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**Mementoes of the Broken Body:**  
**Cormac McCarthy's Aesthetic Politics**

**by**

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degree of  
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## **Declaration**

I hereby confirm that this thesis has been composed by myself. None of the material presented in this thesis has been used before or been published as a whole or in parts, nor has any of the material been submitted for another degree at this or another university.

## Abstract

This thesis analyses representations of the broken body in Cormac McCarthy's novels. McCarthy presents bodies remarkable in their unwholesomeness, often marked by wounds and scars, alcoholism and illness, or forms of monstrosity. The majority of these bodies exist in marginalised spaces at the fringe of mainstream society, and the markings on their bodies correlate to their lifestyle. Expanding upon the sociology of Pierre Bourdieu to include a broader understanding of class structures, this thesis demonstrates how McCarthy connects an aesthetics of the body to class hierarchies, categorising the unbeautiful body as lower class and the beautiful body as upper class.

Using the screenplay *The Gardener's Son* to illustrate the theoretical nuances, Chapter One introduces the overall thesis and the underlying theoretical approach. The project expands the sociology of Bourdieu to include the poor and marginalised under- and lower class, and forms a dialogue with Foucault's work on biopolitics and criminality, as well as Nietzsche's approach to morality. This reading of the body within class and power hierarchies analyses the dynamics of class and power through an aesthetics of the body, and forms of community and resistance to society's dominant power structures.

Chapter Two utilises the theory of the aesthetic politics of the body to read wounded and scarred characters in *Suttree* and the Border Trilogy. I locate selected characters' positions within the class hierarchy. This application of the theory allows for an understanding both of power hegemonies and the mechanics of their reinforcement, for example through law-enforcement, as well as delineating forms of resistance against systems of power, such as community and kindness. Similarly, Chapter Three traces power structures, class hierarchies, and forms of resistance through a reading of drunk and sick bodies in *The Orchard Keeper*, *Outer Dark*, *Suttree*, and *Cities of the Plain*.

Chapters Four and Five offer readings of monstrous bodies in the Appalachian works, *Outer Dark* and *Child of God*, and the Southwestern novels, *Blood Meridian* and *No Country for Old Men*, respectively. Whereas Chapters Two

and Three consider the potential for unity and community amongst the lower classes, Chapters Four and Five read monstrosity as a signifier of division and ostracism, as well as visible manifestation of the corruption generated within and by hegemonic systems of power and associated hierarchical social structures.

McCarthy's latest novel *The Road* is the focus of the postscript in Chapter Six. Situated in a post-apocalyptic, post-societal environment, the body-politics evident throughout the preceding nine novels do not apply to the social structures in *The Road*. Whereas McCarthy revisits tropes of illness, community, and monstrosity in *The Road*, the Postscript offers an adjusted reading of collapsed societal and power structures.

My research shows that this system of classifying the body reveals McCarthy's concern with a politics of the body that underlies American social hierarchies and power structures, an approach that has hitherto received little attention in McCarthy criticism.

# Chapter 1: Reading the Body in Cormac McCarthy's Novels

## 1.1. Introduction

Reading the body is not, by any means, a new concept, but is commonly understood and practiced. This is perhaps most evident in commonplace phrases such as ‘body language’ or ‘the eyes are the mirror of the soul’, both of which imply that the body can be legible. Nor is the concept of reading the body in literature wholly new. In relation to cultural theory, it can be traced back as far as Sigmund Freud’s reading of E.T.A. Hoffmann’s *Der Sandmann* in his essay ‘The Uncanny’. Indeed, instances of reading the body appear in literature as early as Book 19 of Homer’s *Odyssey*, in which the maid, Euryclea, recognises the returned king from a childhood scar on his thigh. Another instance of a body being read is the disciples’ recognition of the risen Jesus Christ through the stigmata, the crucifixion wounds, in the Bible. Why, then, propose a project entirely dedicated to reading the body?

The first unit of this project – Chapters Two and Three – establish the body as a site of political practice and foregrounds the connection Cormac McCarthy creates between definitions of beauty and worth, both societal and pecuniary. Reading the body within social power structures unveils a system of classification that undermines the ideals of a moral and just society. The body emerges as a site of resistance against the oppressive and marginalising practices of a hierarchical society and the exclusionary practices of those who hold power, the dominant, towards those in positions of relative powerlessness, the dominated. This resistance through the body creates a community of sufferers within which members recognise and treat each other with kindness, thus creating moments of beauty and humanity. One of the earliest instances of kindness in McCarthy’s work is Rinthy Holme’s joining a poor family for dinner in *Outer Dark*. The matriarch’s reaction to Rinthy’s question if she could ‘just rest a spell’ is ‘Yes. Tell her yes’.<sup>1</sup> She demonstrates no suspicion, as her husband does, and for the duration of Rinthy’s stay with the family, the woman looks after Rinthy’s comfort and wellbeing, even though the

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<sup>1</sup> Cormac McCarthy, *Outer Dark* (London: Picador, 2010), pp. 60–62.

family ‘ain’t never had nothin’ themselves.<sup>2</sup> Such moments of kindness and beauty occur not only throughout *Outer Dark*, but also *Suttree*, *The Border Trilogy*, and even *Blood Meridian, or the Evening Redness in the West* and *The Road*. Those bodies judged unbeautiful within mainstream society thus form their own aesthetic, not based on superficial and ultimately meaningless outward beauty, but on the profundity of their shared suffering and treatment of each other.<sup>3</sup>

After Chapters Two and Three examine the implications of hegemonic notions of beauty imposed by those in positions of power within the dominant society, the second unit – Chapters Four and Five – reads the bodies of those characters who embody the systemic violence inherent in hierarchical society through analysing different forms of both moral and bodily monstrosities. McCarthy highlights the logic that underlies the flaws of a hierarchically structured society in his monstrous and most violent characters. Utilising ideas of monstrosity, McCarthy’s work investigates the potential consequences of American society’s hypocritical promise of inclusion and opportunity, which ultimately fails to provide equal access to society’s advantages to its marginalised and most vulnerable members. McCarthy presents two types of monster. On the one hand, there are those like *Child of God*’s Lester Ballard whom exclusion from all social contacts propels into a life of monstrous criminality; a deterioration traceable on his body. On the other hand, McCarthy offers examples of those monsters who act as agents of society, or powerful forces within that society, such as *Blood Meridian*’s Judge Holden, whose body traces a different form of monstrosity. Ballard transitions from the traumatised boy who ‘come in the store and told’ of his father’s suicide ‘like you’d tell it was rainin out’, to the young man with ‘a petty annoyance flickering across the wallward eye’ just before he loses his family home, to the monster who ‘looked like something come against the end of a springloaded tether or some

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 62.

<sup>3</sup> Throughout this thesis, I will be using the term ‘unbeauty’ rather than ‘ugliness,’ as ‘ugliness’ implies a value judgement, correlating to what or who is considered worthy to participate in mainstream society and culture. Instead of adhering to hegemonic discourses of beauty, I use ‘unbeauty’ to highlight the distinction between what is considered beautiful in dominant society as opposed to what is considered different from expected standards without applying the same value judgement.

slapstick contrivance of the filmcutter's art' after his complete exclusion from society and well into his murder spree.<sup>4</sup> The judge, however, enters the narrative as '[a]n enormous man [...] bald as a stone and he had no trace of beard and he had no brows to his eyes nor lashes to them [...] close to seven feet tall'.<sup>5</sup> Holden exits the narrative after inciting chaos and violence, committing acts of murder, paedophilia, and anthropophagy, '[t]owering over them all [...] the judge [...] is naked dancing [...] He says that he will never die [...] He never sleeps, the judge. He is dancing, dancing. He says that he will never die.'<sup>6</sup> Where Lester's body visibly deteriorates, Holden's domineering and imposing physique remains unchanged. The second unit of this project examines the societal origins of each type of monster and situates them within the contextual framework of society's hegemonic power structures.

Finally, the postscript offers *The Road* as the consolidation of McCarthy's bleak outlook on humanity as a whole, in which the rare but profound moments of humanity that weave through the author's work are small beacons of hope and consolation. Where McCarthy's novels published prior to *The Road* are all situated within either American society in its infancy, or after the establishment of the American nation state and national consciousness, *The Road* holds the unique position as McCarthy's only post-societal novel to date. Where the previous chapters focus on the body within society, the postscript considers the body in a post-societal environment and the possibilities for community and society after the collapse of modernity and capitalism.

Conceptually, this project engages in a larger framework of the systemic classification of bodies. I aim to read the body in the context of class and social hierarchy. Issues of class, of course, cannot be separated from debates surrounding race and/or gender. However, for the purpose of this thesis, my focus will be predominantly on class. To propose a balanced analysis of class, race, and gender

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<sup>4</sup> Cormac McCarthy, *Child of God* (London: Picador, 2010), pp. 22, 6, 164 [hereafter *CoG*].

<sup>5</sup> Cormac McCarthy, *Blood Meridian, or, The Evening Redness in the West* (London: Picador, 2010), pp. 6, 353.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 353.

under the title ‘Mementoes of the Broken Body’, I suggest, would be to perpetuate a narrative that ‘others’ racialised and gendered bodies by suggesting that they are in some form ‘broken’ and deviate from the norm. Despite McCarthy’s difficult relationship with gender and race, I do not intend to suggest that women and racialised bodies are broken, deviant, or monstrous, nor do I suggest that those bodies have access to equal levels of advantage or disadvantage as heteronormative white male bodies. While much of my project focusses on class and, in accordance with McCarthy’s own focus, the default position rests on white men, I include some discussion of characters such as *Suttree*’s Ab Jones or *Outer Dark*’s Rinthy Holme, where their bodies offer insights into the classificatory structures of a hierarchical society dominated by white men with access to ‘social, cultural, and economic capital’.<sup>7</sup>

I propose that the underlying principle of class, race, and gender in a hierarchical society is a question of access, specifically within a Western context. By this I mean to indicate that my key questions pertain to access to education, to health care, to food, to shelter, to safety, to the ‘inalienable Rights [... of] Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness’,<sup>8</sup> or what Pierre Bourdieu terms ‘economic, social, and cultural capital’.<sup>9</sup> The matter of access, I propose, constitutes a boundary between those who have such access to social, cultural, and economic capital, and those who do not. As I will show in the theoretical section, this boundary classifies, or categorises, the body into a societal class structure; the more access to social, cultural, and economic capital, the higher up in the hierarchy the body is situated. Access, in this sense, is often limited not only through class affiliation, but by gender and/or race, through systematic and systemic discrimination against women and people of colour. Both gender and race, therefore, will be discussed sporadically throughout the thesis. However, the primary focus of this project will remain on the systemic classification of the body marked by a defined set of actions,

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<sup>7</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, trans. by Richard Nice, Reprint 1984 (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1996), p. 114.

<sup>8</sup> Jack N. Rakove, *The Annotated U.S. Constitution and Declaration of Independence* (Cambridge, MA; London: Belknap, 2012), p. 77.

<sup>9</sup> Bourdieu, p. 234.

rather than by accident of birth: a classification, it will become clear, of the body of beauty or unbeauty.

In the theoretical outline below, I detail the proposed method of reading the body and include a more detailed introduction and explanation of the theoretical framework. This framework is a result of my research on Cormac McCarthy, rather than a reading of McCarthy's work through this specific lens. This project originates in my interest in McCarthy and is the result of the original question of why McCarthy offers virtually no wholesome bodies, and specifically no wholesome protagonists. Not only are McCarthy's protagonists' bodies all broken and marked in some form, the vast majority of minor characters' bodies are as well. These marked bodies are coupled with McCarthy's specific and almost exclusive interest in the marginalised and disenfranchised lower classes, 'what we now euphemistically call the "underclass"'.<sup>10</sup> The underlying hypothesis of this project is that McCarthy establishes a link between the marked, broken body and class position.

While much McCarthy criticism addresses the human body in some form – through femininity and masculinity, gender, or violence, for example – few critics have paid explicit attention to the human body across the author's oeuvre. Rather, critics often point toward the flatness of McCarthy's characters, seeing there a lack of psychological depth and, often, plausibility. Indeed, only Lydia R. Cooper has offered an article dedicated specifically to the material body in McCarthy's *Suttree* in the *Casebook Studies in Cormac McCarthy Series*, edited by Rick Wallach and published by the Cormac McCarthy Society (not, therefore, a mainstream or widely accessible publication). Cooper owns that 'in *Suttree*, perhaps more than any other work in McCarthy's corpus to date [...] the human body – plays a central thematic role'. Yet, while Cooper establishes that the novel 'foregrounds questions of human value within and apart from [...] ideological social structures in which human identities are forged [...] such as gender, race, religious and cultural heritage, and

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<sup>10</sup> Louis Palmer, "Encampment of the Damned": Ideology and Class in *Suttree*', *The Cormac McCarthy Journal*, 4.1 (2003), 183–209 (p. 188).

material possessions’, she simultaneously asserts that ‘human beings are aesthetically reduced to the material body through descriptions that focus exclusively on the carnal, the scatological, the sexually and physically deviant and deformed’.<sup>11</sup> Cooper’s assertion of the reduction of the characters to the material body follows a trajectory common both in McCarthy studies and within studies of the body in general: namely, that to focus on the body constitutes a form of reductionism, and that interiority constitutes superior access to understanding character.

This project, instead of assuming an ‘aesthetic dehumanization of the material body’, considers the physical body in McCarthy’s work, specifically the ten novels to date, as a site upon which character and experience are written and made explicit, thus reassessing and reasserting the humanity of the body. Cooper’s assertion of the dehumanisation of the material body presumably rests in the stark and omnipresent violence against the body across McCarthy’s work. To her, the body in *Suttree* is ‘made into a grotesque object’ and ‘the objectified body takes the shape of a rotting corpse, or a mutilated, denuded living body, or [...] fetishizes the sexual body’.<sup>12</sup> Cooper’s analysis supports my hypothesis of the omnipresence of broken bodies in *Suttree* and is equally applicable to McCarthy’s wider oeuvre. Yet, where Cooper asserts that the broken body constitutes a form of fetishisation, I argue that markings inscribe experiences upon the body. McCarthy, I suggest, uses the body quite like he uses the blank page, as a site upon which to inscribe a story. Critics have previously located the aesthetic aspect of McCarthy’s work in the beauty of the language the author employs to describe, for example, acts of unfathomable violence. To Steven Shaviro, ‘*Blood Meridian* sings hymns of violence, its gorgeous language commemorating slaughter in all its sumptuousness and splendor.’<sup>13</sup> McCarthy’s writing on his characters’ bodies, I suggest, indicates

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<sup>11</sup> Lydia R. Cooper, “‘The Sculptor’s Art’: Mystery and the Material Body in *Suttree*”, in *You Would Not Believe What Watches: Suttree and Cormac McCarthy’s Knoxville*, Casebook Studies in Cormac McCarthy, 2nd edn (Cormac McCarthy Society, 2014), I, 189–96 (p. 189).

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 191, 189.

<sup>13</sup> Steven Shaviro, “‘The Very Life of Darkness’: A Reading of *Blood Meridian*”, in *Perspectives on Cormac McCarthy*, ed. by Edwin T. Arnold and Dianne C. Luce, Southern Quarterly Series (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1999), pp. 145–58 (p. 145).

an aesthetics of the body comparable to the celebrated and widely acknowledged aesthetics of McCarthy's style.

The hypothesis that McCarthy writes on the body raises the question of how such inscriptions materialise, or how the author marks the body for reading. The most obvious is the marking of the body through violence. Violence, throughout McCarthy's oeuvre, appears in many guises and leaves a variety of traces on the body, frequently intimately connected with the body's voluntary or involuntary engagement in violent confrontation. Most frequently, violence is the result of confrontation and impacts on the body as wounds and scars, reminders of violent encounters. Wounds and scars offer both evidence of confrontation and a timeline, a wound being the result of more recent violence than a scar (a wound that has had time to heal). Reading the wounded and scarred body will be the focus of Chapter Two of the thesis, "Picturebook of the afflicted": Reading Wounds and Scars'. While each of McCarthy's novels features instances of wounded or scarred bodies, the scope of this project does not allow for a detailed reading of every novel in each chapter. The chapters, therefore, will each focus on a selection of novels. In Chapter Two, *Suttree* is representative of the earlier writings, the Appalachian novels, and the Border Trilogy constitutes a sample of the later writings, commonly referred to as the 'Southwestern period'.

A wound becomes a scar through the passing of time. While the wound signifies recent conflict, the scar recounts previous encounters and thus serves as a reminder of past action. The second chapter, therefore, addresses themes of memory and identity as inscribed on the body through violence and breaches of physical integrity. The chapter will identify that much of the violence in *Suttree* and the Border Trilogy arises between members of the lower classes and law enforcement. This raises the question of the role of law enforcement and legality in society, specifically the question of the constitution of a society within which conflict between the marginalised and agents of the legal system is not only possible, but inevitable. It is here that the body is revealed, in a Foucauldian reading of McCarthy's work, as profoundly political. McCarthy's work, I argue, exposes the

underlying logic of systemic violence directed towards the body marked by illegal, and perhaps immoral, activity. This logic, following the sociology of Bourdieu, then reveals how the body marked by conflict becomes a site of recognition, readable and recognisable both by other marked bodies – thus creating communities of the marked, unbeautiful body – and by agents of societal control.

