea was intoxicating. It made a man feel enormous and substantial. That he might be necessary' (236). What is almost of more importance in *Eyrie* is the way in which this relationship with Kai spurs Keely to reflect upon his idolisation of his own father, and his father's unique brand of social justice.

Keely remembers his father, Nev, as a formidable physical presence who loads his social and religious beliefs with a muscularity that Keely only wishes he could summon in himself, describing his father in mythical terms as 'Christ's own Viking, all love and thunder' (130). Nev was someone who could throw a person

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<sup>38</sup> Michael Chabon, 'Dark Adventure: On Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*', *Maps and Legends: Reading and Writing Along the Borderlands* (London: Harper, 2009), pp. 95-108 (p. 108).

'through an Asbestos wall' at a prayer meeting and tell a man like Gemma's abusive father 'love conquers all' and 'punch him in the throat' (130). We see a similar but more subdued access to the past in *The Road*. While we do not gain access to the man's memories of his father as directly as Keely grants us, the man is continually wrestling with the father figures of his past, be they individual or collective. Most crucial is the memory of a fishing trip with his uncle, which he describes as 'the perfect day of his childhood. This was the day to shape the days upon' (12). We could argue that both of these idealised memories of father figures and their ability to provide strength or peace contribute to the privileging of parent/child relationships that Massey perceives to be hindering a broader embrace of care and responsibility. However, while the familial relationships of Keely and the man do indicate a fading ripple of care that emanates from the familial, the novels more broadly engage with concepts of how neighbourly responsibility exists beyond the familial, or even the face-to-face. This is achieved by allowing these central father son relationships to resonate with the novels' central concrete structures and the broader, political concepts of care that they embody.

The central concrete structure of *The Road* is, of course, the road that the narrative follows from the Appalachian Mountains to the eastern coast. The American network of state roads that the man and the boy travel is potentially 'the greatest and the longest engineered structure ever built', with a macadam veneer supported by enough concrete to create a 'wide sidewalk extending to a point in space five times beyond the distance of the moon'.<sup>39</sup> Just as the vast road network impressed its mark firmly upon the American landscape, so too did it press on the American psyche through its place in American history, lore and ideology. Tom Lewis writes of the road as embodying that paradoxical nature that Forty finds so attractive and repellent in concrete, writing that 'the highways became a stage on which we have played out a great drama of contradictions [...] On this stage we see all our fantasies and fears, our social ideals and racial divisions, our middle-class aspirations and our underclass realities'.<sup>40</sup> The crucial place of the road in the American political and social life is raised early in the novel when the boy looks at a map and asks his father:

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<sup>39</sup> Tom Lewis, *Divided Highways: Building the Interstate Highways, Transforming American Life* (London: Cornell University Press, 2013), p. xiii.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., p. xiii.

Why are they state roads?

Because they used to belong to the states. What used to be called the states.

But theres not any more states?

No.

What happened to them?

I dont know exactly. That's a good question. (43–44)

For the boy and the man, the road has become an archaeological reminder of North America as a set of United States, continually posing the question of whether the ideals of the nation still hold in this post-apocalyptic world.

Critics have debated the political symbolism of the road, with Nell Sullivan arguing that the road becomes conflated with the domestic space of the state, the absence of which is parallel to the absence of the mother.<sup>41</sup> Others, such as Sheehan, have read it as a more simple invocation of capitalism.<sup>42</sup> We can deepen both by considering the historical context of the state highways as 'the greatest public works programme in the history of the nation' but which was 'set in motion by a Republican president who disliked the excessive authority of big government.'<sup>43</sup> This seemingly contradictory identity as a large and expensive federal project born by the small-government Republicanism of President Eisenhower deepens the road's capitalist significance, having been constructed to enable rapid evacuation in times of war as well as to ease the movement of capital between cities and states.<sup>44</sup> This contradiction directs us to read the road as a space of libertarian self-reliance, with the roads becoming—along with the automobile—a lasting American symbol of freedom for the individual to make their own way in America. This governmental enabling of the individual's freedom was even supported at the roots of American libertarianism, with Henry David Thoreau admitting that: 'I have never declined paying the highway tax, because I am as desirous of being a good neighbor as I am of being a bad subject.'<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Nell Sullivan, 'The Good Guys: McCarthy's *The Road* as Post-9/11 Male Sentimental Novel', *Genre*, 46:1 (2013), 79-101.

<sup>42</sup> Paul Sheehan, 'Road, fire, trees: Cormac McCarthy's post-America', *Styles of Extinction*, ed. by Julian Murphy and Mark Steven (London: Continuum, 2012), pp. 89-108.

<sup>43</sup> Lewis, p. xiii.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., p. 12.

<sup>45</sup> Henry David Thoreau, 'On the Duty of Civil Disobedience', in *Walden and Civil Disobedience*, ed. by Michael Meyer (London: Penguin, 1983), pp. 313-415 (p. 407).

Reading the road in this light illuminates how it evokes the man's memory of his favourite day, appearing like the dream of a child who has grown up idolising the self-reliant relationship with the land written about by Thoreau and championed by Emerson. The man's relationship with self-reliance clearly developed into adulthood as he displays a strangely cool and calm awareness of what to do in disaster. His ability to dress his wounds, shoot with accuracy under pressure, and to survive as long as he has, not to mention his odd presence-of mind to fill a bath on seeing the faint glow through the window that quietly signalled the apocalyptic disaster, all point to a man who has prepared himself to be fully self-reliant.

If the road of McCarthy's novel is a concrete structure sprawling over the lay of the land as a deteriorating symbol of commerce and individual freedom, then Winton's central concrete structure *The Mirador* is a 'brutal monolith' squatting in the centre of Fremantle offering community and symbolising an active state. Like the road, its concrete construction is similarly hidden by a façade. It is described by Keely as 'a classic shitbox: beige bricks, raw concrete galleries, ironware railings, doors and windows like prison slots' (21). Beneath this ugly appearance lies a deeper, if ill-executed, social purpose, with Keely noting it 'hard to credit that fifty years ago some nabob thought it a grand idea, a harbinger of progress' (21). In spite of its poor, ageing and faulty design, the block's affordability makes it impossible for Keely to loathe, appreciating its place as 'a haven for old folks, retired lumpers and clerks, invalid pensioners, transients, drunks and welfare mothers' (21). Again, this central concrete structure, and the social principles that built it, becomes conflated with the protagonist's father and upbringing.

Through Keely's memories of his father, we begin to see that both he and Doris echo the stature of *The Mirador* by existing in his mind as 'moral giants' (292). Nev, in particular, with the brute muscularity of his social sense of responsibility, is portrayed as someone who could battle the 'Leviathan with an irritable bowel' that Keely believes Western Australia has become. Keely begins to more consciously blend the familial sense of responsibility and the more broadly social when he describes *The Mirador* as a political sibling, viewing the *Mirador* as 'like him a product of the 60s' (21). The idea of his parents as representative of a political ideal embodied in social space and architecture such as the *Mirador* is even solidified in his father's downfall and eventual demise, with the severe church politics and ensuing legal proceedings, which would prove too much for his heart, first turning

him ‘into a ruin’ (222). Keely is described as a physical and moral inheritor of his father’s legacy in similarly robust and architectural invocations, being described, more than once, as ‘a chip off the old block’ (130, 274).