Chapter Three, ‘The drunk and the sick: Reading Alcoholism and Illness’, focusses on *Outer Dark*, *Suttree*, and *The Crossing*. This analysis continues to examine the question of classification of the body and social control through the perspective of the body marked by alcoholism and illness. Both sick and drunken bodies feature throughout McCarthy’s work. Illness and excessive alcohol consumption mark the body with suffering, inscribing the experience on the body in a similar fashion to those violent breaches of physical integrity caused by physical violence. As in the second chapter, this leaves the body recognisable both within and outside a community of the sick and the drunk. Sampling the history of alcohol and its legal implications in the US, this chapter establishes a link between public perception of excessive alcohol consumption and the classification of the drunk body. The strict legal regulation of alcohol and drunkenness in the US opens the possibility for the drunk body to become a site of resistance through which a community of drinkers are able to rebel against legal and systemic marginalisation. Yet, excessive consumption of alcohol leads to a deterioration of the body’s health. Where the drunk body establishes a community of resistance, the sick body invites a community of shared suffering and human kindness. McCarthy’s sick bodies are regularly welcomed and cared for in the homes of fellow underclass members who share in acts of kindness and compassion. McCarthy establishes the fate of the sick outside of any community in *The Road*, perhaps overshadowing the question of the validity of kindness and compassion with the unceremonious death of the father in a world in which society and ethics have become void and replaced by a reversal to the logic of the survival of the fittest.

Chapters Four and Five turn to a discussion of McCarthy’s monsters. The category of monstrosity is defined through each monstrous character’s position in

relation to society. For structural reasons, the chapters are divided according to McCarthy's writing periods: Chapter Four focuses on the earlier works, or Appalachian novels, *Outer Dark* and *Child of God*; whereas Chapter Five analyses the later works, known as the Southwestern novels, *Blood Meridian: or the Evening Redness in the West* and *No Country for Old Men*. The category of the monster is not neatly defined in the earlier works, and the central question of Chapter Four addresses the question of guilt and societal complicity in creating the monster, thus focusing on the limits of morality and moral society. This line of enquiry will follow the trajectory of Chapters Two and Three in questioning the compatibility of legality, morality, and justice in the definition, categorisation, and classification of the body. Chapter Five focuses specifically on two characters, Judge Holden in *Blood Meridian* and Anton Chigurh in *No Country for Old Men*. The analysis highlights the connection between their physical and moral monstrosity alongside the connection between the predominant social philosophy of their times, Enlightenment and the postmodern philosophy of chance, respectively. Through these characters, I aim to analyse the moral failure of mainstream society that leads to the emanation of monsters that embody society in its logical extremes.

The novel that features illness, community, and monstrosity and forms an exception to McCarthy's other work is the author's latest novel to date, *The Road*. The exceptional aspect of *The Road* is that its post-apocalyptic vision portrays a post-societal world, forcing a revision of the meanings of morality, society, and community. In the postscript to the thesis, I aim to consolidate McCarthy's vision of society and morality through a close reading of *The Road* and the roaming gangs of cannibals populating McCarthy's post-apocalyptic novel.

## ***1.2. Theoretical Framework in Practice***

McCarthy's concern with the class structure underlying US American society and the markers on the body that aid in the classification of persons is evident in the majority of his works, but perhaps most explicit in the screenplay *The Gardener's*

*Son*. Set in the 1870s, the factory town is populated by factory hands (working class), white collar and office workers (middle class), and the family owning the mills and the factories (upper class). Robert McEvoy, the gardener's son who lost his leg as a teenager during a train accident, kills James Gregg, son and sole male heir of the founder of the town. Whereas the plot remains open to a variety of possible interpretations, McCarthy's presentation of the various characters firmly situates each within a social hierarchy. Introducing each family in their own home, the discrepancy is immediately visible between the Greggs' stately home, including servants, and the McEvoy's small family home where the mother and the two sisters organise the household. The first explicit verbal expression of difference comes from the doctor (upper middle class), who has come to the McEvoy house to amputate Robert McEvoy's leg. The following conversation ensues:

Mrs McEvoy      It might could mend.  
Dr Perceval      Mrs McEvoy, it could not mend. Not in this world. It is beset with rot. Who can say why? Germs have their flyways, like migratory fowl. Winging unseen through the night. The boy's leg must come off if his life is to be saved. I'm sorry to be so blunt but you people will not seem to understand.<sup>14</sup>

The patience Dr Perceval exhibits earlier when replying to Mrs Gregg's question about a possible reversal of her husband's terminal illness starkly contrasts to his unkind reproach of Mrs McEvoy's concern for her son. The doctor is oblivious to the repercussions of losing a limb for 'these people', whose source of income is inextricably connected to the fitness of their bodies to work in manual labour employment. His charge of 'you people will not seem to understand' firmly positions the working class family's understanding as inferior to the doctor's, while subsuming all members of that class under the umbrella of 'you people' of insufficient learning and inadequate understanding.

Dr Perceval's verbal attack on this woman of inferior class and understanding reveals the distinction between the social positions. Other, small indicators emerge throughout the scene: Mrs McEvoy is '*wiping her hands on her*

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<sup>14</sup> Cormac McCarthy, *The Gardener's Son: A Screenplay* (New York: Ecco, 2015), p. 12.

apron', the working woman's uniform, whereas Mrs Gregg wears a hat held with pins which she removes as she speaks to the sick Robert McEvoy, a pinned hat that lacks functionality and is an item purely of fashion.<sup>15</sup> A linguistic analysis would equally reveal that the speech patterns of Mrs Gregg and Dr Perceval show more eloquence and sophistication than those of the McEvoy family, the result of a difference in education and engagement with 'high culture'.

Bourdieu's sociology of distinction and taste, specifically Bourdieu's *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*, supports a reading of dress and linguistic markers as class signifiers. Bourdieu proposes a correlation between an aesthetics of the body, the outward appearance and practices of a body within a specific societal and cultural context, and class membership. This correlation, Bourdieu suggests, is most pronounced and distinguished through taste, that is, taste in cultural and artistic signifiers.

Taste classifies, and it classifies the classifier. Social subjects, classified by their classifications, distinguish themselves by the distinctions they make, between the beautiful and the ugly, the distinguished and the vulgar, in which their position in the objective classifications is expressed or betrayed.<sup>16</sup>

Taste, or aesthetic understanding, Bourdieu argues, is learned behaviour, rooted in social and familial upbringing. The practice of recognising and judging beauty or unbeauty, within existing cultural and societal frameworks, therefore, is in itself a marker of class membership. Mrs Gregg's hat, therefore, is a signifier both of taste and of leisure, without any practical application, 'characterized by the suspension and removal of economic necessity and by objective and subjective distance from practical urgencies'.<sup>17</sup> Mrs McEvoy's apron, on the other hand, is not fashionable but practical, as befits a woman who organises a family of five without the aid of servants and with limited economic means.

Whereas Bourdieu's main concern throughout *Distinction* is the recognition and participation in specific cultural practices that become class markers, 'such as

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<sup>15</sup> *The Gardener's Son*, pp. 11, 13 [italics in original].

<sup>16</sup> Bourdieu, p. 6.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 54.

preferences in music and food, painting and sport, literature and hairstyle’, he allows for the body to be part of a system of classification.<sup>18</sup>

[T]o understand the class distribution of the various spans, one would have to take account of the representation which, in terms of their specific schemes of perception and appreciation, the different classes have of the costs (economic, cultural and “physical”) and benefits attached to the different sports – immediate or deferred “physical” benefits (health, beauty, strength, whether visible, through “body-building” or invisible through “keep-fit” exercises), economic and social benefits (upward mobility etc.), immediate or deferred symbolic benefits linked to the distributional or positional value of each of the sports considered (i.e., all that each of them receives from its greater or lesser rarity, and its more or less clear association with a class, with boxing, football, rugby or bodybuilding evoking the working classes, tennis and skiing the bourgeoisie and golf the upper bourgeoisie), gains in distinction accruing from the effects on the body itself (e.g., slimness, sun-tan, muscles obviously or discreetly visible etc.) or from the access to highly selective groups which some of these sports give (golf, polo etc.).<sup>19</sup>

Bourdieu recognises the reciprocity between cultured taste and economic situation. The cost of certain practices, pecuniary implications, time investment, and energy expenditure, render especially leisure activities impracticable or inaccessible to some, where others can engage in such practices unreservedly. This is perhaps most recognisable in certain sports activities; where basketball requires only a ball, a pitch or yard, and a few players and can be played for various amounts of times, the equipment required to play golf, the time investment in a game, and the specific spaces this game can only be played within (the golf course) preclude those with little leisure and limited economic means from participating in the activity. Ease, articulated through access, or lack thereof, is therefore a cluster of a series of interrelated circumstances. Membership, or distinction, of a specific social group, according to Bourdieu, thus becomes visible both through bodily practices and markers on the body, such as body shape, fitness, tan, or degree or subtlety of these markers. In *The Gardener’s Son*, bodies are clothed and shaped according to the labour they perform, not least Robert McEvoy, who loses his leg in a train accident. Such an accident is only possible through proximity to machinery, thus precluding factory owner James Gregg or the Timekeeper Mr Giles from the potential of

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 6.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 20.

receiving such a mark on their body, as their tasks within the factory are bureaucratic and thus removed from the potential danger inherent in manual labour tasks.

Yet, *Distinction* focuses largely on differences between the bourgeoisie, the working class, and the corresponding gradations, i.e. the petit-bourgeoisie, or middle-class, on which much of Bourdieu's work centres.

Social class is not defined by a property (not even the most determinant one, such as the volume and composition of capital) nor by a collection of properties (of sex, age, social origin, ethnic origin-proportion of blacks and whites, for example, or natives and immigrants – income, educational level etc.), nor even by a chain of properties strung out from a fundamental property (position in the relations of production) in a relation of cause and effect, conditioner and conditioned; but by the structure of relations between all the pertinent properties which gives its specific value to each of them and to the effects they exert on practices.<sup>20</sup>

As the above example demonstrates, the McEvoy's are members of the working class, recognisable in the comparative disorder and smallness of the house, as well as their clothing, i.e. the mother's apron and Robert's injury. Dr Perceval's reprimand demonstrates the relation between class, appearance, and education, or the lack thereof, evident in the family's speech patterns and, specifically, the son's coarseness of expression. The McEvoy's possess neither significant economic capital, nor much of social or cultural capital. Their practices and circumstances firmly situate them within the working classes, as do Mrs Gregg's and Dr Perceval's situate them in the respective upper strata, without the requirement for any explicit mentioning of the class structures that govern society in *The Gardener's Son*.

While my intention is not, here, to provide a complete analysis of *The Gardener's Son*, I read this text, alongside some excerpts of an earlier draft, to highlight and demonstrate McCarthy's understanding of societal class structures in the US and to demonstrate where Bourdieu's class aesthetic requires expansion to encompass a methodological approach to McCarthy's work. In a scene reminiscent of John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*, a group of destitutes arrive in the mill

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 106.

town hoping to find employment. James Gregg, the second-generation owner of the factory, looks out of his office window to see

*[s]tanding along the edge of the road [...] a band of filthy and ragged people with bales of bedding and sorry household effects, nearly all barefooted, some appearing to be albinos, a couple of emaciated hound dogs, a few crates of chickens. They are staring hungrily toward the office.*<sup>21</sup>

Gregg rejects the group, much like Steinbeck's Joad family is continually rejected, and orders they be given the fares 'back to wherever the hell they came from' after they receive food at the church. The physical description of the 'procession of derelicts', their attire and possessions, clearly demarcate them as below even the meanest of the working class residents of the town.<sup>22</sup> They are not allowed to stay because nobody is 'supposed to stay on at the company house if [they] aint employed by the company [...] it's company policy'.<sup>23</sup> While the doctor's opinion, discussed above, highlights the low opinion on working class people, the destitute and poor are removed from the town altogether.

*The Gardener's Son* is McCarthy's most explicit observation on class structures in American society, and might have been more explicit yet, but for the intervention of Richard Pearce, the film director who commissioned the screenplay. In collaboration with Pearce, McCarthy deleted the following scene, James Gregg's diatribe against the destitute:

James Gregg     Damned people wandering up and down the country. People say it was the war but it was the same before the war. Come down here. Been eating clay. Inbred, their eyes grown together. Eat up with hookworm and God knows what else. Sit em down to a table and they eat till they founder and fall back. A dog's got more sense. Then we have to pay for their fare back to whatever hole they crawled out of [...] and want to know why we dont put em to work in the mill and send the kids to school. Raise em up in (") habits of industry (?). Good God it's enough to make a well man puke. I guess they'll be sending niggers next. Or maybe the niggers are sending these [...] I'm right up to here with the poor and downtrodden. They say God must have loved them cause he made so many of them. I think

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<sup>21</sup> *The Gardener's Son*, p. 22 [italics in original].

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 24 [italics in original].

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 32.

he just wanted to see if one – just one – of the squint-eyed sons of bitches wouldn't get off his ass and do something.<sup>24</sup>

This dense paragraph illuminates a bourgeois perspective on the destitute that weaves through much of McCarthy's work, such as the Dueña Alfonsa in *All the Pretty Horses* whose motion with her hand is 'both a dismissal and a summation', thus establishing her power and status over John Grady Cole.<sup>25</sup> James Gregg, born into his father's accrued wealth, condemns the destitute and marginalised by blaming their economic situation on a lack of industry, or willingness to work, despite their precarious wanderings in search of employment and security.<sup>26</sup>

However, lack of access to cultural, social, and economic capital is rarely an active choice. Katherine S. Newman and Victor Tan Chen establish how the 'missing class', those who live just above the poverty line in America today, live in areas next to those who live in poverty, America's inner-city ghettos. '[In] neighborhoods', that is,

that are chronically underserved by financial institutions and scrupulously avoided by grocery chains and other major retail outlets. Denied even the most basic infrastructure for savings or loans at reasonable rates and forced to pay a premium on virtually everything they buy, these harried workers turn to check-cashing stores that exact a cut before handing over their wages. They purchase their food, household goods, and furniture at corner bodegas and other small shops with high margins.<sup>27</sup>

George Lipsitz<sup>28</sup> and Ta-Nehisi Coates<sup>29</sup> trace the same phenomenon of systemic exclusion from basic infrastructure, appropriate housing, and means to ascend the

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<sup>24</sup> Cormac McCarthy, 'Typescript with Pencil Corrections [The Gardener's Son]' (Alkek Library, Texas State University at San Marcos), pp. 27–28, Cormac McCarthy Papers, The Wittliff Collections, box 18, folder 4.

<sup>25</sup> Cormac McCarthy, *All the Pretty Horses* (London: Picador, 2010), p. 141.

<sup>26</sup> The idea that the poor are to blame for their economic hardship, as Gregg communicates it in his diatribe, is part of the American consciousness, as it is the inverse reality of the ideal of the right to the 'pursuit of happiness' and the myth of the 'self-made man' (from rags to riches). These ideals lead to an understanding of American society as a meritocracy, yet, if those who 'made it' deserve their good fortune, then those who struggle also deserve to do so because of their 'lack of industry' and self-imposed limitations. This logic overlooks privilege of class, race, or gender and other factors such as access to cultural, social, and economic capital.

<sup>27</sup> Katherine S Newman and Victor Tan Chen, *The Missing Class: Portraits of the Near Poor in America* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2007), p. 6.

<sup>28</sup> George Lipsitz, *How Racism Takes Place* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2011).

<sup>29</sup> Ta-Nehisi Coates, 'The Case for Reparations', *The Atlantic Monthly*, June 2014, pp. 54–71.

social ladder, such as quality of education. Both Lipsitz and Coates focus particularly on communities of colour in the centres of America's major cities, thus connecting class and race as related social issues. Like McCarthy's hillbillies in *The Gardener's Son*, those who moved from the periphery to the centre, from rural areas to cities, in pursuit of employment and a higher standard of living, find themselves abandoned, systematically disadvantaged, and either sent away or caught in circumstances that offer neither opportunities for improvement nor an escape route.<sup>30</sup> Not a lack of industry, as James Gregg suggests, but rather the lack of opportunity and access lies at the heart of the discrepancy between the poor and the wealthy, which establishes and affirms the different classes in US society. Rather than society's misfits – literally those who do not fit – choosing to reject moral, societal, and cultural standards, those standards appear implemented in order to exclude specific demographics – the poor and marginalised and people of colour – from access to mainstream society and its benefits.