The personal and more broadly political ideas of social responsibility instilled in the fathers and concrete structures of both novels echo iconic ideals of both Australia and the USA. In *The Road*, the self-reliant background of the man and the constant presence of the interstate roads echo a classic libertarian and, more recently, Tea-party sense of freedom of the individual to achieve the American Dream. For *Eyre*, Nev’s imposing desire to help his community and the Mirador’s decades of service as a haven for those who might otherwise be forgotten by society recall the bleeding-heart Australian left’s faith in a state which can help provide a ‘fair go’ for its citizens. The presence of these political ideals in the novels, which are still so audible in their nations (even if only as echoes), and which reverberate throughout the concrete structures of the texts, is no more coincidental than it might be deliberate. Rather, the strength of their presence emerges from a crucial transpacific difference between American and Australian associations with concrete that mirror the same, but more frequently acknowledged, transatlantic differences.

Forty points to the German architect of the Autobahns, Walter Oswald, and his philosophy of designing the network as an example of the European associations with concrete: ‘we must build not the shortest, but rather the most noble connection between two points.’<sup>46</sup> While the aim of German engineering was to ‘create “culture” and to realize human potential’, Forty argues that on the other side of the Atlantic, ‘American practice was seen as guided purely by efficiency.’<sup>47</sup> Concrete thus became another material of nineteenth and twentieth-century transatlantic antagonism, with the material posing a potential threat to the USA’s desire to make itself exceptional to Europe. Forty writes that in the 1920s ‘the U.S was identified as the nation of steel, and Europe the land of concrete.’<sup>48</sup> He goes on to explain:

Crucial to the American reluctance to lay claim to reinforced concrete were misgivings as to whether it could truly be considered an ‘industrial’ material. America’s national myth was that the country’s industrial strength had come

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<sup>46</sup> Forty, *Concrete and Culture*, p. 64.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., p. 68.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., p. 107.

about through the way it had overcome its shortage of skilled craft labour by developing methods for the mass production of components that could then be assembled by unskilled labour; any process that did not conform to this model was regarded with suspicion.<sup>49</sup>

The American suspicion of concrete was so strong that 'the first post-war American reinforced concrete skyscrapers, Saarinen's CBS build and Yamasaki's World Trade Centre', opened in 1965 and 1973 respectively.<sup>50</sup> These differences led to radically opposing associations of concrete after the cold war. Europe and Australia used concrete to build the instruments of a welfare state, of which Keely's Mirador now stands testament.<sup>51</sup> Meanwhile, the USA's rugged libertarian roots prevented the same rise of state welfare and so concrete became more associated with the instruments of a military resigned to keep such communist and socialist ideologies at bay.<sup>52</sup>

Through their embodiment of both the familial and political attitudes towards one's neighbour, we could begin to argue that Keely and the man's material and cultural inheritance will form the concrete mooring to which the novels wish to re-tether themselves. We do feel their envy at the way in which their fathers, and even their younger selves, were able to live in less troubled times, or at least in times where the principles of society and their family seemed both synchronised and adequate enough to meet the challenges of their age. However, in keeping with Kermode's claim that crisis fiction pushes forward, the novelists use the vacillation between the father and the state to more fully engage with and criticise this social and political inheritance. Through this engagement, both texts interrogate the protagonists' envious nostalgia, unearthing how the political and familial principles of their past have contributed to their present situations.

Keely begins to realise that the political ideals embodied by both his father and the Mirador have failed to live up to their expectations. Beneath his idolisation of his father, Keely acknowledges that while Nev was 'a good man' he was 'not always smart' (130). Keely's own mother points out to him the flaws of the social

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid., pp. 107–108.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., p. 112.

<sup>51</sup> The similarities between the European and Australian association of concrete with the Welfare State can be seen in such acts of government as the 1945 Commonwealth State-Housing Agreement which allocated funds for affordable, public rental living space.

<sup>52</sup> Forty, *Concrete and Culture*, pp. 145–149.

principles he has grown to valorise. As Tom is set upon helping Gemma, Dorris offers him advice based on her regret about the way she and Nev treated Gemma's mother, which has become the source of much of Keely's social beliefs:

She got used to being helped, being absolved of accountability. I think, despite ourselves, we got caught up, Nev and me, making her the victim, only ever seeing her as, I don't know, prey. She was passive enough to begin with. We didn't expect enough. We didn't really help [ . . . ] We infantilised the poor woman, indulged ourselves. At her cost, I think, and our own. (313)

Keely is so surprised by his mother's revisionist views on how to treat thy neighbour that he immediately shoots back with an accusation of libertarian coldness: 'What's this, social work 101? *Ayn Rand in the Antipodes*?' To which Doris responds by wielding the ultimate trump card in the parent-child relationship: 'No, Tom, it's half my life' (313). Through the cracks that develop in Tom's image of his father and his principles, we also begin to see how some of the more socially radical past of Fremantle has tamed, becoming a 'boho theme park' (19) filled with hipsters (369, 388) and yummy mummies (20) enjoying the city's 'coffee culture' (21) and fulfilling Massey's belief that 'communitarianism tends towards the building of enclosed and excluding spaces, while the postmodern version can resolve into "a form of passive cosmopolitanism."<sup>53</sup>

McCarthy portrays a similar awakening from nostalgia later in the novel when the man recalls a memory of his childhood that alters the way we see the first. The man remembers being with a group of 'rough men' presumably his father or uncle among them. Rather than the idyll he remembers on that 'wordless day' fishing on the lake, this time the men are set about a darker task. At an opening on a rocky hillside, they have found a 'bolus of serpents collected there for common warmth' (201):

The men poured gasoline on them and burned them alive, having no remedy for evil but only for the image of it as they conceived it to be. The burning snakes twisted horribly and some crawled burning across the floor of the grotto to illuminate its darker recesses. As they were mute there were no screams of

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<sup>53</sup> Massey, p. 186.

pain and the men watched them burn and writhe and blacken in just such silence themselves and they disbanded in silence in the winter dusk each with his own thoughts to go home to their suppers. (201)

The incident inverts the earlier scene's idolisation of silence. Rather than praising the blissful possibilities of individualism, the scene reveals the disturbing other possibilities in a world where silence and the internal is prized over words and communication. The scene draws a particularly grim parallel between the burning of the snakes and the aftermath of a fire witnessed just two pages later, as the man and boy stumble upon 'Figures half mired in the blacktop, clutching themselves, mouths howling' (203).

The conflict within these men about attitudes toward their inherited desire to be self-reliant or communitarian is again complicated when the problems are refracted back into concrete. In *Eyrie*, despite idolising his father's active role within the community, Keely treads lightly through the halls of the Mirador, hoping to pass through without incident or encounter. Keely enjoys the fact that his neighbours are 'anonymous and disconnected', understandably bemoaning his neighbour's occasional outbursts as 'hard on the nerves' (4). Keely even finds the concept of sharing an elevator hard to handle, admitting that his first encounter with Gemma may never have occurred due to his preferred practice of avoiding a shared ride up by peeling off into the laundromat until his neighbours were gone (22).

We see a similarly ironic treatment of different buildings in *The Road* that exposes the post-apocalyptic world as not a break from American history, but deeply rooted within it. While Nell Sullivan points out that the boy has begun to fear houses, interpreting this as a symbolic fear of the domestic, there are structures the boy does not fear sleeping in. The most important of these is the bunker the man finds, which is described as 'walled with concrete block' and with a 'poured concrete floor' (146). Initially, the bunker appears to affirm the idea that individualist principles are keeping the man and boy alive, with the bunker a symbol of Cold War anxiety still embraced by the often right-wing image of the prepper.<sup>54</sup> This individualist space becomes transformed into a place of unintended community when the boy gives grace over dinner: 'Dear people, thank you for all this food and stuff. We know that

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<sup>54</sup> Jason Wilson, 'What preppers and survivalists tell us about America's apocalyptic readiness', *The Guardian* (10 February 2016) <<https://goo.gl/QejBdK>> [Accessed 2 August 2016].

you saved it for yourself and if you were here we wouldn't eat it no matter how hungry we were and we're sorry that you didn't get to eat it and we hope that you're safe in heaven with God' (154–155). While the boy's greatest experience of safety is experienced in a concrete environment, the boy's greatest encounter with fear is in a wooden house, where they find the bodies of the half-dead being harvested by a group of survivors for food.

In this, the novel's most disturbing scene, we are offered a description of the house that reveals a connection between the post-apocalyptic American future, and the nation's past. The man observes that the floorboards of the house are ones upon which 'chattel slaves had once trod [ . . . ] Bearing food and drink on silver trays' (112). As we saw upon the Mississippi in chapter one, these minor details reveal the depth of McCarthy's engagement with the physical and geophysical remnants of the USA's dark ties with slavery. By bringing this to the fore, McCarthy highlights his nation's difficult history of social responsibility, with slavery having been made acceptable by the forefathers through the Constitution's article I section II clause III that makes a distinction between 'free peoples' and 'all other peoples'.<sup>55</sup> The obvious irony is that the apocalyptic nightmare of man keeping fellow man in chains to satisfy his own hunger has its roots in an American historical reality where American liberty was built on the back of enslavement.

These moments of oscillation between the state and father offer the reader a series of complicated inherited beliefs regarding social responsibility. In a way, they consciously embody the central problem that Massey sees emerge from an understanding of care as a decreasing ripple with the family at the centre. It is this proximity-based understanding that makes slavery acceptable in both the post-apocalyptic and pre-abolition America. It is also this understanding that makes Keely believe he can avoid responsibility if he physically avoids those in his apartment, and which made his parents infantilise Gemma by artificially bringing her into their family. This makes both of their political and the paternal influences, which have fostered so many of their beliefs, unsuitable moorings for their sliding worlds. Instead, we begin to see the novels embody that particular value of crisis fiction outlined by Kermode, the ability to 'change as the need for sense-making change' by

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<sup>55</sup> Jack N. Rakove, *The Annotated U.S Constitution and Declaration of Independence* (London: Harvard University Press, 2009), p. 111.

exploring the possibility for their own craft of writing to be something substantial enough to stand firm and provide mooring for a world adrift.<sup>56</sup>

## Concrete Poetry

The connection between language and architecture, particularly in relation to crisis, is not one forged for the first time by McCarthy and Winton. The most towering example of this coupling from the previous century is George Orwell's *1984*, in which 'the party' of Oceania assert their ideology through the promise of a concrete modernity:

The ideal set up by the party was something huge, terrible and glittering—a world of steel and concrete of monstrous machines and terrifying weapons—a nation of warriors and fanatics, marching forward in perfect unity, all thinking the same thoughts and shouting the same slogans, perpetually working, fighting, triumphing, persecuting—three hundred million people all with the same face. The reality was decaying, dingy cities where underfed people shuffled to and fro in leaky shoes, in patched-up nineteenth century houses that smelt always of cabbage and bad lavatories.<sup>57</sup>

The only place that matches this image of the gleaming modern is the 'enormous pyramidal structure of glittering white concrete' which is home to the Ministry of Truth, an instrument of government that controls the population by shaving language of words which may give form to feelings of dissatisfaction and substance to rebellion.<sup>58</sup>

The Ministry of Truth was merely a half-step ahead in a deterioration Orwell believed was already eating at the post-war use of English. Orwell believed that staleness of imagery, lack of precision, acceptance of cliché and continual reaching for stock phrases were used, particularly by politicians, 'to make lies sound truthful

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<sup>56</sup> Kermode, p. 39.

<sup>57</sup> George Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (London: Penguin, 1989), p. 77.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., p. 24.

and murder respectable, and to give an appearance of solidity to pure wind.<sup>59</sup> Writing during the late days of Modernism, Orwell's belief in the decaying of the English Language can be read as a prophetic attack upon postmodernism, which would celebrate language as representation with only illusory bonds to an equally illusory notion of a fixed reality. Orwell seems prescient of David Foster Wallace's twenty-first-century concern, warning: 'The great enemy of clear language is insincerity.'<sup>60</sup> This postmodern lack of faith in language's solidity, and an Orwellian suspicion of its slipperiness, haunts both *Eyrie* and *The Road*.

Both novels' faith in language is shaken by the protagonists' experience of language being stripped of its referents, and thus its power. In *The Road*, the man wrestles with how to raise a son in a world where the social, natural, political and even linguistic referents that guided his own upbringing are being snuffed out of existence:

He'd had this feeling before, beyond the numbness and the dull despair. The world shrinking down about a raw core of parseable entities. The names of things slowly following those things into oblivion. Colors. The names of birds. Things to eat. Finally the names of things one believed to be true. More fragile than he would have thought. How much was gone already? The sacred idiom shorn of its referents and so of its reality. Drawing down like something trying to preserve heat. In time to wink out forever. (93)

Through the destruction of so much that the man has known and that formed his own life, the man realises that 'to the boy he was himself an alien. A being from a planet that no longer existed' (135). The boy also understands how the world used to be, missing the birds that are to him mythical creatures. Even though this post-apocalyptic world is painted as the corpse of the state, its politic in shaping our language still intrudes upon the novel. Most intriguingly, it is the boy who, despite being born in a post-apocalypse and post-government world, displays the effect of political language through echoes of post-9/11 slogans such as 'we must be vigilant' (231). This context is reinforced throughout the book by scenes and allusions such as the burned dead echoing images of the 'Highways of Death' from the first gulf

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<sup>59</sup> George Orwell, 'Politics and the English Language', *George Orwell: Selected Writings*, ed. By George Bott (London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1958), pp. 75-89 (p. 89).