It becomes necessary, at this juncture, to offer some context for the structuring of the class at the centre of this study. McCarthy focusses predominantly on characters who cannot be categorised into a superficial structure of class that contains the common three levels, the bourgeoisie, the middle class, and the working class. Across his work, McCarthy focusses on the lower end of the class scale. However, the name 'working class' suggests that its members are in work and, to some extent, able to support themselves through participation in the capitalist exchange of labour for money. While regularly not highly or even adequately remunerated, members of the working classes, predominantly blue collar manual labourers, nevertheless experience relative stability and security, a situation changing under the recent neoliberal policies and practices to the working class's disadvantage, but holding largely true for much of McCarthy's writing

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<sup>30</sup> Due to the limited scope of this project, I cannot, here, fully explore the issue of the abandoned city centres of America, nor the perception of the central and lower Appalachian communities, both intricately linked to race and perception of race, as well as class. While researching and writing the theory for this thesis, I came to realise that my approach to reading the body is applicable beyond McCarthy's work. I hope to continue my research in this field, focussing on reading the classified body in culture and society more broadly.

period between the 1960s and early 2000s. McCarthy's focus, however, is on the class of people who lack even such relative security, who infrequently or not at all participate in the capitalist exchange of labour for a salary, and whose lives are precarious for the lack of a secure income, for their being read as 'criminals of person' by law enforcement and mainstream society, and their lack of access to appropriate housing, education, healthcare, adequate nutrition, and other essentials of living.

The descriptors of this class below the working class have varied over the many decades of their featuring in social and economic theories. John Welshman points out that there is a question of the applicability of the category of 'class' in a Marxist sense, that is a question of whether or not this group is capable of developing a class conscience.<sup>31</sup> Both Welshman and Michael B. Katz discuss the history of the theory of this demographic back to discussions of the deserving and undeserving poor and the link to theories of biological inferiority that gave rise and informed the pseudoscientific movements of eugenics and social hygiene.<sup>32</sup> Gunnar Myrdal circumscribes the underlying causes of the class as 'the social impact of relative economic stagnation and high unemployment and, in particular, with the stiffening of the class structure in America by the creation of an "underclass" of more permanently unemployed, unemployables, and underemployed'.<sup>33</sup> It is this term, the 'underclass' as defined by Myrdal, that both best describes those at the centre of McCarthy's focus while also, in itself, being a highly contested term that has adapted new meanings and has been used critically by many sociologists and human geographers over recent decades of theory.<sup>34</sup>

In 1963, Myrdal examines the correlation between changing class structures in the US with the correlating economic changes and finds that:

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<sup>31</sup> John Welshman, *Underclass: A History of the Excluded since 1880*, 2nd edn (London (et al): Bloomsbury, 2013), p. 3.

<sup>32</sup> Michael B. Katz, *The Undeserving Poor: America's Enduring Confrontation with Poverty*, 2nd edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 29.

<sup>33</sup> Gunnar Myrdal, *Challenge to Affluence* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1963), p. 23.

<sup>34</sup> William J. Wilson, *The Truly Disadvantaged: The Inner City, the Underclass, and Public Policy*, 2nd edn (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 2012), p. 7.

*American unemployment [...] is increasingly a structural one. Every year, indeed every month, that a high level of unemployment is tolerated makes full employment more difficult to attain as a political goal.*<sup>35</sup>

Katz further suggests that the focus in approaches to and discourses surrounding the underclass has been in ‘categorizing the poor’ rather than investigating the structures under which poverty is both possible and becoming increasingly pervasive with the rise of late capitalism.<sup>36</sup> In his overview of writings on the underclass, Katz traces both progressive and conservative approaches to understanding and addressing the issue of especially urban poverty and surveys the changing implications of the terminology used to describe this specific demographic and how communities of colour, especially black urban neighbourhoods, became increasingly the focus of the political and sociological debate around poverty, the underclass, and the question of who deserves welfare and state support and who comes to form a new class of the undeserving poor.

Acknowledging the history of the term ‘underclass’, as introduced into McCarthy criticism by Palmer in 2003,<sup>37</sup> it is beyond the scope of this project to engage with the debate surrounding the term further. My use of the term, throughout this project, is in accordance with Myrdal’s technical description of the underclass as those un- or underemployed, living precariously and with a definitive lack of access to the basic amenities of life which leaves their bodies marked in a variety of ways. It is the processes of this marking, rather than an extended discussion of the categories of class in US society, that form the core of this project. Where the centre of the novels are located outside urban areas, the term ‘lower class’ is more applicable, as ‘underclass’ has a distinctly urban connotation. Nevertheless, I do not fully endorse Myrdal’s theorising of the underclass as ‘unorganized and largely inarticulate’, as I suggest, with sociologists such as Stephen Crossley and Katz, that this inarticulation derives more from a lack of audience than a lack of ability to speak. McCarthy’s underclass, therefore, comprises of a variety of characters who find themselves marginalised and excluded from mainstream society,

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p. 29 [italics in original].

<sup>36</sup> Katz, p. 204.

<sup>37</sup> Palmer, p. 188.

disproportionally targeted by law enforcement, without access to social, cultural, and especially economic capital. There are those, amongst this class, who nevertheless form communities and share in kindness and humanity, such as *The Gardener's Son's* hillbillies, *The Orchard Keeper's* Marion Sylder, *Outer Dark's* Rinthy Holmes, *Suttree's* Suttree, Ab Jones, or the rackpicker Harvey. There are also those who are excluded from even such marginal community, like *Child of God's* Lester Ballard, and there are those who embody the violence of the systems of inequality that renders the mainstream population indifferent to the vulnerable and less fortunate, such as *Blood Meridian's* Judge Holden.

The term underclass, Katz suggest, has taken on a racialised meaning especially in US urban settings. The indivisibility of race and class in political and sociological terms is widely theories, with Myrdal, Katz, and Wilson as leading theorists across several decades. To return to McCarthy, Gregg's comment, in above cited diatribe, that 'they'll be sending niggers next' illustrates the widespread racism in American and specifically in the Southern states following the Civil War. The notion that 'maybe the niggers are sending them' further alludes to the persuasion, not uncommon even in today's racisms, that the black population of America, or in this case specifically the Southern states, is taking over power and will thus be in a position to send white people across the country. Interestingly, this fear about black influence over the white population mirrors the realities of white slaveholders' power, about twenty years before *The Gardener's Son* is set, to send enslaved black people across the country at will. Yet, Gregg's treatment of the white destitutes is hardly less violent than his racism against the black population. It is here that McCarthy's concern with not only racism, but classism is particularly explicit. The ragged band of paupers are hillbillies, as McCarthy's introduction of the Ragged Man as 'thin and shifty-eyed hillbilly' clarifies.<sup>38</sup> Anthony Harkins's cultural history of the term attests that the image of the hillbilly carries a predominantly, if not exclusively, negative connotation. 'Uniquely positioned as a white "other," a construction both within and beyond the confines of American

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<sup>38</sup> Wilson, p. 7.

“whiteness,” the hillbilly has [...] been at the heart of struggles over American racial identity and hierarchy.<sup>39</sup> Gregg’s racism is thus not only directed against the black population, but against the nondefinitive whiteness of the hillbilly.<sup>40</sup> Their poverty, lack of health, and unwillingness to work and thus participate in mainstream society, implicit in Gregg’s speech, renders the hillbilly a lower form of humanity, not unlike that ascribed to Americans of African descent during slavery and the ensuing segregation under Jim Crow.

The term hillbilly references not only the racial aspect of a lower whiteness, but carries a number of negative meanings, alongside related and interchangeable contemptuous terms,

intended to indicate a diet rooted in scarcity [...] physical appearance and clothing that [denotes] hard and specifically working class conditions [...] and animal-like existence on the economic and physical fringes of society [...] ignorance and racism, and in all cases, economic, genetic, and cultural impoverishment.<sup>41</sup>

Harkins’s exploration of the racial implications and negative image surrounding the understanding of the term ‘hillbilly’ summarises both of the above *The Gardener’s Son* excerpts and illuminate McCarthy’s portrayal of the rugged band of paupers. Arguably, however, McCarthy’s perspective is more sympathetic to the paupers than to James Gregg or the Timekeeper, particularly evident in Gregg’s deleted diatribe which does not invite sympathy for the rich man who, unlike his father, did not achieve the dream of starting as dishwasher and becoming a millionaire, but was born into wealth and privilege.

McCarthy’s hillbilly Ragged Man and his band of paupers introduce a spectrum into the understanding of US class structure unaccounted for in Bourdieu’s sociology of distinction. Bourdieu assumes a somewhat three-tier hierarchical structure with the working class on the lower end and the bourgeoisie on the upper end. While he accounts for gradations within this structure, the

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<sup>39</sup> Anthony Harkins, *Hillbilly: A Cultural History of an American Icon* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 4.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

existence of a class below the working class does not factor into Bourdieu's theory. However, McCarthy's profound interest in those at the very fringes of society, less, perhaps, in *The Gardener's Son* than in most of his novels, calls for a closer examination of America's class structure and a reconsideration of the poor and marginalised within and as part of society.

To apply Bourdieu's sociology to McCarthy's work, the theory needs to include the body of the underclass. Gregg's treatment of the band of paupers is representative of the treatment the marginalised receive from the dominant classes in McCarthy's oeuvre. It suggests that non-participation in mainstream society is intentional and malevolent, rather than the result of unfortunate circumstances and systematic exclusion from access to (particularly economic) means. Gregg's diatribe demonstrates arbitrarily imposed cultural and societal standards that are dictated by, and for the benefit of, those with access to cultural, societal, and economic capital. Illustrating life at the very bottom of society, McCarthy sheds light on this demographic overlooked by Bourdieu and regarded unsympathetically by much of mainstream society. McCarthy exhibits little interest in the middle-class or the bourgeoisie, nor does the working-class receive significant attention throughout the author's work. At the centre of McCarthy's examinations of humanity lie the marginalised – those in precarious circumstances and at the fringes of society, either by choice, such as Cornelius Suttree in *Suttree* or Lacey Rawlins in *All the Pretty Horses*, by circumstance, such as Lester Ballard in *Child of God*, Culla Holme in *Outer Dark*, or John Grady Cole in *All the Pretty Horses* and *Cities of the Plain*, or by a combination of both, such as Billy Parham in *The Crossing* and *Cities of the Plain* or Marion Sylder in *The Orchard Keeper*.

Whereas Bourdieu's sociology does not consider the underclass, it nevertheless supplies a valuable approach to linking an aesthetics of the body to the politics of class and classification. The 'different classes (and class fractions)' of Bourdieu's sociology can be identified through clothing, standards of living, and a body shaped by labour and leisure, the same logic dictates that the underclass body's identifying markers, as McCarthy demonstrates, derive from a lifestyle

lacking cultural, social, and economic capital and which involves an excess of violence, alcohol, and illness, complicated by a lack of balanced nutrition or health care. Bourdieu asserts that

[t]he primary differences, those which distinguish the major classes of conditions of existence, derive from the overall volume of capital, understood as the set of actually usable resources and powers – economic capital, cultural capital and also social capital. The distribution of the different classes (and class fractions) thus runs from those who are best provided with both economic and cultural capital to those who are most deprived in both respects.<sup>42</sup>

Where Bourdieu suggests that choice of food, for example, is dictated by a taste developed under specific economic requirements and practices, he neglects to examine those whose economic and societal status does not allow for choice or taste, but depends on what is available and affordable.<sup>43</sup> Simply put, where there is no money, you must eat what you can find or hunt, or go hungry.<sup>44</sup> Food undeniably affects the body and thus ‘the idea each class has of the body [...] that is, on its strength, health and beauty’.<sup>45</sup> Where there is a consistent lack of food, the body will show signs of this deprivation and become readable and recognisable as member of the underclass – those with no or little economic capital and no access to adequate, balanced nutrition. Equally, other practices associated with class membership have the potential to leave traces on the body that become legible and recognisable, such as leisure and capital to access costly types of sport or other cultural activities. The body, denied access to occupations and goods improving health and beauty, fails the aesthetic taste of mainstream society and is judged unbeautiful.

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<sup>42</sup> Bourdieu, p. 114.

<sup>43</sup> ‘Tastes in food also depend on the idea each class has of the body and of the effects of food on the body, that is, on its strength, health and beauty; and on the categories it uses to evaluate these effects, some of which may be important for one class and ignored by another, and which the different classes may rank in very different ways’. (Bourdieu, p. 190)

<sup>44</sup> A number of characters across McCarthy’s novels are explicitly described as very thin or starving. While this is a significant observation, the scope of this project does not allow a closer examination of this specific aspect of reading the body and will have to be examined in detail in a venture external to this thesis.

<sup>45</sup> Bourdieu, p. 190.

In addition to the body aesthetics of specific classes, Bourdieu observes a connection between class and morality within the parameters of the three-tier structure of his sociology:

The body, a social product which is the only tangible manifestation of the “person”, is commonly perceived as the most natural expression of innermost nature. There are no merely “physical” facial signs; the colour and thickness of lipstick, or expressions, as well as the shape of the face or the mouth, are immediately read as *indices of a “moral” physiognomy, socially characterized*, i.e., of a “vulgar” or “distinguished” mind, naturally “natural” or naturally “cultivated”. The signs constituting the perceived body, cultural products which differentiate groups by their degree of culture, that is, their distance from nature, seem grounded in nature. *The legitimate use of the body is spontaneously perceived as an index of moral uprightness*, so that its opposite, a “natural” body, is seen as an index of *laisser-aller* (“letting oneself go”), a culpable surrender to facility.<sup>46</sup>

Bourdieu suggests a connection between physical appearance and ‘moral uprightness’ in mainstream society’s reading of the body. The body’s appearance is inextricably linked to access to economic, cultural, and social capital and the consequential degree of ease. Yet, the common practice of reading the body establishes both beauty and the measure for moral behaviour within a given societal and cultural context, through standards sought and set by the upper classes – those who own access and capital. This simplistic divide situates both beauty and the standard of moral behaviour in the upper classes and creates a downward slope upon which to measure the aesthetics and morality of those lower on the classificatory scale. The ‘*laisser-aller*’ of the underclass, I suggest, is less about the fitness or beauty of the body, but a result of a ‘letting oneself go’ morally, that is, not adhering to the moral and hegemonic cultural codes. The ensuing actions, presumed part of underclass life, such as excesses of violence, alcohol, and illness, leave traces on the underclass body that evidence the perception of immorality. McCarthy’s work, I argue, is more sympathetic to the underclass and the behaviours regarded as symptomatic in marginalised communities. Throughout his work, the author examines the potential for an alternative, more honest morality in the lower classes while showcasing the catastrophic consequences of dominant society’s

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., pp. 192–93 [emphasis added].

moral hypocrisy that condemns the poor while perpetuating injustice within social power structures.

Bourdieu's reference to the connection between an aesthetics of the body and perceptions of morality echoes discourses of social hygiene, eugenics, and deservingness as well as a Victorian understanding of the connection between physical (often facial) features, and criminality. In such discourses, physical appearance is perceived as 'the most natural expression of innermost nature'.<sup>47</sup> These discourses assume that immoral or deviant behaviours express themselves visibly on the body, the body, therefore becomes legible not only as poor, but as naturally bad, underserving, and deviant. As Katz suggests, '[t]he belief that poverty results from personal inadequacy assumes that poverty is a problem of persons.'<sup>48</sup>

The idea of poverty as a problem of persons comes in both hard and soft versions. The soft version portrays poverty as the result of laziness, immoral behavior, inadequate skills, and dysfunctional families. The hard version views poverty as the result of inherited deficiencies that limit intellectual potential, trigger harmful and immoral behavior, and circumscribe economic achievement.<sup>49</sup>

In mainstream discourse, poverty, according to Katz's summary, is at best a defect of character and therefore undeserving, and at worst a genetic defect in persons who threaten social order and hierarchies, a narrative, as mentioned above, underlying ideologies of eugenics and social hygiene. This approach to poverty specifically, and class in general, individualises aspects of society, its hierarchical nature and standards of morality and decency, that originate not in the individual, but in the structural organisation of social hierarchies and the incumbent structural inequalities of access to social, cultural, and economic capital. This understanding of class and morality structures society according to individual acts and behaviours and categorises persons, or characters, into 'good' and 'bad', or 'moral' and 'amoral'.

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<sup>47</sup> Bourdieu, p. 192.

<sup>48</sup> Katz, p. 2.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., p. 3.

This moral dimension of the aesthetic classification of person offers a useful addition to Bourdieu's approach to the aesthetics of the classified person that removes the focus from the individual to the structural. Friedrich Nietzsche attempts to trace the origin of the connection between class systems and morality in *On the Genealogy of Morals*. Examining the notions of 'good' and 'bad', Nietzsche suggests

that everywhere "noble," "aristocratic" in the social sense, is the basic concept from which "good" in the sense of "with aristocratic soul," "noble," "with a soul of high order," "with a privileged soul" necessarily developed: a development which always runs parallel with that other in which "common," "plebeian," "low" are finally transformed into the concept "bad."<sup>50</sup>

Nietzsche's analysis suggests that 'goodness' is traditionally located in the upper classes, not because of inherent goodness, but because a dominant position in society provides the power to decide who and what defines 'good' and 'bad'. Nietzsche asserts that this classification is only possible through an 'other', the 'common' person whose lower, and thus less desirable, status forms the other extreme of the measuring pole of 'goodness' and morality. As standards of morality are thus dictated by those whose interest it is to remain at the top of the hierarchy, the disadvantages to those lower on the scale become inherently systemic.