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., p. 86.

war. All of these allusions bring the controversial dichotomising and simplifying of late-twentieth and early twenty-first century politics into the extreme post-apocalyptic environment in which the man and boy understand themselves as the 'good guys' and all others as potential 'bad guys' (81).

Keely's confessed cynicism about the power of language is the result of an environmental career that involved sparring with a deliberately evasive political rhetoric in the hopes of revealing its darker hidden meanings. Having to combat the politics within an equally political language became too much, and got to the point where dealing with an insincere and calculated use of words exploded into the relief of speaking 'the truth' live on TV, a sensation like 'vomiting hot coals' (75). While clearly a shared authorial concern, language's ability to affect change has been a theme most thoroughly explored in the criticism that engages McCarthy's writing.

David Holloway argues that McCarthy's Western fiction reveals a complex position between the modernist/realist belief and postmodernist disbelief in language's bond to a describable reality. Holloway believes that 'McCarthy's is a writing that acknowledges the need to accommodate the insight of postmodern thinking but that simultaneously remains attached to the modernist assumption that narrative can and should stand apart from the world, in order to then engage and go to work against it.'<sup>61</sup> Holloway goes on to argue that the difficulty of unravelling any solution to this often contradictory impasse arises from a lack of 'any systematic diagnosis of the broader historical and ideological contexts that permit these contradictory definitions of aesthetic practice to co-exist, side by side, in the same narrative space.'<sup>62</sup> Holloway suggests that, instead of attempting to find a solution, McCarthy's Western fiction embraces the contradiction between modernist faith and postmodern disbelief in language through a form of negative capability, presenting language as 'a primordial and monolithic presence in the world [...] [that] cannot be made susceptible to any qualitative resolution in the future.'<sup>63</sup> Thus, Holloway considers that McCarthy's Western novels simultaneously imbue language with power while also denying its ability to exert real change by privileging the now, arguing that 'the ideology of the antinomy then lies precisely in this supposition, that

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<sup>61</sup> David Holloway, *The Late Modernism of Cormac McCarthy* (London: Greenwood Press 2002), p. 43.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., p. 43.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., p. 57.

we live in this moment and this world only, because this moment and this world is all that we will ever have and all that we have ever had.<sup>64</sup> While Holloway's diagnosis seems accurate for McCarthy's earlier Western novels, the urgency of both *The Road* and *Eyre* force McCarthy and Winton into moving beyond a negative capability that sees language as existing 'now' to adopt an understanding of language that helps accommodate the future. In doing so, the novels also begin to embody Massey's claim that:

An understanding of the social and the political which avoids both classical individualism and communitarian organicism absolutely requires its constitution through a spatio-temporality which is open, through an open-ended temporality which itself necessarily requires a spatiality that is both multiple and not enclosed, one which is always in the process of construction. Any politics which acknowledges the openness of the future (otherwise there could be no realm of the political) entails a radically open time-space, a space which is always being made.<sup>65</sup>

Thus, in confronting language's position in relation to the future, the novels also work towards an evolution of the communitarianism and libertarianism that both protagonists have inherited.

Both novelists begin an attempt to safeguard a clearer understanding of language's role in building a future when their protagonists realise the uselessness of an ungrounded language that only pays attention to the 'now'. This dawns on Keely when he reflects on how his attitude toward Joseph Heller's *Catch-22* has changed with age, recalling how he'd 'found it so mordantly fun in his youth. Now it was too distressing' (234). In adulthood, he finds himself imitating Kai in his desire 'to shout at the novelist: no more, no fooling, no falling' (234–235). *The Road* builds on this frustration through the introduction of Ely:

Is your name really Ely?  
No.  
You dont want to say your name.  
I dont want to say it.

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Massey, p. 189.

Why?

I couldnt trust you with it. To do something with it. I dont want anybody talking about me. To say where I was or what I said when I was there. I mean, you could talk about me maybe. But nobody could say that it was me. I could be anybody. I think in times like these the less said the better. If something had happened and we were survivors and we met on the road then we'd have something to talk about. But we're not. So we dont. (182)

Ely refuses to give his name because he fears that to give somebody the power to name him would be to put him at risk. The encounter is infuriating for characters who are doomed by the impossibility of forging a community, of building anything, when every encounter with another human is riddled with mistrust. In a world where all previous forms of society have turned to dust, what good is a man who refuses to even divulge his name? This irritation emerges from the same foundation as Keely's frustration with Heller, that a refusal to be pinned down prevents anyone from grabbing hold of meaning. Later in the novel, we see the man realise that he perpetuates this same problem, with both him and his son suffering from his own suspicion of people and their words.

Armed with his gun, the man has developed a fear of people so strong that he avoids all encounters where possible. He even refuses to listen to his son's requests that they help a boy and a dog he believes he sees at different points. The father believes that it is his quest to save his son but slowly realises that his determined self-reliance simultaneously denies his son a future. This realisation is quietly achieved when his son asks him where they will find the good guys his father claims to be searching for. The man can only respond that 'they're hiding [...] [f]rom each other' (196). It is only when both Keely and the man look at the children as the future that either is able to reach beyond their cynical mistrust in both people and language.

In *Eyrie*, despite Keely's inability to answer Kai's repeated question 'but really, where do words come from?', both he and Kai have the sense that they are tangible and material. Kai and Keely bond over material words through scrabble, with Keely noticing Kai's love of 'building words' and enjoying the physicality of the letters', rubbing his fingers over their surface 'as if tempted to slip them into his mouth like milky chocolates' (232). Despite this enjoyment, Kai is still suspicious of the letters: 'He did not enjoy the letter Q. And blanks, letters that were mutable,

seemed to cause him anxiety; they had to be marked laboriously with a pencil before he could accept them as real and even then they troubled him, as if there were something untrustworthy about their nature' (232). Between this adoration of words as milky bricks with which things can be built, and an ingrained mistrust of them, is the sense that they are crucial to his identity. Kai bemuses Keely with his observation that creased on his palms is the letter 'M'. There is never any explanation for what 'M' might symbolise; rather, it seems to further imprint in the novel the inseparable yet ungraspable connection between humanity and language.

Just as Kai's love of Scrabble stokes in Keely a renewed sense of enjoyment in language, the boy's naive generosity pushes his father to show kindness to Ely. The man honours his son's wishes to share with Ely, telling him to thank his son for sharing their food:

You should thank him you know, the man said. I wouldnt have given you anything.

Maybe I should and maybe I shouldnt.

Why wouldnt you?

I wouldnt have given him mine.

You dont care if it hurts his feelings?

Will it hurt his feelings?

No. That's not why he did it.

Why did he do it?

He looked over at the boy and he looked at the old man. You wouldnt understand, he said. I'm not sure I do. Maybe he believes in God.

I dont know what he believes in.

He'll get over it.