Within Western societies, morality, therefore, does not dictate where the individual is positioned within the societal order, but those who rank high in society dictate the moral code to their advantage and to perpetuate existing power structures and imbalances. Inherent in this organisation of societal structures is a profoundly problematic ideology. Firstly, those situated towards the upper end of the societal scale do not act disinterestedly, but rather with the aim of retaining, if not increasing, their status – including the economic, societal, and cultural capital inextricably connected with their positions. As Nietzsche argues, 'they designate themselves simply by their superiority in power [...] or by the most clearly visible

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<sup>50</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals & Ecce Homo*, ed. by Walter Arnold Kaufmann, trans. by Walter Arnold Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), pp. 27–28.

sign of this superiority, for example, as “the rich”, “the possessors”.’<sup>51</sup> To maintain their position, those in power reinforce the distance between themselves and those lower in the social structure. This distance is generated and regenerated through both spatial and social control.

The benefits of this system for the dominant class are both visible and communicable to those without access to influence moral and societal standards. It is at this stage that the importance of the body, the physical existence of a person within a specific socio-geographic context, becomes most visible. Bourdieu argues ‘that within the dominant class, one can, for the sake of simplicity, distinguish three structures of the consumption distributed under three items: food, culture and presentation (clothing, beauty care, toiletries, domestic servants)’.<sup>52</sup> The correlation between high social status and economic capital, under a Western capitalist system, ensures that members of the upper classes are able to afford superior clothing, beauty care, food, and other luxuries. These goods, as outlined above, all mark the body in specific ways and thus render the body legible as belonging to a member of the upper class, as opposed to those who are unable to afford such luxuries and whose bodies, consequently, are marked as belonging to the lower classes. Through body shape, clothing, accessories, and material possession, therefore, class membership becomes visible and communicable through and on the body. As Margot L. Lyon asserts, a ‘*body is at once material and social, that is how fundamental aspects of material processes are constituted through interrelationships with other bodies in society*’.<sup>53</sup> This interrelationship forms around the core of status, desire, and power and thus becomes self-perpetuating. Within this structure, morality no longer *de facto* correlates with a Romano-Christian idea of ‘goodness’, in the sense of altruism and community spirit, or ‘care for thy neighbour’, but becomes a tool through which existing social structures are reinforced.

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid, p. 29.

<sup>52</sup> Bourdieu, p. 184.

<sup>53</sup> Margot L. Lyon, ‘The Material Body, Social Processes and Emotion: “Techniques of the Body” Revisited’, *Body & Society*, 3.1 (1997), 83–101 (p. 83) [emphasis added].

The underclass – the marginalised and poor in capitalist society – thus find themselves at the bottom of a classificatory scale that deems their body unbeautiful and their habits and behaviours immoral. While, arguably, standards of beauty or morality are constantly in flux, they nevertheless are consistently dictated by those holding significant economic, social, and cultural capital.<sup>54</sup> As mentioned above, the distance between high and low social status is maintained and patrolled through social control. To further illustrate and expand on Bourdieu's sociology and class differentiation, Michel Foucault's work on social control, criminality, and abnormality is useful. Foucault suggests that '[p]ower relations are rooted in the whole network of the social', indicating that power necessarily is embedded in and at the core of societal structures.<sup>55</sup> This is implicitly illustrated in the language used to describe class structure, i.e. *upper* and *lower* class following the logic that being *higher* is more desirable than being *lower*, also echoed in Nietzsche's assertion that 'noble' implies having 'a soul of a high order'.<sup>56</sup>

Citing Foucault's *History of Sexuality Vol. I: The Will to Knowledge*,<sup>57</sup>

Bryan S. Turner asserts that:

In modern societies, power has a specific focus, namely the body which is the product of political/power relationships. The body as an object of power is produced in order to be controlled, identified and reproduced. Power over the

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<sup>54</sup> Kenneth R. Dutton's *The Perfectible Body: The Western Ideal of Physical Development* is one study, focussing on the male body, that shows how the perception has changed over the last century. To trace these developments in detail is beyond the scope of this project. Within a short side note, it can, for example, be observed that standards of female beauty, in the USA have, changed significantly within the last 30 years. Comparing the cast of the late 1990s TV show *Ally McBeal* (1997-2002), in which female actresses are deliberately thin and business-like, to the contemporary popularity of the Kardashian family, whose female members are curvaceous, provides one indicator of changing beauty standards. The constantly changing nature of high street fashion is another indicator of changing beauty ideas. Equally, within the last 20 years the focus of US crime fiction, both in film and prose, has shifted from clearly identifiable 'good' and 'evil' characters, as in the 'good' FBI agents and the 'evil' serial killers in *Criminal Minds* (2005- ), to more complex narratives, such as Lee Child's morally flexible Jack Reacher character (1997- ), or the vigilante serial killer of dangerous criminals in the eponymous TV show *Dexter* (2006-2013). These standards are changeable and not rigidly structured. However, trends can be identified as emerging or fading.

<sup>55</sup> Michel Foucault, 'The Subject and Power', in *Power*, ed. by James D. Faubion, trans. by Robert Hurley, Essential Works of Foucault 1954-1984 (New York: The New Press, 2001), III, 327-248 (p. 345).

<sup>56</sup> Nietzsche, p. 28.

<sup>57</sup> Also published as *The History of Sexuality Vol. I: An Introduction*.

materiality of the body can be divided into two separate but related issues – “the disciplines of the body and the regulations of the population”.<sup>58</sup>

Exertion of power and social control, or the organisation of the smooth running of a society, Turner asserts, centres around the body and how the body can be disciplined. The body thus becomes a *locus politicus*, a site of political practice. Foucault also employs the term ‘biopolitics’ to denote the government of, or wielding of power over, the living:

We say now that the true object of the police becomes, at the end of the eighteenth century, the population; or, in other words, the state has essentially to take care of men as a population. It wields its power over living beings as living beings, and its politics, therefore, has to be a *biopolitics*. Since the population is nothing more than what the state takes care of for its own sake, of course, the state is entitled to slaughter it, if necessary. So the reverse of *biopolitics* is *thanatopolitics*.<sup>59</sup>

The creation of a police force, Foucault contends, is rooted in the politics of governing the body and is profoundly concerned with the structuring of power in society. The body thus becomes paramount for the organisation and control of society.

The body is essential in establishing and maintaining social control. ‘The classical age’, Foucault argues, ‘discovered the body as object and target of power’. Influencing and controlling the body through coercion, economy, and modality, ‘made possible the meticulous control of the operations of the body, which assured the constant subjection of its [the body’s] forces and imposed upon them a relation of docility-utility [...] called “disciplines”’. Where Foucault recognises that this disciplining happens in institutions such as the military barracks, the hospital, schools, and prisons, he more broadly suggests that ‘discipline proceeds from the distribution of individuals in space’ and ‘requires *enclosure*’.<sup>60</sup> Such disciplining, or social control, of the body, is evident in the majority of McCarthy’s body of

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<sup>58</sup> Bryan S. Turner, *The Body & Society: Explorations in Social Theory*, Theory, Culture & Society, 3rd edn (Los Angeles: SAGE, 2008), p. 36.

<sup>59</sup> Michel Foucault, ‘The Political Technology of Individuals’, in *Power*, ed. by James D. Faubion, trans. by Robert Hurley, Essential Works of Foucault 1954-1984 (New York: The New Press, 2001), III, 404–17 (p. 416) [emphasis added].

<sup>60</sup> Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. by Alan Sheridan, 3rd edn (London (et al): Penguin Books, 1991), p. 136 [emphasis added].

work. As indicated above, society in the mill town of *The Gardener's Son* is ordered into specific spaces. The Greggs are situated in the great house and the central office of the factory. The McEvoy family live in a small house in a separate part of town and work in the manual labour section of the factory. The McEvoy women are located in the domestic sphere, specifically within the kitchen, while the band of ragged paupers belong in an unnamed space external to the ordered spaces of the mill town. Similarly, *Suttree* is set largely in McAnally Flats, an area that serves as 'the great "confinement" of vagabonds and paupers' in McCarthy's early 1950s Knoxville, Tennessee.<sup>61</sup> *Suttree's* vagabonds and paupers roam '*a darker town, past lamps stoned blind, past smoking oblique shacks [...] where dirty flowers grow*'. McCarthy's poor are located '[i]n these alien reaches, these maugre sinks and interstitial wastes that the righteous see from carriage and car'.<sup>62</sup> Situating the marginalised among the waste and decay of the cityscape not only forms a connection between the dirt of the area and the character of the people inhabiting the space, it also removes the possibility from interacting with '*the righteous*' who only see these areas '*from carriage and car*' at a fast pace that allows for only a superficial impression of the area. The biopolitics of segregating the classes serves to discipline the underclass to know and accept their place among the waste of the city, and enables the upper classes to remove them 'to whatever hole they crawled out of'.<sup>63</sup> Those who hold power in society create the moral code operative within that society, through legislation and jurisprudence, but also through the discrepancy between desire, need, and access to cultural, social, and economic capital for large parts of society. The power to govern, judge, and police those lower on the social scale becomes a self-perpetuating logic of dominant and dominated bodies and becomes visible and distinguishable through body aesthetics, the logic of beauty and un beauty, as well as in the organization of social space.

In the history of the US, this organisation of space is perhaps most explicit in racial segregation, abolished, *de jure* if not *de facto*, in 1954. Maintaining a

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid, p. 141.

<sup>62</sup> Cormac McCarthy, *Suttree* (London: Picador, 2010), p. 4 [italics in original].

<sup>63</sup> McCarthy, Drafts, n.d. [of *The Gardener's Son*], box 18, folder 4, pp. 27-28.

distance between racial groups follows the same logic as separating classes, in that this segregation removes from visibility undesirable members of society, members of specific racial demographics and lower classes, while also centralising security and assets in areas with a high accumulation of social, cultural, and economic capital, as Newman and Chen suggest.<sup>64</sup> Bourdieu establishes that ‘a group's real social distance from certain assets must integrate the geographical distance, which itself depends on the group's spatial distribution and, more precisely, its distribution with respect to the “focal point” of economic and cultural values’.<sup>65</sup> Similar to the logic of class hierarchy, the logic of spatial separation becomes self-perpetuating and precludes those from a background of lower social, cultural, and especially economic capital from accessing higher social standards.

This classificatory system, which is the product of the internalization of the structure of social space, in the form in which it impinges through the experience of a particular position in that space, is, within the limits of economic possibilities and impossibilities (which it tends to reproduce in its own logic), the generator of practices adjusted to the regularities inherent in a condition.<sup>66</sup>

Those with access to capital, then, create and cluster around centres of power and security and in the process remove or push those low on the social scale towards the outer edges of those centres. Thus, those who hold little or no capital are located at the physically and ideologically furthest removed margins of society's centres.

McCarthy's concern with legal injustice and arbitrariness weaves throughout his work. His marginalised characters are frequently subject to police brutality or imprisoned for vagrancy and related legal offences, which specifically targets those of low socio-economic status, as the below analyses will show. The author traces the social and spatial separation and its inherent injustices and violations of the freedom and safety of the (lower class) person, highlighting how this systemic violence targets specifically the unbeautiful lower class body while advantaging those of higher status. In the example of *The Gardener's Son*, this is

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<sup>64</sup> Newman and Chen, p. 6.

<sup>65</sup> Bourdieu, p. 124.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 175.

evident in the company rule that prohibits those not employed by the company from living in the town, which forces those like the band of hillbillies and Robert McEvoy out of town. Equally, the separate location of the big house of the family owning the factory from those who work in it indicates a further tactic of spatial separation, evident also in novels such as *Outer Dark*, *Child of God*, or *Suttree*.

The connection between biopolitics (the politics concerning the living body) and social control is a result of the desire of those in power and those who enforce power structures to maintain power. The pillars of biopolitics – legislative, judicial, and executive – establish the dominion over the population by a group of select people. To become a power-holding member of the legislative and judicial class normally presupposes membership of the upper classes and a large amount of cultural and social capital, i.e. education and social connections. Without those attributes, achieving employment in a law or government environment is rarely possible. Achieving those attributes also requires access to economic capital, in order to, for example, undertake a university degree, which precludes those whose social and economic situation requires an income, those of low economic capital, as well as those with dependents who do not or cannot participate in the economic stability of the household.<sup>67</sup>

Two of the three pillars of biopolitics, the legislative and judicial, therefore, systematically preclude participation of those lower on the social scale, particularly the marginalised and poor. The third pillar, however, is ostensibly open to a wider population, especially through the state and local police forces. Tasked with the implementation and enforcement of the law, the training to become a member or operative of law enforcement is accessible with less cultural, social, and economic capital. The police force, however, can include members of several backgrounds, including those of lower social classes. Law enforcement personnel, thus, almost

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<sup>67</sup> Of course there are exceptions, those who win scholarships or work during their degree. However, as scholarships are normally prestige- rather than need-based, the majority of those undertaking years of studying to achieve a degree qualifying for work in legislative or judicial environments, to the degree where they become holders of power, are often those who already come from backgrounds of access to social, cultural, and economic capital.

form a separate social class. The power to interpret and enforce the law locates the executive in a position in which they wield a similar and more direct power to create and adhere to a moral code as those higher on the social scale. Encounters between law enforcement and members of the underclass community that demonstrate the potential for moral corruption in the police force are prominent throughout McCarthy's work. One of the earliest examples of corrupt law enforcement is Jefferson Gifford in *The Orchard Keeper*. Marion Sylder's analysis, after Gifford uses intimidation tactics on the 14-year-old John Wesley Rattner, is that Gifford 'knewed you [John Wesley] didn't have no daddy, nobody to take up for you [...] and he figured he could jump on you'.<sup>68</sup> Sylder sees through Gifford's immoral attempt to intimidate a minor who does not have the support of his parents. More damning, perhaps, is the arrest of Arthur Ownby: 'They came three times for the old man. At first it was just the Sheriff and Gifford [...] The second time [...] with three deputies and a county officer.' Then '[t]here was a cannonade of shots from the woods'. To Ownby, '[i]t was like being in a room full of invisible and malevolent spirits.'<sup>69</sup> While Ownby, indeed, is resisting arrest, the reason for his arrest and the excessive fire power applied against him, is that Ownby destroyed government property. Law enforcement powers make no effort of communicating with the old man, they open fire without warning. The victimless crime against government property, it appears, is punishable by an armed siege of the house of a reclusive elder and thus becomes testimony to the arbitrary nature of law enforcement practices.

None of the three pillars of biopolitics, thus, are unproblematic. As Foucault asserts, '[f]or a justice system to be unjust, it doesn't need to convict the wrong individual; it only needs to judge in the wrong way.'<sup>70</sup> An example of the arbitrariness and injustice of this practice are the 'stop and frisk' laws practiced in larger US cities, first implemented in New York in 1968. Under these laws, the

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<sup>68</sup> Cormac McCarthy, *The Orchard Keeper* (London: Picador, 2010), p. 170.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 196-7.

<sup>70</sup> Michel Foucault, 'The Proper Use of Criminals', in *Power*, ed. by James D. Faubion, trans. by Robert Hurley, *Essential Works of Foucault 1954-1984* (New York: The New Press, 2001), III, 429-34 (p. 429).

police have the right to stop and search anyone whom they deem suspicious, a direct contradiction to Amendment IV of the Constitution:

The right of the people to be secure in their persons, houses, papers, and effects, against unreasonable searches and seizures, shall not be violated, and no warrants shall issue, but upon probable cause, supported by oath or affirmation, and particularly describing the place to be searched and the persons or things to be seized.<sup>71</sup>

The implementation of the ‘stop and frisk’ law coincides with the peak of the Civil Rights and other liberation movements at the time. Since its implementation, it has frequently been criticised for being racially motivated, as the majority of those stopped and frisked by the police are persons of colour, specifically young black and Hispanic men in impoverished, marginalized, and predominantly black and Hispanic neighbourhoods. ‘Stop and frisk’, created during a time of social unrest and white-middle-class anxiety regarding status, power, and violence, is thus implemented for political reasons in a society fraught with systemic classism and racism. Such laws disproportionately affect those already marginalised and ostracised from society, persons of colour, the poor and marginalised, and other ‘criminals of person’.