No he wont. (184–185)

In these moments, *The Road* comes close to being a saccharine, naive and sentimental ode to the innocence of the child without ever quite crossing that line. This is partly due to the boy's expressions of bitterness towards his father. In one particular moment, the boy reveals his ability to see the truth behind his father's words, accusing the man of telling him false stories: 'In the stories we're always helping people and we dont help people' (287). The boy's discernment means that he finds it almost impossible to tell his own stories, as his are 'more like real life' (287). This

reveals simultaneously the inescapable slipperiness and foundational nature of language. While the boy's experience of his father's true stories as fiction confirms language's relativity, his own inability or refusal to tell stories that do not reflect his current situation also confirms the necessity of language's tie to reality.

Despite their desire, both novels struggle to know how to resolve the contradiction between an inherited modernist belief in the visceral and social power of language and post-modern assertion of language as merely representation. Without settling this contradiction, the novels are also prevented in finding a sense of social responsibility that transcends the libertarian and the communal and which might act as mooring for their troubled worlds. The connection between the two issues results from the long-standing complexity of the relationship between space and language. As Forty notes in his study *Words and Architecture*:

In general, in the attempts to describe the 'social' aspects of architecture, language has let architecture down. Language's particular strength—the creation of differences—has been of limited value in this domain; while the task of making evident a relationship between two such utterly disparate phenomena as social practise on the one hand and physical space on the other has proved to be largely beyond the capacity of language.<sup>66</sup>

Forty's belief that language has 'let architecture down' reveals his perspective on the relationship as firmly architectural. In many ways, this belief in language's failure to engage with the social element of architecture is challenged and proven by Masey's *For Space*.

In her conclusive synthesis, Massey argues that our concept of space should, perhaps, be more similar to our understanding of history:

My question is can this temporal extension be paralleled in the spatial? As 'the past continues in our present' so also is the distant implicated in our 'here'. Identities are relational in ways that are spatio-temporal. They are indeed bound up with 'the narratives of the past' (Hall, 1990, p. 225) and made up of resources we 'inherit' (Gilroy, 1997, p. 341), but not only did these pasts themselves have a geography, but the process of identity-construction is

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<sup>66</sup> Adrian Forty, *Words and Architecture: A Vocabulary of Modern Architecture* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2000), p. 117.

'ongoing' (Gatens and Lloyd) now. And it has a global geography. To respond to that geography would be to address the spatial counterpoint to an ethics of hospitality. A politics of outwardlookingness, from place beyond place.<sup>67</sup>

It is commonly accepted that history affects our future through narrative, resulting in the acceptable cliché that those who forget history are doomed to repeat it. Yet, this is not so accepted with regards to space. Massey proposes developing our understanding of similar ties between 'there' and 'here' would help us complicate our simplistic understanding of responsibility as a fading ripple which moves from ourselves, to our family, to our nation and only finally and most faintly to the global. In proposing this, Massey argues the case for potentially unifying the relationship between language and space, while simultaneously showing the complexity of it through her own complex writing. Although *For Space* argues for the possibility of the productive possibilities for language to describe and relate to social space, the occasionally baffling nature of the academic's prose could be used as evidence that this relationship is being stretched. Bearing in mind that the novels posing these questions are ones of crisis, the potential of Massey's work to help answer the novels is deepened by Slavoj Žižek's exploration of claims that the collapse of the twin towers symbolised 'the end of the age of irony'.<sup>68</sup>

Žižek notes that there came with this call a belief that 'postmodern relativism's time is over' and that 'once again we need firm and unambiguous commitments'.<sup>69</sup> From this narrative, Žižek argues, we witnessed a slip into an 'impotent acting out' symbolised in the misguided and inaccurate wars against Afghanistan and Iraq that failed to strike a precise enemy, but rather a distant population who 'barely survive on barren hills'.<sup>70</sup> Does this arguably misguided international political response to the 9/11 attacks invalidate or condemn a desire to move beyond a sense of postmodern relativism? Žižek inadvertently reveals that it does not when he diagnoses the existence of the Real in fact and fiction:

This means that the dialectic of semblance and Real cannot be reduced to the rather elementary fact that the virtualisation of our daily lives, the experience

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<sup>67</sup> Massey, p. 192.

<sup>68</sup> Slavoj Žižek, *Welcome to the Desert of the Real* (London: Verso, 2002), p. 34.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., p. 35.

that we are living more and more in an artificially constructed universe, gives rise to an irresistible urge to 'return to the Real', to regain firm ground in some 'real reality'. The Real which returns has the status of a(nother) semblance: precisely because it is real, that is, on account of its traumatic/excessive character, we are unable to integrate it into (what we experience as) our reality, and are therefore compelled to experience it as a nightmarish apparition. [...] The lesson of psychoanalysis here is the opposite one: we should not mistake reality for fiction—we should be able to discern, in what we experience as fiction the hard kernel of the Real which we are able to sustain only if we fictionalise it. In short, we should discern which part of reality is 'transfunctionalized' through fantasy, so that, although it is part of reality, it is perceived in a fictional mode. Much more difficult than to denounce/unmask (what appears as) reality as fiction is to recognise the part of fiction in 'real' reality. (This, of course, brings us back to the old Lacanian notion that, while animals can deceive by presenting what is false as true, only humans (entities inhabiting the symbolic space) can deceive by presenting what is true as false.)<sup>71</sup>

By locating the real in fiction, Žižek reveals that fiction can express dissatisfaction with postmodern relativism and irony with accuracy beyond the possibility of political rhetoric. Whereas political rhetoric is limited by the very fact that it is carefully constructed to *seem* Real, works like *Eyre* and *The Road*—which are expressly fictional and have no need to appear real—can harbour that hard but delicate kernel of truth. Furthermore, if Massey believes that we must see space in a narrative manner similar to our relationship to the past, Žižek's locating of the Real within fiction also shows us the possibility for this narrative to occur within fiction. In realising this, we begin to see how both *Eyre* and *The Road* move from questioning the solidity of literature, to realising it is something of monumental significance.

At the close of both novels the father figures get closer to resolving their responsibilities to their children, and how to best equip them for a world they themselves struggle to cope with. At the end of *The Road*, the man's lungs begin to fail him. Just before the man dies, the boy weepingly asks him:

Is it real? The fire?

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid., p. 19.

Yes it is.

Where is it? I dont know where it is.

Yes you do. It's inside you. It was always there. I can see it. (298)

This story is threaded throughout the narrative, and sustains the man and the boy to bring them to this final point, a story based on nothing other than the man's desire for his son to live a life better than seems possible in the world around him. The story is not a concoction designed to keep he and the boy alive, but an exercise of faith that there is something beyond their sheer willpower helping them to stay alive, and that there is something worth staying alive for. As the man and boy's final conversation reveals, the man must necessarily die for his story to become true:

Do you think he's alright that little boy?

Oh yes. I think he's alright.

Do you think he was lost?

No. I dont think he was lost.

I'm scared that he was lost.

I think he's all right.

But who will find him if he's lost? Who will find the little boy?

Goodness will find the little boy. It always has. It will again. (300)

The end is given its poignancy and weight because the father's words about the little boy, which transform into words about his own son, become not just blind stories to appease the child, but ones that reveal the man's surrender of faith to those who must now take care of his son. It is a surrender that hopes that there will be people better than he, who did not search for the child his son believed to be lost for fear of his own. His faith is rewarded when a family arrive that same day to rescue the boy. The coming-to-pass of a near-prophetic fiction that necessarily ends with the death of the protagonist also marks the ending of *Eyrie*.

Keely's story is not so much told as it is performed. After a brief tussle with a gang member who has come to demand the money from Gemma and Kai, Keely chases in pursuit down through the Mirador. As he crashes into the forecourt, it becomes clear he has been stabbed. He falls to the ground deliriously and there is commotion around him. The scene enacts a dream, told by Kai to Keely about how he would be lying dead on the forecourt as people with 'eyes without faces' look at

him indifferently (254). In this scene, Keely replaces Kai as the one dying on the street below. The book does not tell us if Keely survives the stabbing or what occurs following the incident, but the reader can presume that the drama of the incident—a notable environmentalist stabbed in aid of a woman and her child and bleeding to death on the busy sidewalk—will force the attention to the situation that Gemma knows she will not gain by going to the cops herself. In its public nature, Keely's stabbing might enable the survival of Kai.

It would be easy to read into these endings a messianic story of redemption. The man and Keely becoming figures who save their sons, and possibly future generations, through their selfless sacrifice. We could thus happily conclude that the novels are simple calls to arms for a generation willing to wake up to the environmental crises of our times and put everything on the line to safeguard the future. But this would be to miss the subtle progressiveness of these novels. What is most powerful about both endings, and what seals within them the hard kernel of the Real that separates them from political rhetoric or polemic, is that both novels turn these potential saviours into men who surrender to the compassion of strangers.

Just as the man's work in protecting his son only became meaningful through the boy's survival at the mercy of others, *Eyrie* ends with Keely's life in the hands of a stranger. In the novel's final few lines we see him realising what his act has achieved as he lies there bleeding out on the pavement:

He rolled to a shoulder, fell back strangely breathless to see the purling sky and the pink finger of the building above him. The world flashed outside him, shivering light, stammering sound. A circle of dark head in hoods enclosed him, offering moments of merciful shade.

Sir?

Dark skinned noses, black eyes, pieces of face through the letterbox slits of cloth.

Sir? The pair of spectacles, the swatch of human shape behind. Sir, are you well?

The veiled faces retracted uncertainly and keenly understood. He'd fallen. He saw the tower beyond and the tiny figure of the boy safe on the balcony. He smelt salt and concrete and urine. Saw lovely brown thumbs pressing numbers, cheeping digits, reaching down. The edit was choppy. The boy's face a flash—or was that a gull?

Sir, there is bleeding. Are you well?

Yes, he said with all the clarity left to him. Thank you. I am well. (424)

Keely is at the mercy of a stranger significantly 'other' in Winton's fiction: a female figure in a burka whose stilted English indicates that she is a first-generation immigrant. By ending on this scene and this newly established relationship with the stranger who holds Keely's life in her hands, Winton's text invokes a speech he gave published after the publication of *Eyrie*, his Palm Sunday Plea. In his speech, Winton addresses the Australian government's disturbing immigration policy, urging his political leaders to 'turn back from this path to brutality'.<sup>72</sup> The talk is emotionally wrought and powerfully spoken as Winton decries the success of political language in smuggling lies into the heads of the people: 'The political slogans have ground their way into our hearts and minds. The mantras of fear have been internalised'.<sup>73</sup> What may have driven him to this territory of the polemical is his public doubt about the novel as a medium which can effect change, claiming, 'Novels aren't a means of persuasion. Fiction doesn't have answers. It's a means of wondering or imagining'.<sup>74</sup> We can see this as the author's modesty, or, more likely, the inevitable result of a writer whose long career may have seen the political frustration behind his novels pushing in one direction, and the politics of his nation slowly sliding in the other. But it is through the fiction that these writers offer the greatest possibility for affecting change.

In *For Space*, Massey ends her study with the claim:

Place is as much a challenge as is time. Neither space nor place can provide a haven from the world. If time presents us with the opportunities of change and (as some would see it) the terror of death, then space presents us with the social in the widest sense: the challenge of our constitutive interrelatedness—and thus our collective implication in the outcomes of that interrelatedness; the radical contemporaneity of an ongoing multiplicity of others, human and non-

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<sup>72</sup> Tim Winton, 'Tim Winton's Palm Sunday Plea: Start the Soul Searching Australia', *The Age* (29 March 2015) <<http://goo.gl/Nw82P9>> [Accessed 21 July 2016].

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Deborah Bogle, 'Australian Novelist Tim Winton, author of *Cloudstreet*, *Dirt Music* and new book *Eyrie* uses words to ponder change', *The Advertiser* (20 October 2013) <<http://goo.gl/fyJTxQ>> [Accessed 22 July 2016].

human; and the ongoing and ever-specific project of the practices through which that sociability is to be configured. (195)

In these novels, which respond to an array of environmental, political, financial and social crises that have dogged the infancy of the twenty-first century, we see both Winton and McCarthy push their fiction to meet this challenge of interrelatedness and to become a means through which sociability can be configured. We have seen them struggle to find a firm mooring in the political ideals that have built their physical and social environment and fail to find satisfaction with either the modernist or postmodernist understandings of language's role in shaping it. Instead, these novels are created as the solution to their own quest for solidity: the novels are themselves solid forms of representation. They are porous enough to let in a diverse readership, creating a space where the only requirement is the ability and inclination to read and by which the individual enters a space within which they can access a multiplicity of places, cultures and experiences. The story itself, in the form of a novel, contains the power to present the reader an experience of all potential multiplicities of space. In doing so, fiction which is both unstable and solid, ancient and modern, grounded in the real world and also pure representation, tears down national, social, and class boundaries more effectively than any political rhetoric of unity and togetherness, to turn places and people from outside of our experience into our neighbourhood and our neighbours.

# Conclusion: Reading the World

If anything fit to be called by the name of reading, the process itself should be absorbing and voluptuous; we should gloat over a book, be rapt clean out of ourselves, and rise from the perusal, our mind filled with the busiest, kaleidoscopic dance of images, incapable of sleep or of continuous thought. The words, if the book be eloquent, should run thenceforward in our ears like the noise of breakers, and the story, if it be a story, repeat itself in a thousand coloured pictures to the eye. It was for this last pleasure that we read so closely, and loved our books so dearly, in the bright troubled period of boyhood.

Robert Louis Stevenson, 'A Gossip on Romance'<sup>1</sup>

When asked about the value of writing classes, Winton offered his opinion but proposed: 'We need readers more than writers at the moment, I would have thought.'<sup>2</sup> Following the flow of rivers, the weaving of lines, the scattering of sand and the solidifying of concrete through Tim Winton and Cormac McCarthy's fiction continually reveals writing's ability to channel the power and dynamism of geography. The forces at work in these fictional geographies raise, celebrate, and interrogate national identities and histories, shake notions of gender, and form a foundation of hope for the future. But, as Winton's response indicates, these messages mean nothing if they go unread. To realise the presence of such dynamics and pull their significance from the fictional into the real world, our reading must be equally shaped by physical geography.