Amendment IV guarantees the security of the person and protection from unlawful and capricious prosecution. Yet, laws have passed that provide a tool for law enforcement to legally harass bodies marked by poverty and/or race. These laws constitute a risk to ‘the safety of the person’ for minorities and the marginalised. A further example of such biased systemic injustice particularly relevant to McCarthy’s work are the various versions of the vagrancy laws. Forrest W. Lacey, in 1953, states that

Vagrancy is the principal crime in which the offense consists of being a certain kind of person rather than in having done or failed to do certain acts. Other crimes of this nature include being a common drunkard, common prostitute, common thief, tramp, or disorderly person.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Rakove, p. 231.

<sup>72</sup> Forrest W. Lacey, ‘Vagrancy and Other Crimes of Personal Condition’, *Harvard Law Review*, 7, 1953, 1203–26 (p. 1203).

While several of McCarthy's characters are met with suspicion and police dogmatism, such as Lester Ballard in *Child of God* or Culla Holme in *Outer Dark*, McCarthy's perspective on 'offenses of the person' is most explicit in *Suttree*. Several of the characters, the drunkards, thieves, and disorderly are assembled in the workhouse early on in the novel, where Suttree himself is confined for 'five months' because he was '[l]aying drunk'.<sup>73</sup> However, Lacey further states that 'the breadth of the vagrancy statutes is such that the police are almost inevitably driven to an arbitrary selection of the persons to be prosecuted'.<sup>74</sup> This arbitrariness, in *Suttree*, is most explicit in encounters between Ab Jones and the police. Set in a Southern city prior to the legal abolition of segregation and Jim Crow, Ab Jones's 'huge frame' carries the scars of arbitrary police brutality, the '[s]ame old shit. Your little blue friends.'<sup>75</sup> Jones's interactions with his fellow derelicts in the McAnally environment depict a different person than the 'dangerous big black man' the police consistently harass, beat, imprison, and ultimately murder. Ab Jones's story portrays McCarthy's awareness of how race is inextricably interwoven with matters of class and privilege in the 'injustice system' that underlies American society.

Yet, to focus all attention on existing power structures and those who hold social, economic, and cultural capital, is to imply that those at the lower end of the social scale are passive subjects of power. The system of reward (increase in social, cultural, and/or economic capital) and punishment (marginalisation, prosecution, and imprisonment) presupposes a complicit population, members of society who participate in this system either through desire or intimidation. As Foucault suggests, 'we can surely accept the general proposition that, in our societies,' that is Western societies, 'the systems of punishment are to be situated in a certain "political economy" of the body [...] it is always the body that is at issue – the body and its forces, their utility and their docility, their distribution and their submission.'<sup>76</sup> However, the need to create a system of controlling the body in society, to include the body into a political economy aimed at docility and

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<sup>73</sup> *Suttree*, pp. 52, 66.

<sup>74</sup> Lacey, p. 1224.

<sup>75</sup> *Suttree*, p. 246.

<sup>76</sup> Foucault, *Discipline* p. 25.

submission of the body, implies that the body has the capacity to not be docile, to offer resistance to structural disadvantage and systemic violence. Regarding the unbeautiful body as passive subjects of power underestimates the potential for resistance and community these bodies can enact. Rather than submit to mainstream society's judgement of their body and characters, McCarthy's marginalised frequently use their bodies to resist systemic violence and injustice through open revolt, public drinking and disorderly behaviour, as well as acts of kindness that show community spirit and mutual support, thus disproving the image of the crude and immoral solitary destitute. They are not, in Marxian terms, a *Lumpenproletariat* without class consciousness, but form communities of support and kinship parallel to mainstream society, since society disregards and excludes them from consideration and the perceived benefits and shared wealth of capitalist gains.

The political economy in which the beautiful bodies of the power-holders signifies a higher value than the unbeautiful body of the dominated classes, in which beauty and moral merit are directly linked to access to capital, creates a fiercely individualistic society in which personal gain and aspiration trump community spirit. In a society where inequality is a structural issue, privileging those ranking high within the structure and who have access to capital and thus freedom and security of the person, competition becomes fierce and ruthless. This notion has become mythologised in US culture through the credo of the 'pursuit of happiness' and the myth of the man who makes it 'from rags to riches'. The direct link between economic success and happiness, implied by these notions, results in a capitalist system that renders interchangeable the ideas of freedom, independence, and wealth. The origin of this mythology and fierce individualism are laid in the founding document of the United States of America: the 1776 Declaration of Independence. The second paragraph of the Declaration states:

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness [...] That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, laying its foundation on such principles and

organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their safety and Happiness.<sup>77</sup>

The notions of equality, liberty, freedom, and the pursuit of happiness as inalienable rights are thus located at the very inception of the United States as a nation. However, these biopolitical ideals at the heart of America's self-image are also an early instance of systemic injustice through the exclusion of the enslaved black population and the disregard for the rights of Native American peoples. The Declaration of Independence, written by rich white slaveholders and usurpers of Native lands, thus heralds the beginning of centuries of structural disadvantage to the underclass, people of colour, and ethnic minorities, causing them, in effect, to become invisible in and excluded from mainstream society. McCarthy's work renders visible both the plight and possibilities of such fringe communities.

A strongly hierarchical structure and fierce individualism constitute US society, and those high on the social scale (the dominant), exert power and control over those low on this scale (the dominated). McCarthy dedicates the majority of his work to the unbeautiful members of the lower classes and thus showcases the moral and societal devastation caused by America's structural inequalities. However, rather than focussing solely on the disempowerment of the marginalised and vulnerable, McCarthy illustrates aspects of society that are based on kindness and community. The body becomes a site of resistance to structural and systemic injustices embedded in mainstream societal structures and consciousness. Chapters Two and Three detail the unbeautiful body in society and will examine how the ostracised and marginalised members of the underclass use their bodies as sites of resistance. Their mode of existence in McCarthy's works belies the myth of the immoral poor through forming communities of kindness and kinship based on mutual support. The final two chapters will examine the consequences of a fiercely individualistic society based on structural inequality and systemic discrimination through McCarthy's moral and immoral monsters, those victimised beyond humanity, and those victimising beyond the humane. Overall, I suggest that

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<sup>77</sup> Rakove, pp. 77–79.

McCarthy offers an astute analysis of societal structures and its moral and ethical failures to include and protect those most vulnerable.

### ***1.3. Literature Review***

McCarthy scholarship began when Vereen M. Bell published the first article on McCarthy in 1983 and the first monograph dedicated to the author in 1988. In *The Achievement of Cormac McCarthy*, Bell attests to a ‘prevailing gothic and nihilistic mood’ in McCarthy’s work, written with an ‘antimetaphysical bias’ conveyed in ‘the concreteness of his prose style’.<sup>78</sup> In addition to analysing McCarthy’s ability to create atmosphere through language, Bell is also the first to comment on the author’s ability to reflect region, dialect, and character through style. ‘McCarthy’s first four novels are set within a hundred-mile radius of Maryville, Tennessee, and convey [...] the speech, manners, and values of the area’s people [...] the specific whole ecology and spirit of a region.’<sup>79</sup> In McCarthy’s world ‘perceived innocent of moral form,’ as Bell diagnoses, ‘there may be a residual yearning for ontological certainty – we suspect from this recurrence of preachers and priests, however demented.’<sup>80</sup> Characters across McCarthy’s work, ‘are almost without thoughts, certainly without thought process’ and are in a perpetual quest for meaning, interrupted by violence and loss.<sup>81</sup>

Bell’s initial analysis, in which he dedicates a full chapter to each of the five novels McCarthy had published to date, offers an overview of some of the themes in McCarthy’s work that have since become the centre of attention for McCarthy scholars. These themes include nihilism and existentialism, and are discussed, among others, in Dianne C. Luce’s 2009 monograph *Reading the World: Cormac McCarthy’s Tennessee Period*. William Prather’s book chapter ‘Absurd Reasoning

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<sup>78</sup> Vereen M Bell, *The Achievement of Cormac McCarthy* (Baton Rouge u.a.: Louisiana State University Press, 1988), pp. 1, 2.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, p 4.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.

in an Existential World: A Consideration of Cormac McCarthy's *Suttree*', in the 2001 collection dedicated to McCarthy, *Sacred Violence: Cormac McCarthy's Appalachian Works*, also examines the role of existentialism and absurdity. Discussions on nihilism and existentialism also feature questions of religion, often related to the author's Irish Catholic upbringing. Several scholars have dedicated publications to the question of religion and Gnosticism in McCarthy's work. In the same collection as Prather, Tim Parrish and William C. Spencer published on the question of religion in 'The Killer Wears the Halo: Cormac McCarthy, Flannery O'Connor, and the American Religion' and 'Cormac McCarthy's Unholy Trinity: Biblical Parody in *Outer Dark*'. In *Reading the World*, Luce also offers a discussion of Gnosticism.

Several more scholars have published on McCarthy's nihilism, existentialism, religion, and Gnosticism, especially in *The Cormac McCarthy Journal*, a scholarly journal founded in 2001 and dedicated to the author's work. The most notable scholar in this field is Petra Mundik, who in 2016 published her first monograph on metaphysics and Gnosticism in McCarthy's work: *A Bloody and Barbarous God: The Metaphysics of Cormac McCarthy*. Mundik contends that 'McCarthy's metaphysics and theodicy [...] deal with the universal human condition'. The interest in the metaphysics of evil, in demiurgy and the spiritual and philosophical origin of binary conceptions of morality, that is good vs. evil, do not address the systemic nature of such conceptions embedded in the socio-political environment that underlie McCarthy's human condition and communities. These systems both generate the potential for violence and are in themselves forms of violence. Rather than to 'not examine the sociopolitical and historical themes surrounding the south-western region', or any other McCarthy setting, in favour of the gnostic and metaphysical, as colleagues working in this field have done, my approach traces the origins of McCarthy's dysfunctional human environments and communities specifically within the systems organising social structures and classed located-ness.<sup>82</sup> Instead of regarding the body as a vessel in which 'the

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<sup>82</sup> Petra Mundik, *A Bloody and Barbarous God: The Metaphysics of Cormac McCarthy* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2016), p. 5.

human soul is helplessly lodged in base matter and immured in a foul body', as Russell Hillier summarises the Gnostic approach to McCarthy's work, I offer a reading of the body that grounds the author's human condition not in the realms of theodicy or philosophy, but in the socio-political and economic realities of their environments and situation.<sup>83</sup>

Connected to the themes of religion and Gnosticism is the question of morality which has received significant attention within the last decade of McCarthy scholarship. Notably, Cooper published her monograph *No More Heroes: Narrative Perspective and Morality in Cormac McCarthy* in 2011. Since Cooper's publication, several monographs focusing on the question of morality have become available, such as Matthew Potts's *Cormac McCarthy and the Signs of Sacrament: Literature, Theology, and the Moral of Stories* which directly relates the questions of morality and religion, and Hillier's 2017 analysis of violence and morality in *Morality in Cormac McCarthy's Fiction: Souls at Hazard*. Potts finds it 'obvious from any study of McCarthy [...] that these novels attempt to discern some sort of moral system in light of metaphysical collapse' and 'that if McCarthy does in fact offer some moral system through his fiction, a sophisticated understanding of sacraments might inform that ethic'.<sup>84</sup> Hillier suggests that one of the fundamental elements of McCarthy's work is 'a moral urgency, and a need for moral order'<sup>85</sup> and Cooper sets out to demonstrate 'that shifts in narrative perspective illuminate many different levels of morality, from vaguely moral inclinations to strongly ethical behaviour'. 'McCarthy', Cooper suggests, 'seems interested in asking readers to engage with morally uncomfortable perspectives, perspectives that draw readers' attention to the darkest, bleakest depths of human depravity.'<sup>86</sup> While the underlying question of morality throughout McCarthy's

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<sup>83</sup> Russell M. Hillier, *Morality in Cormac McCarthy's Fiction: Souls at Hazard* (New York: Springer, 2017), p. 4.

<sup>84</sup> Matthew L. Potts, *Cormac McCarthy and the Signs of Sacrament: Literature, Theology, and the Moral of Stories* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015), p. 14.

<sup>85</sup> Hillier, *Morality*, p. 3.

<sup>86</sup> Lydia R. Cooper, *No More Heroes: Narrative Perspective and Morality in Cormac McCarthy*, Southern Literary Series (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2011), p. 15, 17.

work remains pertinent, Potts, Cooper, and Hillier's focus on the philosophical and religious aspect of McCarthy's moral urgency remains outside of social structures and hierarchies within which these moral urgencies arise. As I argue in the above theoretical framework, the very notion of morality and the definition of moral standards are part of the categorisation and classification of social structures. Loosely based, in Western societies, on Christian values, moral standards are by no means rigid and unchanging, but have, instead, been adjust throughout history to separate and categorise the lower from the upper classes.

Potts, Cooper, and Hillier, among others, presuppose the inherent benevolence of the use of morality as measure of worth and goodness and thus overlook the possibility of reading the moral failings and achievements of McCarthy's characters outside the individual instead of situating them within the wider social context. It is here that my work expands existing scholarship to consider the limitations and possibilities of moral behaviours within given societal structures. The individualisation of the question of morality is inherently connected to discussions surrounding notions of 'good' and 'evil'. These questions also feature in a variety of articles and chapters such as Edwin T. Arnold's 'Naming, Knowing and Nothingness: McCarthy's Moral Parables' published in 1999. Arnold finds that 'there is in each novel a moral gauge by which we, the readers, are able to judge the failure or limited success of McCarthy's characters.'<sup>87</sup> Sean Braune's 2015 article 'A Chaotic and Dark Vitalism: A Case Study of Cormac McCarthy's Psychopaths amid a Geology of Immorals' examines 'the implications when psychopathy is a Darwinian advantage' through a speculative realism and chaos theory lens, focussing on the possibility for evil and chaos inherent in nature.

Euan Gallivan's 'Compassionate McCarthy?: *The Road* and Schopenhauerian Ethics', published in 2008, also focusses on the question of true morality in the Schopenhauerian sense. The underlying logic in Schopenhauer, that 'only the individual who accepts the moral boundary between right and wrong

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<sup>87</sup> Edwin T. Arnold, 'Naming, Knowing and Nothingness: McCarthy's Moral Parables', in *Perspectives on Cormac McCarthy*, ed. by Edwin T. Arnold and Dianne C. Luce, Southern Quarterly Series, Rev. ed (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1999), pp. 45–69 (p. 46).

where no State or other authority guarantees it can truly be identified as just', is in line with McCarthy criticism focussing on the nature of morality on the individual character, rather than examining the origin and structural nature of moral standards. Linda Woodson's "'You are the battleground": Materiality, Moral Responsibility, and Determinism in *No Country for Old Men*' examines the limitations of 'moral responsibility in a contemporary world' that is possibly deterministic.<sup>88</sup> While Woodson looks at the structures and patterns of violence and chaos, she continues the traditional McCarthy criticism perspective of lifting individual morality of action out of the social and political context and focussing morality on individual action and potentialities rather than socio-political contexts and structures. The debate surrounding morality in McCarthy focuses largely on the question of whether McCarthy works on the basis of a Machiavellian understanding of good and evil, whether he allows for the good in humanity, and whether his texts offer a moral perspective and moral teachings in their stark and bleak environments and catastrophic violence. With this thesis, I offer an expansion on this prevailing perspective through the analysis of the origins of moral standards and the implications these standards have within hegemonic societal structures.

Catastrophic violence is another theme in McCarthy's work that Bell alludes to and which has received significant critical attention since the early McCarthy scholarship of the 1990s. Wade Hall and Richard Wallach published a two-volume collection in 2001 entitled *Sacred Violence* in which several scholars offer perspectives on a variety of topics connected to the theme of violence. At the centre of studies on violence in McCarthy is the author's 1985 novel *Blood Meridian: Or the Evening Redness in the West*, which, according to Shaviro, 'sings hymns of violence, its gorgeous language commemorating slaughter in all its sumptuousness and splendor.'<sup>89</sup> In the first volume of *Sacred Violence*, dedicated to McCarthy's Appalachian works, Brian Evenson published his influential 'McCarthy's

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<sup>88</sup> Linda Woodson, "'You Are the Battleground": Materiality, Moral Responsibility, and Determinism in *No Country for Old Men*', in *No Country for Old Men: From Novel to Film*, ed. by Lynnea Chapman King, Rick Wallach, and James M. Welsh (Lanham, Md: Scarecrow Press, 2009), pp. 1–12 (p. 11).

<sup>89</sup> Shaviro, p. 145.

Wanderers: Nomadology, Violence, and Open Country’, a Deleuzian reading of violence and space in *Outer Dark*, *Child of God*, and *Blood Meridian*. Evenson’s analysis touches upon not individual instances of violence, but categorises characters and violence within broader social and philosophical frameworks. His focus on ‘characters [who] move from their home societies to participate actively in other societies’ addresses matters of community and social contexts and how individuals fit within these contexts.<sup>90</sup> Shaviro, on the other hand, offers a celebration of McCarthy’s literary style and finds that ‘[b]loody death is our monotonously predictable destiny; yet its baroque opulence [in *Blood Meridian*] is attended with a frighteningly complicitous joy’.<sup>91</sup> Given the omnipresence of violence and dread in McCarthy’s work and the long tradition of scholarly work in the field, a full review of the critical scholarship is beyond the scope of this subchapter. Scholars who notably work in the field include Luce, Arnold, Wallach, Cooper, Hillier, and Gallivan, as well as Gary M. Ciuba, James R. Giles, Trenton Hickman, and John Wegner. Further, each volume of *The Cormac McCarthy Journal* since its inception in 2001, as well as each edited collection, includes works on violence in McCarthy. Brad Bannon and John Vanderheide recently published another collection dedicated to violence in McCarthy, *Cormac McCarthy’s Violent Destinies: The Poetics of Determinism and Fatalism*. Whereas each of these scholars adds to our understanding of violence in McCarthy’s work, this current project adds to the discussion in focussing on the systemic violence that necessarily attends the hierarchical structuring of the socio-politics evident in the author’s novels, removing the lens from individual and isolated instances of violence.

McCarthy’s violence, I have argued before, is intricately connected to the landscape settings of his novels.<sup>92</sup> In fact, violence and landscape, or space, are themes equally prevalent in McCarthy’s work and related scholarship. As the above

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<sup>90</sup> Brian Evenson, ‘McCarthy’s Wanderers: Nomadology, Violence, and Open Country’, in *Sacred Violence: Cormac McCarthy’s Appalachian Works*, ed. by Wade H Hall and Rick Wallach, 2nd edn (El Paso, Tex.: Texas Western Press/University of Texas at El Paso, 2002), I, 51–73 (p. 51).

<sup>91</sup> Shaviro, p. 146.

<sup>92</sup> Katja Rebmann, ‘Cormac McCarthy’s Topologies of Violence’, in *Cormac McCarthy’s Borders and Landscapes*, ed. by Louise Jillett (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), pp. 108–19.

mentioned titles suggest, McCarthy's work is divided into the earlier Appalachian works, also referred to as 'Tennessee period', and the later 'Southwestern works', beginning with *Blood Meridian*. This division is complicated by McCarthy's latest novel to date, *The Road*, published in 2006 and returning to the Southern states, albeit in a post-apocalyptic, dystopian vision of the US after the apocalypse. Situating McCarthy's work is made possible by the author's distinct descriptions and representations of the spatial setting of his texts which mark the novels as distinctly American, Southern or Southwestern respectively. Scholarship debating McCarthy's spaces is abundant, ranging from Georg Guillemin's 2004 monograph on the pastoral *The Pastoral Vision of Cormac McCarthy*, Jay Ellis's 2006 monograph *No Place for Home: Spatial Constraint and Character Flight in the Novels of Cormac McCarthy* to Megan Riley McGilchrist's comparative study *The Western Landscape in Cormac McCarthy and Wallace Stegner: Myths of the Frontier* published in 2010. As mentioned above, both Evenson and Shaviro touch upon the spatial theme as early as 1999 and 2001, and in 2016 Louise Jillett published the *Cormac McCarthy's Borders and Landscapes* collection, following the 2014 annual Cormac McCarthy conference in Sydney, dedicated to McCarthy's spaces and landscapes.

Space and landscape also link to a theme in scholarship dedicated to genre and narrative, which has received attention by Susan Kollin in her 2001 article 'Genre and the Geographies of Violence: Cormac McCarthy and the Contemporary Western'. Barclay Owens dedicates his 2000 monograph *Cormac McCarthy's Western Novels* to a discussion of genre, violence, space, and historical reading, whereas John Cant's 2008 monograph *Cormac McCarthy and the Myth of American Exceptionalism* discusses McCarthy's use of genre and history to discuss the founding myths of the US, myths that continue to inform the 'American Character' and that impact on how those 'out of luck', the destitute and marginalised underclass, continue to be regarded and located, for example the 'hillbilly' in the Appalachian region, until today. Hillier's 2006 article "'In a Dark Parody" of John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*: The Presence of Subversive Allegory in Cormac McCarthy's *Outer Dark*' discusses McCarthy's use of allegory

as narrative device. Cooper's *No More Heroes* uses linguistic analyses to examine narrative perspective and morality in McCarthy's novels, whereas James Dorson examines narrative and space in his 2016 monograph *Counternarrative Possibilities: Virgin Land, Homeland, and Cormac McCarthy's Westerns*. Kenneth Lincoln's 2008 monograph *Cormac McCarthy: American Canticles* examines the connection between the Mexican vocal form of the 'corrido', adding another layer to genre-possibilities in McCarthy's work.

Much of the work on genre connects to historical and intertextual readings of McCarthy. John Sepich dedicates his 1993 monograph *Notes on Blood Meridian* (reprinted in 2008) to *Blood Meridian*. Sepich traces the historical accuracy of McCarthy's gang of marauders and connects the narrative of *Blood Meridian* to 'Samuel Chamberlain's long-lost personal narrative of the late 1840s, *My Confession*'.<sup>93</sup> The origin of *Blood Meridian* in cultural history, read in conjunction with Barclay Owens's assessment that 'Predatory human violence is far older than we want to imagine' and that 'McCarthy, like many anthropologists and biologists, weighs [the Anglo-American conquest] against the evolutionary history of violence', traces the lineage and circularity of Anglo-Colonialism and excesses of violence from the Frontier to the Vietnam war and beyond.<sup>94</sup> In 2000, Neil Campbell follows in Sepich's footsteps and publishes 'Liberty Beyond its Proper Bounds: Cormac McCarthy's History of the West on *Blood Meridian*' in one of the early edited collections *Myth, Legend, Dust: Critical Responses to Cormac McCarthy*, edited by Wallach. Wesley G. Morgan, during the first main surge of McCarthy scholarship in the early 2000s, published several articles in which he discusses actual events and characters that have influenced McCarthy in writing *Suttree*. Meanwhile, McCarthy's literary influences have been equally well documented. Luce, for example, discusses the Platonic cave motive in *Reading the World*. Nicholas Monk edited the collection *Intertextual and Interdisciplinary Approaches to Cormac McCarthy: Borders and Crossings* in 2012, in which the

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<sup>93</sup> John Sepich, *Notes on Blood Meridian: Revised and Expanded Edition* (University of Texas Press, 2008), p. 5.

<sup>94</sup> Barclay Owens, *Cormac McCarthy's Western Novels* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2000), pp. ix, 38.

terms ‘borders’ and ‘crossings’ move between physical spaces, metaphorical and moral ideas of boundaries and crossings, and the crossing and intersections of different authors and McCarthy’s intertextual potential.

In 2016, Monk published his monograph *True and Living Prophet of Destruction: Cormac McCarthy and Modernity* in which he continues the tradition of reading McCarthy as a sceptic of modernity and the modern world, a tradition begun in 1988 by Vereen M. Bell. Luce, whose work touches upon the question of modernity, suggests that ‘it is fruitful to bring to a reading of these works [specifically the Tennessee works] an understanding of the social, historical, cultural, and environmental issues’,<sup>95</sup> an endeavour that Monk realises in his reading of ‘[t]he annihilation predicted both indirectly and directly in the works’ of McCarthy.<sup>96</sup> McCarthy, Monk diagnoses, writes landscapes ‘paved by technological advances, brutal exploitation of resources, and short-termism, all of which have disconnected humanity from its environment with the consequence that both teeter on the brink of obliteration’.<sup>97</sup> Monk’s reading resounds with Marxist and capitalism-critical readings such as David Holloway’s 2002 *The Late Modernism of Cormac McCarthy* in which Holloway ‘would take the failure of modernism to sustain the illusion of cultural autonomy to be at the very heart of McCarthy’s project in the Border Trilogy, where the very possibility of individual or collective secession from the structures of the world as we find it is relentlessly problematized’.<sup>98</sup> Marxist and anti-capitalist readings have recently seen an increase in popularity through articles such as Jordan J. Dominy’s 2015 ‘Cannibalism, Consumerism, and Profanation: Cormac McCarthy’s *The Road* and the End of Capitalism’ or Casey Jergenson’s 2016 discussion “‘In what direction did lost men veer?’ Late Capitalism and Utopia in *The Road*’. Politically left-leaning approaches to McCarthy have become more frequent after the 2005

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<sup>95</sup> Dianne C. Luce, *Reading the World: Cormac McCarthy’s Tennessee Period* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2009), p. vii.

<sup>96</sup> Nicholas Monk, *True and Living Prophet of Destruction: Cormac McCarthy and Modernity* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2016), p. xi.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, xii.

<sup>98</sup> David Holloway, *The Late Modernism of Cormac McCarthy*, Contributions to World Literature (Westport; London: Greenwood Press, 2002), CXV, p. 19.

publication of *No Country for Old Men* and the 2006 novel *The Road*. Sara L. Spurgeon's 2011 edited collection *Cormac McCarthy: All the Pretty Horses, No Country for Old Men, The Road* contain earlier readings of late capitalist themes, such as Stephen Tatum's "“Mercantile Ethics”": *No Country for Old Men* and the Narcocorrido'.

McCarthy's concern regarding the destruction of the world, through the processes of modernisation and capitalism, combined with the dystopian vision of *The Road* has triggered a more recent scholarly approach through the lens of ecocriticism and disaster or apocalypse studies. Andrew Keller Estes's 2013 monograph *Cormac McCarthy and the Writing of American Spaces* marks one of the early eco-critical studies, while Fredrik Svensson currently dedicates his PhD research in Karlstad, Sweden, to ecocriticism. Markus Wierschem has published on McCarthy's apocalyptic vision in 2015, after Julian Murphet and Mark Steven edited a collection in 2012, *Styles of Extinction: Cormac McCarthy's The Road*, dedicated to the same topic. In 2017, David Huebert combines the themes of cannibalism and apocalypse in his article 'Eating and Mourning the Corpse of the World: Ecological Cannibalism and Elegiac Protomourning in Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*' and Joshua Ryan Jackson and Ken R. Hanssen both discuss time and meaning in their articles in *The Cormac McCarthy Journal* Volume 15, Number 2.

The trappings of capitalism and the destruction of living spaces and nature, at the epitome of which in McCarthy's oeuvre sits *The Road*, preoccupy and inform much of the political approach to readings of the works. Many of these studies, both those sustained to monograph length and the articles, focus on the US national as well as broader global impact of consumer capitalism and the unsustainability of current economic politics and wealth extraction, as well as to question what Hannah Arendt terms 'the human condition' within late capitalism and *The Road*'s post-apocalyptic landscape.<sup>99</sup> However, bar few exceptions such as D.S. Butterworth, Matthew Boudway, Luce to an extent, and Yi Young, few critics have engaged in

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<sup>99</sup> Hannah Arendt, *On Violence* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1970), p. 13.

a sustained socio-political reading which places the characters within the context of wider societal and political structures. Luce suggests that Ab Jones's struggle is of his own making when she claims that 'Suttree has always seen quite clearly that Ab creates his own hell', rather than figuring Ab's situation within the Jim Crow South and his experience of structural and systemic violence as a black man living under a legally unjust system.<sup>100</sup> Rather than discussing the politics and implications of (late) capitalism on a broader scale, or trace the connection between poverty, marginalisation, immorality, and violence to individual failings, my project offers a study of how a reading of the body offers insights both into the characters as well as into the inner workings of power disequilibria underlying hierarchical social structures and the systematic maintenance of these disequilibria that can be traced throughout McCarthy's work.

As this survey shows, McCarthy scholarship is a popular field with an increasing number of critics publishing on a variety of themes. The majority of the above-mentioned scholars are male, and McCarthy criticism remains dominated by white male academics. This may be one reason why feminist scholarship is underrepresented, although not absent from the field. The most notable feminist scholars are Nell Sullivan, who published some of the earliest feminist scholarship on McCarthy in 2000 and 2001, namely her articles 'Boys Will Be Boys and Girls Will Be Gone: The Circuit of Male Desire in Cormac McCarthy's Border Trilogy' and 'The Evolution of the Dead Girlfriend Motif in *Outer Dark* and *Child of God*'. Linda Woodson published on the complex female presence in the Border Trilogy, and Harriet Poppy Stilley combines feminist and Marxist readings, for example in her 2016 article "'White Pussy Is Nothin but Trouble": Hypermasculine Hysteria and the Displacement of the Feminine Body in Cormac McCarthy's *Child of God*'. Stacey Peebles, Luce, and Cooper all have published on feminist issues, albeit often as a secondary interest to their research. Some of the male colleagues, Hillier and Monk, for example, have commented on female absence or complicated presences in McCarthy's work.

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<sup>100</sup> Luce, *Reading* p. 253.

Feminist readings of McCarthy's work are a promising aspect of future research, particularly because it is rumoured that the long anticipated upcoming novel *The Passenger* features a female protagonist. At the Cormac McCarthy Conference in Austin in September 2017, Peebles and Steven Frye identified three further research areas of increasing interest. Peebles herself, in 2017, published a monograph titled *Cormac McCarthy and Performance: Page, Stage, Screen* – identifying adaptation as a field in which little research has been conducted to date. Another budding field is the above-mentioned ecocriticism, including a recent increase in animal studies in McCarthy's work. The final field mentioned is the work currently undertaken on the Cormac McCarthy Papers, the archives held at the Wittliff Collection at Texas State University, San Marcos. Several scholars have published on the archival holdings, most notably, Luce's article on early versions of *Suttree*. Luce is also currently working on a similar article concerning *Child of God*. Michael Lynn Crews, in 2017, published *Books Are Made Out Of Books: A Guide to Cormac McCarthy's Literary Influences*, a study revealing references to a vast array of authors and texts in McCarthy's work and notes. While Crews's work focuses on references and Luce traces the genesis of *Suttree*, for the purpose of this project, I include archival findings to illuminate specific aspects of McCarthy's writing and thinking, rather than establishing a genealogy or publishing history of the works.

This review of the paradigmatic literature on Cormac McCarthy is but a short and necessarily incomplete overview of possible themes. Some are discussed in more detail, while others, such as McCarthy and philosophy, for example, only receive an honorary mention. The theme that remains underrepresented in McCarthy scholarship is the theme that forms the core of this thesis. The human body, albeit frequently alluded to and touched upon in studies of violence and morality, only has a single chapter dedicated to it, written by Cooper and published by the Cormac McCarthy Society in *You Would Not Believe What Watches: Suttree and Cormac McCarthy's Knoxville in the Casebook Studies in Cormac McCarthy*

series in 2014.<sup>101</sup> With this project, I aim to contribute a new and previously overlooked research field in McCarthy scholarship in order to expand the perspective both on the human body and on McCarthy's deeply rooted interest in social concerns and systems of access and exclusion that underlie social hierarchies and lie at the core of systemic forms of violence.

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<sup>101</sup> Cooper informed me at the Cormac McCarthy Conference in Berlin in 2016 that she wrote the article after Steven Frye explicitly asked her to write on the body.

## Chapter 2: ‘Picturebook of the afflicted’: Reading Wounds and Scars

### 2.1. Introduction: Memory, Community, Resistance

Cormac McCarthy utilises the unmarked body like a blank sheet of paper, as a surface upon which to write and inscribe a narrative. Where the blank page foreshadows stories yet to be written, the unmarked body speaks of encounters yet to come, experiences yet to be made. As the process of writing inscribes a narrative onto the page, life inscribes experiences and memories on the body to be read and interpreted. Traces of age or of body modifications, such as tattoos, piercings, and brandings, are examples of such markings. Other markings are the result of breaches of the integrity of the body, both through accidents and violent encounters. These markings, namely wounds and scars, are at the centre of the analysis for this chapter, with a focus on McCarthy’s *Suttree* and the Border Trilogy novels *All the Pretty Horses*, *The Crossing*, and *Cities of the Plain*.

The preoccupation with recording and memory is a prevalent feature of McCarthy’s work. While this project focuses on McCarthy’s novels, his other works feature significant examples of the author’s understanding and discussion of memory. *The Gardener’s Son*, as mentioned above, records the McEvoy family’s tragic life in a variety of frames. Robert McEvoy’s amputated leg serves as a reminder of the accident to Robert himself, to his family, and to the people of the mill town. The amputation becomes a site of recognition not unlike Odysseus’s scar (p. 1 above). Robert McEvoy returns to the town and encounters an old man.

Old Man                      Who’s that?  
The old man looks down at his [Robert McEvoy’s] leg and his crutch.  
Old Man                      Ah. It’s you.

The missing leg summons memories of Robert’s accident and serves as a site of recognition between Robert and his former community. Further, this scene takes place at a ‘greenhouse that Mr McEvoy used to tend. Weeds grow by the wall and

a number of panes are stoved and broken [...] Inside withered pottings.’<sup>102</sup> Robert finds the former place of his father’s employment exhibiting definitive signs of decay and time passed, while the structure of the greenhouse and the pottings serve as reminders of a time of activity and growth. McCarthy inscribes memory both onto Robert’s body and into the environment. Histories and memories are legible and recognisable in the everyday material of life and its surrounding.