Both the popular need and desire for ways of reading the physical world has manifested in the unlikely success of a genre commonly labelled 'new nature writing.' Flowering in the same post-postmodern climate of anxiety about linguistic and environmental instability that fertilised *The Road* and *Eyrie*, new nature writing is a

<sup>1</sup> Robert Louis Stevenson, 'A Gossip on Romance', *R. L. Stevenson on Fiction*, ed. By Glenda Norquay (Edinburgh: EUP, 1999), p. 52.

<sup>2</sup> Mauria Muruzzi & Andrew Lawless, "You kill them if pressed" – Tim Winton', *Three Monkeys Online*, <goo.gl/euPGdZ> [Accessed 09 September 2016].

largely British form of prose that has grown under the canopy of creative non-fiction. Prominent figures include Robert Macfarlane, Philip Hoare, Mark Cocker, and George Monbiot, and new voices continue to emerge: Helen Macdonald's *H is for Hawk* (2014), James Rebanks' *The Shepherd's Life* (2015), and Alexandra Harris' *Weatherland* (2015) are recent contributions to the genre. The prose works emerging under the 'new nature' label have found such critical and popular success that the genre has been described as a 'publishing phenomenon'<sup>3</sup> producing 'blockbuster'<sup>4</sup> works. Over almost a decade, Nature writing has moved from the anoraky shelf on the fringe to the showpiece table of British bookshops. This success has contributed to the turnaround in the fortunes of bookstores and books that had risked fading into a digital century.

While the flourishing of new nature writing is partly due to an increasing anxiety about the natural world's decomposition, its success is also a result of its literary form. Macfarlane gestures to this when questioning the accuracy of the new nature writing label and its identity as a genre. Macfarlane proposes that instead of being a clearly defined genre, the works often discussed under the 'new nature' label might better be understood as an ecology of works united in exploring the 'relations between selfhood, landscape and ethics'.<sup>5</sup> This exploration is focused on nature as subject, but requires experimental forms to connect this subject with such personal and ontological concerns as the self and ethics. What is particularly significant to any geocritical endeavour is the genre's crucial re-negotiation of the relationship between the reader, writer and text.

The result of this re-negotiation that most radically serves the genre's crucial exploration of the relationship between selfhood, landscape, and ethics, is the intimate presence of the writer. As the opening of Philip Hoare's *Leviathan* (2008) establishes, the author's presence within the prose manages to counter-balance the lecturing rigidity of non-fiction with the poetic inclinations of fiction, allowing memory to contextualize fact, and fact to clarify memory:

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<sup>3</sup> Mark Cocker, 'Death of a Naturalist: why is the "new nature writing" so tame?', *The New Statesman* (17 June 2015) <<http://goo.gl/RKfkdc>> [Accessed 21 July 2016].

<sup>4</sup> Jamie Doward, 'Hawks, butterflies, coasts and footpaths: how nature writing turned to literary gold', *The Observer* (22 March 2015) <<https://goo.gl/8iUIDc>> [Accessed 21 July 2016].

<sup>5</sup> Robert Macfarlane, 'Why We Need Nature Writing', *The New Statesman* (2nd September 2015) <<http://goo.gl/dgS1T7>> [Accessed 21 July 2016].

I have always been afraid of deep water. Even bathtime had its terrors for me (although I was by no means a timid child) when I thought of the stories my mother told of her own childhood, and how my grandfather had painted a whale on the outside of their enamel bathtub. It was an image bound up in other childish fears and fascinations, ready to emerge out of the depths like the giant squid in the film of *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea*, with its bug-eyed Nautilus, Kirk Douglas's tousled blond locks and stripy T-shirt, and its futuristic divers walking the ocean floor as they might stroll along the beach.<sup>6</sup>

This memory, and many others, continually shape *Leviathan*'s historical, cultural, and biological portraits of the whale, revealing the entanglements of fact and fiction. In embracing this ebb and flow of memory, Hoare's prose does not just reveal the at-once subtle and monumental significance of the whale upon his own life and thinking, but narrows the gap between the reader and the subject. The book is not intended as a tool to better understand whales from the distance of an armchair, but to better realize that, even from the distance of an armchair, we are continually connected with the natural world, physically, environmentally, culturally, personally, economically, and imaginatively. In doing so, Hoare's book transcends any heavily 'environmentalist' political tone, and becomes an emotional lament of the whale's endangerment and a prodding of the consciousness to help save it.

For many new nature writers, such self-awareness frequently involves the particular recollection of childhood. Macfarlane observes that when he asks scientists and naturalists what ignited their passion for the natural world, 'the answer is almost always the same: an encounter with a wild creature and an encounter with a book.'<sup>7</sup> While not necessarily experienced as a child, these literary and natural encounters that underpin so much new nature writing and so much of our personal relationship with the world are often, as they were for Hoare, first and most potently experienced in childhood.

The child, particularly the boy, has been consistently important throughout this thesis. We have watched the kid and Bruce grow the rhythm of the fluvial cycle of *Blood Meridian* and *Breath*. We have seen the chap and Billie of *Outer Dark* and *The Riders* being dragged along in their parent's pursuit of family. We have also seen

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<sup>6</sup> Philip Hoare, *Leviathan* (London: Fourth Estate, 2008), pp. 1-2.

<sup>7</sup> Macfarlane, op. cit.

Bird's naïvely profound vision of the natural world in *Dirt Music*, and the boy and Kai's harsh experience of it as they depend upon their parent's protection in *The Road* and *Eryie*. In all of these works the child is a character defined partly by their initial innocence and naivety but most crucially by their receptivity. All of the children, but particularly Bruce and the Kid, are shaped, damaged and uplifted by the world around them far more readily than the novels' adult protagonists.

In his recent memoir *Island Home*, which might be considered as an Australian contribution to new nature writing, Winton addresses the importance of the child's receptivity:

When it comes to apprehending nature kids have a significant advantage. I didn't appreciate that until I could observe my own. Now I have grandkids to reinforce the lesson as they potter about, barefoot and unhurried. You can see them taking the world in through their skin [ . . . ] Being short and powerless, kids see the world low down and close up. On hands and knees, on their naked bellies, they feel it with an immediacy we can scarcely recall as adults. Remember all that wandering and dithering as you crossed the same ground again and again? It wouldn't have seemed so at the time but with all that apparently aimless mooching you were weaving a tapestry of arcane lore—where the chewy gum bulges best from the tree, where the yellow sand makes a warm pad to lie on beneath rattling banksias—that didn't just make the world more comprehensible, but rendered it intimate, even sacred.<sup>8</sup>

Winton is deepening an observation made by Robert Louis Stevenson—one of his many nineteenth-century influences—that literature's ability to convey a 'thousand coloured pictures' was most strongly treasured by readers 'in the bright, troubled period of boyhood.' Stevenson's emphasis on what makes reading so precious to a child is their unadulterated enjoyment of narrative. Winton's observation of the childhood relationship with nature develops this by expressing the importance of intimacy in the child's relationship with place easily forgotten by an adult. This is a sense which is not articulated in Stevenson, but revealing of his proposal that fiction is a way of reconnecting to some forgotten childhood joy, claiming that 'fiction is to the grown man what play is to the child.'<sup>9</sup> If we combine these two observations of

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<sup>8</sup> Tim Winton, *Island Home: A Landscape Memoir* (London: Picador, 2015), pp. 46-47.