In the 1994 play, *The Stonemason*, McCarthy likens masonry, the art of building a lasting stone structure, to the craft of writing stories. The men in the Telfair family create both a legacy and a future with their craft, inscribing the landscape and the building itself with the knowledge and memory of generations. The stone structure becomes a memento to history, family, and community and narrates the story of its inhabitants as the writing of the play inscribes the memories and stories of the Telfair family onto the page.<sup>103</sup> The Telfairs’ story, however, is neither linear nor uncomplicated, and the various stages of disarray in the houses reflect the family’s struggles and difficulties, both past and present. *Blood Meridian*, similarly, examines remembering and memory, particularly in Judge Holden’s ledger in which he keeps drawings and recordings of the histories and memories of the land, while destroying the originals. As Neil Campbell points out, McCarthy uses the ledger to show that ‘recorded history is a process of selection and control’.<sup>104</sup> The narrative’s imperial white whale, Holden, erases traces of the country’s history prior to white imperial rule, deleting evidence of life before colonial settlement and thus perpetuating the settler myth of the ‘empty country’.

The body, however, is the site that McCarthy most consistently explores as site of memory. Whereas the experience and memory of the creation of a wound

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<sup>102</sup> *The Gardener’s Son*, p. 40 [italics in original].

<sup>103</sup> The connection between memory and masonry in *The Stonemason* will be discussed in a forthcoming article titled ‘“The work he’s done is no monument”: Cormac McCarthy’s *The Stonemason*, and the Spatiality of Memory’, co-authored with Madeleine Scherer.

<sup>104</sup> Neil Campbell, ‘Liberty Beyond Its Proper Bounds: Cormac McCarthy’s History of the West on *Blood Meridian*’, in *Myth, Legend, Dust: Critical Responses to Cormac McCarthy*, ed. by Rick Wallach (Manchester; New York: Manchester University Press; St. Martin’s Press [distributor], 2000), pp. 217–26 (p. 218).

and the formation of a scar is profoundly personal, the circumstances under which such incidents occur and in which these marks are read and interpreted, are interwoven with the political. Robert McEvoy's train accident could only happen and inscribe itself onto his body because of his proximity to the machinery. Robert's injury, as discussed in the previous chapter, is thus a consequence of the body and class politics of the mill town. Similarly, *Suttree*'s Ab Jones's body, riddled with mementoes of violent encounters with the police, has its socio-historic location in a Southern US city during the Jim Crow era.

Astrid Erll contends that “memory” [...] is an umbrella term for all those processes of a biological, medical, or social nature which relate past and present (and future) in sociocultural contexts’.<sup>105</sup> Memory and remembering, therefore, do not occur in isolation but within specific sociocultural, sociopolitical, and sociohistorical contexts, much like the body itself:

Today, the human body can no longer lay claim to the radical otherness of nature as distinct from the embedding framework of culture. Rather, instead of representing a stronghold of essential subjectivity, it has come to be seen also as a malleable object, its natural elements inextricably bound up in its cultural contexts, both shaping them and being shaped by them or [...] both reading and readable, writing and rewritable.<sup>106</sup>

McCarthy's writing of and on the body, therefore, establishes the body as part of a narrative to be read and understood alongside and within the text. This practice substantiates the body and its mementoes as a site of cultural, social, and political practices, or in Foucauldian terms, the centre of biopolitics.

Birgit Neumann states that the ‘study of literary representations of individual processes of memory has always been one of the central epistemological interests in literary studies’ and that literature has the potential, both implicitly and

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<sup>105</sup> Astrid Erll, *Memory in Culture*, trans. Sara B. Young (Basingstoke; New York: Palgrave 2011), p. 7.

<sup>106</sup> Ulrike Landfester, ‘Biopolitics, Biosociality and the Body: Introduction’, in *From Literature to Cultural Literacy*, ed. by Naomi Segal and Daniela Koleva (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), pp. 191–97 (p. 191).

explicitly, to examine the correlation between memory and identity.<sup>107</sup> Inscribing narratives onto his characters' bodies, McCarthy provides a tool for understanding characters' identities and struggles without requiring explicit expression and insight into interior processes. Erll coins the term 'experiential mode' of literary writing:

This mode is constituted by literary forms which represent the past as lived-through experience. Experiential modes evoke the "living memory" of contemporary history, generational or family memories [...] Typical forms of this mode of literary remembering are the "personal voice" generated by first-person narration; addressing the reader in the intimate way typical of face-to-face communication; the use of the more immediate present tense; lengthy passages focalised by an "experiencing I" in order to convey embodied, seemingly immediate experience; circumstantial realism, a very detailed presentation of everyday life in the past [...] and finally, the representation of everyday ways of speaking (sociolects, slang, and so on) to convey the linguistic specificity and fluidity of a near past.<sup>108</sup>

As this chapter will show, McCarthy's narratives detail his characters' lived experiences. However, rather than focussing on a 'personal voice', the author's meticulous and exhaustive descriptions of the physical body, specifically the aspects of damage to the body, speak of lived experiences often without the characters or narrators explicitly expressing or recounting them. Experiences, in McCarthy, are both embodied and inscribed on the body and create a weave of memories and narratives through which to read character. Erll's inclusion of sociolects as an aspect of experiential writing further supports this understanding of McCarthy's approach to conveying memory, as characters across his work, from *The Orchard Keeper* to *The Road*, communicate in a 'vernacular voice used mostly for dialogue or first person inserts [...] precisely rendered nuances of dialect' that inform the characters' identities.<sup>109</sup> McCarthy writes dialogue across the Tennessee novels in local dialects; Judge Holden and Anton Chigurh, significantly, speak without recognisable inflections (cf. chapter 5); and Sheriff Bell speaks in a

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<sup>107</sup> Birgit Neumann, 'The Literary Representation of Memory', in *A Companion to Cultural Memory Studies*, ed. by Astrid Erll and Ansgar Nünning (Berlin; New York: De Gruyter, 2010), pp. 333–43 (p. 333).

<sup>108</sup> Erll, pp. 158–59.

<sup>109</sup> Madison Smartt Bell, 'A Writer's View of Cormac McCarthy', in *Myth, Legend, Dust: Critical Responses to Cormac McCarthy*, ed. by Rick Wallach (Manchester; New York: Manchester University Press; St. Martin's Press, 2000), pp. 1–11 (p. 4).

distinctly Texan voice. The locality, like the body, forms part of the characters' cultural identities and thus their cultural and embodied memory.

Wounds and scars trace memories on the body that serve both as reminders and as sites of recognition, not unlike the sociolect which renders the speaker a recognisable member of a specific locality and community. Dieter Vandebroek argues that 'the dispositions that inform the everyday perception of practices, properties and persons are not only rooted "in" the body – in the form of postural schemes or quasi-visceral inclinations – but also contribute to actively shaping its physicality'.<sup>110</sup> The body, thus, registers practices and inclinations, environments and engagements, with specific activities. The relative safety guaranteed James Gregg by his physical distance from heavy machinery leaves his body unmarked by the dangers inherent in working-class labour. A life of hardship and poverty has rendered the hillbillies in *The Gardener's Son* 'a band of filthy and ragged people', instantly recognisable as members of the marginalised lower class.<sup>111</sup> In '§6 Identity without a Person' in *Nudities*, Giorgio Agamben argues that the 'desire to be recognised is inseparable from being human [...] This is not merely a question of satisfaction or self-love; rather, it is only through recognition by others that man can constitute himself as a person.'<sup>112</sup> Recognition through others, Agamben suggests, is not merely a question of personal identity, but of belonging. Becoming cognisant again (literally 're-cognition') of something in another person implies that there is a familiarity, a characteristic that one has already encountered and thus now recognises and remembers in another person. This implied familiarity creates a sense of belonging to a specific group who share specific features and experiences. Recognition, thus, has the potential to build communities amongst those who recognise in each other such a set of shared features.

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<sup>110</sup> Dieter Vandebroek, 'Classifying Bodies, Classified Bodies, Class Bodies: A Carnal Critique of the Judgment of Taste', in *The Routledge Companion to Bourdieu's Distinction*, ed. by Philippe Coulangeon and Julien Duval, Culture, Economy and the Social (New York, NY: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2014), pp. 227–54 (p. 228).

<sup>111</sup> *The Gardener's Son*, p. 22 [italics in original].

<sup>112</sup> Giorgio Agamben, *Nudities*, trans. by David Kishik and Stefan Pedate (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011), p. 46.

Within the process of recognition in McCarthy's work, scars and wounds become mementoes of shared experiences and social contexts that hold the potential for recognition amongst members of specific socio-demographic communities. *Blood Meridian's* kid, for example, engages in a variety of criminal activities and is finally shot 'in the back with a small pistol', his scarred body recollecting the encounters with the ragged and violent men of the American West.<sup>113</sup> He meets Toadvine, whose

head was strangely narrow and his hair was plastered up with mud in a bizarre and primitive coiffure. On his forehead were burned the letters H T and lower almost between the eyes the letter F and these markings were splayed and garish as if the iron had been left too long [...] the kid could see that he had no ears.<sup>114</sup>

After the kid and Toadvine's first vicious physical confrontation they discover that they match each other in strength and join forces. The social morphologies of both the kid and Toadvine commemorate a life of crime and transgression. Indeed, Toadvine's distinct physiognomy, the scars on his face and his dismembered ears, literally write on his body his past crimes. *The Statutes at Large of Pennsylvania* records the following punishment for horse stealing:

if any person or persons, from and after the passing of this act, shall feloniously take and carry away, any horse, mare or gelding of the property of any other person or persons or the United States of America, and shall be thereof convicted, every such person or persons so offending for the first offense shall stand in the pillory for one hour, and shall be publicly whipped on his, her or their (bare) backs with thirty-nine lashes, well laid on, and at the same time shall have his, her or their ears cut off and nailed to the pillory, and for the second offense shall be whipped and pilloried in like manner and be branded on the forehead in a plain and visible manner with the letters H. T.<sup>115</sup>

It is conceivable that similar acts were in place in other states and territories, or, indeed, that Toadvine spent time in Pennsylvania before he meets the kid in Nacogdoches, Texas. Further, the act was passed in March 1780 and repealed in

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<sup>113</sup> *Blood Meridian*, p. 4.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

<sup>115</sup> Pennsylvania, *The Statutes at Large of Pennsylvania from 1682-1801. Compiled under the Authority of the Act of May 19, 1887* (Harrisburg, Pa.: State Printer, 1896), X, Chapter DCCCXC, p. 113.

March 1860. As Toadvine and the kid meet in 1848/9, the act would have been current during Toadvine's lifetime. Both the kid's and Toadvine's bodies thus carry the marks of a life of crime and vagrancy that render each recognisable to the other and, after the initial measuring of strength, form a bond of recognition between them.

Where the example of community between the kid and Toadvine may be considered rather negative, this chapter will explore instances of positive recognition in *Suttree* and the Border Trilogy. Yet, it is crucial to acknowledge that not all recognition results in the formation of human bonds or community. Vandebroek suggests that 'it is in part through the routine set of practical classifications [...] that bodies become *class*-ified, that is to say, acquire their distinct and distinguished social morphology'.<sup>116</sup> Toadvine's and the kid's rugged appearances enable not only other criminals and vagabonds to recognize them, but their markings also categorise them as a specific class of people: the criminal class. For such a categorisation and classification to function, the markings on their bodies have to be legible across all social strata. As Bourdieu suggests, the function of the lower classes 'in the system of aesthetic positions is to serve as a foil, a negative reference point, in relation to which all aesthetics define themselves, by successive negations'.<sup>117</sup> Marks such as wounds and scars, frequently associated with violent behaviours and thus incompatible with orderly society, serve not only as site of memory and community recognition, but also as 'negative reference point' for members of mainstream society. This negative recognition thus leads to the classification of the body marked by wounds and scars as unbeautiful and invites practices of exclusion, marginalisation, and penalisation.

Reading wounds and scars thus connects the body as site of memory and recognition to the larger framework of this project, namely the politics of the unbeautiful lower class body within a society divided into hierarchical structures

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<sup>116</sup> Vandebroek, p. 228 [italics in original].

<sup>117</sup> Bourdieu, p. 57.

and hegemonic systems of power. Tracing memory and recognition across the four novels, this chapter will detail McCarthy's remembering body within a wider socio-political context and highlight how the recognition of the beautiful body leads to both excessive policing and social control, and the formations of communities of broken bodies. These communities, I demonstrate, are not passive recipients of power and discrimination, but use their bodies to resist systemic and systematic marginalisation.

## ***2.2. The Body as Site of Memory***

As we can see with increasing clarity, the body in McCarthy's work serves as memento of his characters' lived histories. McCarthy portrays bodies marked by scars and wounds, tracing both history and interiority on, rather than within, his characters. The prominence of physicality over psychology in his descriptions suggests that the author engages with physicality beyond the level of mere representation and thus invests bodies with narrative. The body becomes a means of reading McCarthy's characters. Wounds and scars provide a physical map upon which to locate the characters' precise cultural and socio-economic position. To understand McCarthy's characters, therefore, it is paramount to read their bodies.

One of McCarthy's characters consistently described as either scarred or in the process of being wounded is John Grady Cole. John Grady suffers physical trauma throughout the trilogy, consistently inscribing memory onto his body. One such instance of injury is the Saltillo prison scene. John Grady and his companion Lacey Rawlins enter prison with '[a] sense of some brooding and malignant life slumbering in the darkened cages they passed'.<sup>118</sup> The atavistic and animalistic atmosphere of violence is palpable in the prison where society confines 'persons who have behaviors different from others that do not conform to the commonly

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<sup>118</sup> *All the Pretty Horses*, p. 186.

defined rules [...] in short, what are called “marginal individuals”<sup>119</sup> Indeed, conflict amongst violent men appears to be the fabric of the Saltillo prison. ‘Underpinning all of it like the fiscal standard in commercial societies lay a bedrock of depravity and violence where in an egalitarian absolute every man was judged by a single standard and that was his readiness to kill.’ John Grady and Rawlins find themselves fighting for a position in the prisoners’ hierarchical system over several days, thus inscribing the narrative of their prison experience onto their bodies until ‘[t]here aint a place on [them] that dont hurt’.<sup>120</sup>

While many of the prisoners in Saltillo may be hardened criminals, John Grady and Rawlins are there due to a corrupt police force. Their bodies were, quite literally, in the wrong place at the wrong time. To extract themselves from their predicament, ‘[o]ther arrangements must be made’.<sup>121</sup> The police captain insinuates that the two Americans will either find the money to ‘make arrangements’ and pay their way out, or die in prison. The captain embodies the arbitrariness of the Mexican justice system, fraught with corruption and power struggles. A system in which figures such as the captain thrive through abusing their position of power is indicative of the problematic nature of hierarchical social structures. The disciplining of John Grady’s, Jimmy Blevins’s, and Lacey Rawlins’s bodies is not a consequence of their actions, but follows the captain’s desire to maintain the structures of power within which he, the captain, has himself become powerful. Grady, Blevins, and Rawlins are misfits not because their behaviour is in itself anti-social, but because their continued existence has the potential to challenge the existing social hierarchy and its embedded power structures. As a consequence, their bodies are violated and the wounds and scars they receive evidence the corrupt politics as well as their personal experiences. In Jimmy Blevins’s case, the corrupt

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<sup>119</sup> Michel Foucault, ‘Madness and Society’, in *Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology*, ed. by James D. Faubion, trans. by Robert Hurley, Essential Works of Foucault 1954-1984 (New York: The New Press, 1998), II, 335–42 (p. 336).

<sup>120</sup> *All the Pretty Horses*, p. 187.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 184.

political system leads to his violent demise, removing both life and identity from Jimmy as his body is left by the road without the dignity of a burial or grave site.

To the same degree that the captain embodies society's flawed power structures, Pérez epitomises the logic of extra-societal justice within the prison. Pérez, living apart from the other prisoners in a situation of privilege made possible by a corrupt justice and penal system, summarises the logic of the Saltillo prison: 'If these men could be controlled they would not be here.'<sup>122</sup> The conversations between John Grady and Rawlins display each characters' understanding of the situation:

All over a goddamned horse, said Rawlins.  
John Grady leaned and spat between his boots and leaned back. Horse had nothing to do with it, he said.<sup>123</sup>

Where Rawlins continues under the assumption that their incarceration is to do with their association with Jimmy Blevins and the supposedly stolen horse, John Grady recognises the more sinister motives behind the captain's actions. Their association with Blevins and the witnessing of his murder requires their removal from a position in which they could undermine existing power structures or exact revenge for Blevins's death. As Americans, they are furthermore expected to have access to pecuniary means with which to bribe the police into releasing them from prison, an action that would implicate them in the corruption. Their incarceration is a blend of small scale corruption and a conspiratorial collaboration between those in positions of power to protect and perpetuate existing power structures.