<sup>9</sup> Stevenson, p. 61.

the child's exceptional relationships with both nature and literature, we can see that literature is an environment in which a grown man might be able to rediscover their childhood playfulness, receptivity, and intimacy with the world.

These observations and beliefs about the child are easy to mock, seeming to accord with David Foster Wallace's prediction of a rise in sincerity. What Winton and Stevenson are observing and which many of the new nature writers manage to realise without being easily accused of the cringe-inducing sentimentality that Wallace predicted, is an embrace of the childhood receptivity that provokes an intimacy with both language and the world. When done well, the openness to this experience and intimacy, which Stevenson points out is not exclusive to an untroubled childhood, works to provoke in the reader not a tremor of laughter, but a shiver of recognition.

Beyond the fictional boys of Winton and McCarthy, this thesis has been continually informed by my own boyhood memories. While I visited the spaces and places that informed these novels during my research, my reading of their literary versions had already been informed by the spaces I know intimately. When I read about the concrete of *Eyrie*'s Mirador and the highways of *The Road*, I see cancerous Brutalist buildings cut up by dual carriageways upon which freight, cargo, slaves and refugees are ferried through the two port towns in which I have lived. The desert becomes the Kent coast where the channel smashes pebbles into sand beneath a maze of cliff-top fortifications where men of countless ages have fought and died. The lines zig-zagging across Europe and the Appalachias take me to the footpaths and desire lines ground into the White Cliffs of Dover, and from which you look across the ocean to see the hills, roads, and churches of another nation. The irrepressible pull of the fluvial cycle on young minds reminds me of days and evenings spent guided by boredom to the river and the beach, flirting with the sins and vices that we believed made us adults. While research, close reading of the texts and engagement with geographical spaces, concepts, and practitioners has directed and shaped this study, it is my childhood memory and intimate experience of these places that has driven it.

This awareness has continually energised the thesis, challenging my method as a literary critic whose presence in the work risks being a distraction from engagement with the text. Yet, without this intimate experience of material realities thousands of miles from the destinations of both McCarthy and Winton, the

particular ways of viewing and understanding these novels that this thesis has proposed might not have been achieved. Adapting to this awareness has meant that the major achievement of this thesis is not any further uncovering of the exceptional geographical engagement of Winton and McCarthy's work. Instead, its achievement lies in provoking the potential methods and rewards of reading prose fiction geographically. Over the course of this investigation, the rigid framework it constructed—reading the literature as heterotopic alteration of geography, bound by the reader to the properties of the real world—has weathered into something which can more simply be expressed as literature's surrender to geography. It is the ease with which McCarthy and Winton's literature surrenders to geography that makes their work so enticing. It transforms their literary geographies from being the author's personal and precious constructs into a moving, breathing, and living worlds distinct in their American and Australian location, but universally recognizable as the world in which we all live.

This surrender goes beyond merely making the literary geography relatable to the reader. As this thesis has shown in its movement from the sea and over the land, reading fiction with a geographical focus allows it to be opened and expanded. Applying such ways of thinking not only allows us to feel the physical world's heft within the literature beyond metaphor, but further deepens our understanding of the poetic, philosophical, moral, and spiritual mark it impresses upon the human experience. Such a way of reading also enables a discussion of antipodal writers that appreciates the depth of commonality between their writing which runs deeper than their shared distances, from each other or from Europe. It also allows other exceptional lives from other times and places but which have been shaped by the same materialities, like Ralph Bagnold, to speak revealingly to fictional worlds.

This is a mode of reading that might contribute to and be encouraged by the new nature writing ecology, provoking thoughts about how a geocritical endeavour might productively embrace both the subjective and objective values of the physical world to create a less purely metaphorical exploration of literary geography. Such readings have the potential to address and balance the concerns and flaws of other literary critical fields and to create a more coherent geographical approach to literature. By not seeking politically charged engagements with literary environments, but being open to their potential presence, such methods can expand and enrich ecocritical ways of reading. By appreciating the perspective of the self in

the analysis, and accepting the ways in which our reading of material geography is informed by our own subjective experience, we can even satisfy the ontological, poetic, and personal concerns of geopolitics. Building upon a focused and sustained engagement with geophysical elements, such as sand, lines, hydrology and concrete, strengthens the interdisciplinary focus sought by geocriticism.

In scouting the diverse potential for a sustained geophysically engaged mode of reading, this study has surpassed its aim to reveal McCarthy and Winton's connections through patiently articulating the impact of physical geography on literary geography. The thesis has glimpsed the potential for such a mode of reading to challenge existing literary criticism and develop our understanding of literary relations on global and temporal scales. It has revealed Winton's and McCarthy's intimate geographical connections despite their antipodal distance by refining the nature of their literary inheritance and locating them as significant voices in shaping twenty-first century Anglophone literature. Most significantly, this study has interrogated the need and the possible form of a geophysically sensitive literary criticism to keep in step with fiction, helping realise what both Winton's and McCarthy's fictions habitually return to: the crucial role of literature in understanding and shaping our relationship to the world around us, both human and non-human.

As with new nature writing, Winton and McCarthy's fiction write dynamic geographies that more fully reveal the physical world to its readers. Unlike new nature writing, the absence of a clear authorial presence guiding us through the text means that the importance and intricacy of such presences risk going unacknowledged. To change this requires us to realise that this absence is not fiction's greatest limitation, but its greatest asset. The restraint of the authorial hand gesturing us through the work presents a full and open world for the reader's play. It is this freedom that allows fiction to harbour those hard but fragile kernels of truth that are all the more convincing, and all the more precious, for their need to be sought by the reader. What this study hopes to provide and provoke is a geographically alert way for readers to find these moments of truth in literary fiction. Only by doing so can we grasp the necessity of fiction to reveal both the power and the fragility of our relationship with the physical world.

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### **Videos:**

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**Images:**

Fig 1.1: Petts, Geoff, and Foster, Ian, *Rivers and Landscape*, p. 9

Fig 3.2: Royal Geographical Society with IBG (S0016282)

Fig 3.3: Royal Geographical Society with IBG (S0005970)

Fig 3.4: Bagnold, Ralph, *The Physics of Blown Sand and Desert Dunes*, p. 115

Fig 4.1: Richard Drew

Fig 4.2: Stan Honda

All other images are from the author's personal collection