John Grady's deeper understanding of and insights into the mechanics of power derive from his previous encounters with similar structures. Throughout the text McCarthy hints at John Grady's encounters with violence and corrupt political and economic forces. He knows that his father was a prisoner of war 'in Goshee. He [knows] that terrible things had been done to him there' and he recognises this

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<sup>122</sup> Ibid., p. 201.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid., p. 190.

in his father's body, 'thin and frail, lost in his clothes [...] with those sunken eyes as if the world out there had been altered or made suspect by what he'd seen elsewhere. As if he might never see it right again.'<sup>124</sup> John Grady recognises the experience of the biopolitics of war and its traumatic effects written onto his father's body.

Russell Hillier addresses John Grady's encounters with society's power-holders:

The novel's opening section shows the reader how, in John Grady's country north of the border, all possibilities of unity and solidarity are variously cracked by remorseless industrial-technological progress, uncontrollable social fragmentation, and uninhibited economic greed. The novel evokes these fault-lines and impediments through the fences, automobiles, roads, trains, and railroads that fret the land, John Grady's grandfather's death, his parents' divorce, and his mother's unreflective willingness to sell the Grady land to be gutted and despoiled by Texan oil corporations so that she can prop up her faded theatrical career.<sup>125</sup>

Leaving aside Hillier's casual condemnation of the mother, he – alongside Bell's and Monk's analyses of McCarthy's critical interrogation of 'materialism, the enslavement of reason to technological development, and the isolations of self from community' – identifies the encroaching of modern life and technological advancements as signifiers of power imbalances that displace an older and (in the logic of the Border Trilogy) purer way of life.<sup>126</sup> Progress, and with it money and a society informed and formed by capitalism, becomes the recognisable dominant logic. John Grady, who seeks an older, more organic way of life in the less developed Mexico, finds only older structures of the same logic there.

While McCarthy traces John Grady's experiences with social and economic power structures in the narrative, as Hillier shows, his desire for an older, purer lifestyle is legible in his body, specifically the way he rides horses. John Grady

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<sup>124</sup> *All the Pretty Horses*, p. 210.

<sup>125</sup> Hillier, *Morality*, p. 103.

<sup>126</sup> Monk, *True*, p. 135.

sat a horse not only as if he'd been born to it which he was but as if were he begot by malice or mischance into some queer land where horses never were he would have found them anyway. Would have known that there was something missing for the world to be right or he right in it and would have set forth to wander wherever it was needed for as long as it took until he came upon one and he would have known that that was what he sought and it would have been.<sup>127</sup>

The harmony between John Grady and the horses speaks to his predilection for a more organic lifestyle in unison with the natural world, as opposed to the encroaching modern life of science, technology, and consumer capitalism. John Grady's familiarity with such systems of violence as World War II and the modernisation and capitalisation of rural Texas, a familiarity born of opposition, enables him to grasp his own situation and recognise the hegemonic structures of Saltillo prison and wider Mexican society. This understanding ultimately affords him some protection.

McCarthy describes the knife-fight between John Grady and the cuchillero in the Saltillo prison as a dance of death during which each body is inscribed with the future memories of the scene. John Grady is cut and 'cut again across the outside of his upper arm [...] cut across his lower chest'.<sup>128</sup> The elegance and length of the scene testifies to the diligence with which McCarthy traces each cut to John Grady's body. Evidence from the Cormac McCarthy Papers at the Wittliff Collections shows the attention to detail McCarthy dedicates to the wounded body. In the first draft of the novel, the doctor's visit to John Grady's sickbed is completed in three lines:

[1] Quién está? said John Grady.

[2] The man looked surprised. I am the doctor, he said.

[3] He changed the dressings and nodded and left.

McCarthy later inserts a handwritten note between lines [2] and [3]: 'Insert 302A'. The following page in the folder, page 302A, details the scene much as it appears in the published novel, adding 24 lines of description to the draft of the doctor's

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<sup>127</sup> *All the Pretty Horses*, p. 24.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 205–6.

visit and his examination of John Grady's wounds, indicating McCarthy's consideration for and attention to John Grady's wounded body.<sup>129</sup> John Grady's wounds heal and become scars, as the doctor in prison predicts when he calls him 'a fasthealer'.<sup>130</sup> The scars inscribe John Grady's memories onto his body, rendering the oral recounting of the events obsolete.

John Grady continues to inscribe narratives on his body which become memories and reflections to be read. After he finds himself friendless in Mexico, as Rawlins has gone back to the US and Alejandra has left, his reaction is to get 'very drunk' and 'in a fight', both numbing his body with alcohol and going through an intense physical experience to surrogate the interior pain of his loss with exterior damage to his physical form. He wakes up the following morning and studies his battered face in the mirror:

He studied his face in a clouded glass. His jaw was bruised and swollen. If he moved his head in the mirror to a certain place he could restore some symmetry [...] He remembered things from the night of whose reality he was uncertain.<sup>131</sup>

Cooper notes that there is a shift in this scene from an outside observer to insights into John Grady's memory, illustrating his guilty feelings over his friend Rawlins and the deception of Don Héctor; an insight that, as Cooper observes, is rare for McCarthy. Cooper further posits that 'John Grady's observations about his bruised and stitched-up face shift to reflection'.<sup>132</sup> Shifting the focus from Cooper's linguistic analysis to a reading of the body offers a rephrasing of Cooper's sentence: 'John Grady's bruised and stitched-up face triggers a series of memories.' This implies that the memories of the night before are inscribed into John Grady's face for him to read, and to be reminded of the following morning. The asymmetry of his face mirrors the vagueness of the memory which he can only restore if he moves

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<sup>129</sup> Cormac McCarthy, 'Typescript, First Draft [All the Pretty Horses]' (Alkek Library, Texas State University at San Marcos), pp. 302, 302A, Cormac McCarthy Papers, The Wittliff Collections, box 46, folder 9.

<sup>130</sup> *All the Pretty Horses*, p. 211.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 261.

<sup>132</sup> Cooper, *Heroes*, p. 82.

‘his head in the mirror to a certain place’. McCarthy here grants insight into the character’s interior life through John Grady’s battered face upon which last night’s transgressions are inscribed and become legible alongside the text. McCarthy offers a reading of John Grady’s physical aspects that replaces a detailed insight into the character’s psychology. ‘Memory [...] seems not just fundamentally individual, but quintessentially so, as primal and lonely as pain’, and the process of remembering through the material body contributes to the readers’ understanding of John Grady’s character.<sup>133</sup>

McCarthy not only inscribes the body with wounds and scars, but with actual writing. In *Cities of the Plain*, John Grady’s attempt to rescue Magdalena ends in a knife fight between him and her pimp Eduardo. As during the Saltillo prison scene, McCarthy meticulously details the process in which the two bodies receive their wounds. Evidence from the archives again suggests McCarthy’s meticulous reworking of the scene, as an early draft shows heavy corrections and additions in pencil.<sup>134</sup> Among the several cuts both John Grady and Eduardo receive, the latter signs his work with the letter *E* on John Grady’s thigh, a scene added in a later draft.<sup>135</sup>

He stepped in with his knife and feinted at the boy’s face and then the blade dropped in a vanishing arc of falling light and connected the three bars by a vertical letter *E* in the flesh of his thigh.<sup>136</sup>

As in the knife fight with the cuchillero in *All the Pretty Horses*, John Grady ‘is silenced during this moment of violence’ and the narrative focusses solely on the

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<sup>133</sup> Jeffrey K. Olick, ‘From Collective Memory to the Sociology of Mnemonic Practices and Produces’, in *A Companion to Cultural Memory Studies*, ed. by Astrid Erll and Ansgar Nünning (Berlin; New York: De Gruyter, 2010), pp. 151–61 (p. 153).

<sup>134</sup> Cormac McCarthy, ‘Draft [of *Cities of the Plain*]’ (box 71, folder 5, 1998, n.d.), pp. 296–9, Cormac McCarthy Papers, The Wittliff Collection, Alkek Library, Texas State University at San Marcos. This draft was likely written between late 1994 and mid 1995, as page 4 indicates the date as ‘SAT/NOV 5’ and page 309 indicates the date as MON/AUG 7. 1994-5 are the closest years prior to publication that match the day and date.

<sup>135</sup> Above draft does not include Eduardo’s inscribing an *E* onto John Grady’s thigh. The draft in the subsequent box, ‘Draft [of *Cities of the Plain*]’ (box 71, folder 6, 1998, n.d.), already includes this scene.

<sup>136</sup> Cormac McCarthy, *Cities of the Plain* (London: Picador, 2011), p. 254.

bodies and movements of the two fighters and Eduardo's derisive and provocative comments.<sup>137</sup> Eduardo's initial on John Grady's thigh signifies both Eduardo's involvement in the destruction of John Grady's body, and a claim of ownership and superiority over John Grady, as Eduardo claims ownership and superiority over Magdalena through violating her body sexually. When Billy finds John Grady, the latter is still able to relate parts of what happened, yet he focuses on Magdalena who 'was so goddamned pretty' and whose death triggers John Grady's lust for revenge and death wish: 'I didn't care to live no more. I knew my life was over. It come almost as a relief to me.'<sup>138</sup> John Grady does not need to recount the actual events of the night – the fight and Eduardo's taunting remarks – because they are clearly legible in his cut and mutilated body, signed and accounted for by Eduardo's initial.

There is a curious discrepancy between the two protagonists of the Border Trilogy. As shown above, John Grady's body undergoes a number of processes of violent wounding and scarring, thus rendering his body legible and interpretable. The trilogy's second protagonist, Billy Parham, on the other hand, appears to emerge out of his adventures with few traces of violence on his body. Throughout both *The Crossing* and *Cities of the Plain*, Billy's suffering is easily assumed but rarely manifests in a graspable reaction or legible inscription on his body. Nor does the narrator offer any insight into Billy's psychology or emotional realm, as Cooper's analysis affirms.<sup>139</sup> The vast majority of Billy's actions remain unexplained, although not incomprehensible, and their impact on the young boy in *The Crossing* and the hardened, flat character in *Cities of the Plain* only break through on rare occasions. The first reaction providing an insight into the character is upon his return to his homestead and discovering his parents' blood staining the mattress in the master bedroom of his childhood home. Billy 'looked at it all and he fell to his knees in the floor and sobbed into his hands'.<sup>140</sup> McCarthy here

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<sup>137</sup> Cooper, *Heroes*, p. 92.

<sup>138</sup> *Cities of the Plain*, p. 260, 261.

<sup>139</sup> Cooper, *Heroes*, p. 99.

<sup>140</sup> Cormac McCarthy, *The Crossing* (London: Picador, 2011), p. 169.

dedicates a single sentence to Billy's expression of pain, about half the word count he applies to describing the bloodstain, accentuating what little weight the author assigns to his character's interior life.

In *The Crossing*, McCarthy uses the allegory of the body of the 'arthritic and illjoined' dog that stands like 'some awful composite of grief [that] had broke through from the preterite world'.<sup>141</sup> Perhaps Billy recognises the dog's grief as mirroring his own and therefore chases him away. The next morning, however, Billy wakes up to the recognition that the dog is, not unlike himself, lonely and full of grief, yet his attempt to find the dog fails. Failing to accept the dog as companion and end both their loneliness, Billy repents:

He called and called. Standing in that inexplicable darkness. Where there was no sound anywhere save only the wind. After a while he sat in the road. He took off his hat and held his face in his hands and wept. He sat there for a long time.<sup>142</sup>

Jacqueline Scoones claims that in the Border Trilogy '[c]haracters who suffer loss do so not with operatic grief, but with intensely private pain', yet Billy's pain, in fact, breaks through and manifests exactly in such operatic grief.<sup>143</sup> McCarthy depicts Billy without interiority, yet his grief is dramatic and intense, accompanied by allegorical figures of grief and landscapes to mirror the young man's interior spaces.

Billy exhibits emotional depth towards the end of *Cities of the Plain*, upon finding John Grady has died while he was away to fetch water. In this instance, McCarthy dedicates all of seven lines of the text to Billy's grief, or rather his anger, since he is crying with an angry face and, like Job, calls to God to witness 'what was before his eyes'.<sup>144</sup> Cooper points out that 'Billy may feel angry, but he would

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<sup>141</sup> Ibid., pp. 435, 436.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid., p. 437.

<sup>143</sup> Jacqueline Scoones, "'The World on Fire: Ethics and Evolution in Cormac McCarthy's Border Trilogy', in *A Cormac McCarthy Companion: The Border Trilogy*, ed. by Edwin T. Arnold and Dianne C. Luce (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2001), pp. 131–60 (p. 142).

<sup>144</sup> *Cities of the Plain*, p. 262.

not normally be aware that his *face* looked angry'.<sup>145</sup> The information about Billy's emotional state is therefore provided by an outside spectator. While such an outside spectator is allowed to presume Billy's emotional state through the expression on his face, there is no textual evidence to prove that Billy is actually angry, no insight is granted and the reader must rely on the spectator's reading and interpretation of Billy's body and facial expression.

Despite all Billy's grief and experiences of violence and loss, his material body remains largely unwounded. Nevertheless, it is on Billy's body that McCarthy explicitly evokes the notion that the body remembers:

She patted his hand. Gnarled, ropescarred, speckled from the sun and the years of it. The ropy veins that bound them to the heart. There *was map enough for man to read*. There God's plenty of signs and wonders to make a landscape. To make a world.<sup>146</sup>

Billy's story is inscribed on his hands, scarred by actual ropes or by the life that bound him with figurative ropes, McCarthy's word-creation allows for both readings. The old man's memories of a life of grief and emotional suffering are literally mapped on his hand 'for man to read'. At the time his hand is thus readable, Billy is in his 70s and much of his story, the majority of his memories, are not accessible to the reader. Instead, McCarthy offers a look at his hand, showing that all that is not in the text can be read on Billy's body.

Unlike the characters of the Border Trilogy, in *Suttree* McCarthy provides an unusual amount of insight into Cornelius Suttree's emotional landscape. Luce suggests that the physical, outward landscape of Suttree's Knoxville is a mirror image of the protagonist's interior space and that 'the Knoxville he experiences reflects his inner, spiritual turmoil'.<sup>147</sup> Neumann points out that 'spatial order often indicates the easy accessibility of the past, spatial disorder suggests that the access to the past is difficult, intricate or even impossible'.<sup>148</sup> Suttree's struggles and

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<sup>145</sup> Cooper, *Heroes*, p. 84 [italics in original].

<sup>146</sup> *Cities of the Plain*, p. 293 [emphasis added].

<sup>147</sup> Luce, *Reading*, p. 230.

<sup>148</sup> Neumann, p. 340.

disconnected memories are reflected in the disorganisation of the spaces of his environs. William Prather examines the existential dimension and the death motif of the novel, while Luis H. Palmer calls the text ‘a quest for identity by an alienated young man’.<sup>149</sup> The existential quest in *Suttree* is an undeniable aspect of the novel, yet reading the text’s bodies offers a perspective both on the novel itself, and on McCarthy’s work as a whole. D.S. Butterworth mentions Suttree’s body in passing, positing that ‘with all its various containments and imprisonments, and its layerings under the stuff of the material world, [Suttree’s body] becomes a place where the unfolding of time can be witnessed and grasped at a glance’.<sup>150</sup> Butterworth here opens a line of enquiry, hinting at the body’s capacity to witness and remember. As in the Border Trilogy, McCarthy offers the body in *Suttree* as a site onto which memories are inscribed. The protagonist frequently does ‘not know what had happened to him’ after the bar brawls that leave his body gravely injured. He wakes up ‘vaguely amazed at being alive’ with only his aching and damaged body as testimony to last night’s violence, a token of remembrance of Suttree’s wanderings in the destitute McAnally Flats.<sup>151</sup> Suttree’s quest leads him to the brink of death several times throughout the novel, and his body undergoes dramatic changes before he succeeds in breaking the cycle of poverty, violence, and excessive alcohol consumption.

### ***2.3. The Body as Site of Recognition***

Memories and experiences inscribed on the body through wounds and scars, however, are not only legible for the characters themselves, or, indeed, the reader. The body marked by wounds and scars becomes legible for other characters within

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<sup>149</sup> Palmer, ‘Encampment’, p. 184.

<sup>150</sup> D. S. Butterworth, ‘Pearls as Swine: Recentering the Marginal in Cormac McCarthy’s *Suttree*’, in *Sacred Violence*, ed. by Wade H. Hall and Rick Wallach, Cormac McCarthy’s Appalachian Works, 2nd edn, 2 vols (El Paso: Texas Western Press/University of Texas at El Paso, 2002), I, 131–37 (p. 133).

<sup>151</sup> *Suttree*, p. 228.

the novels, enabling them to recognise characteristics and affiliations on the body. One example of such recognition is Suttree's reading of Joyce's body. Towards the close of his turbulent affair with the prostitute, Suttree appears to wake from a dream of domestic bliss and begins to read her body. 'Suttree liked her', initially, for being the younger of the two prostitutes and 'not unlovely'.<sup>152</sup> Their relationship continues throughout the winter, as long as she remains 'the very witch of fuck', mostly focusing on their carnal attractions and desires.<sup>153</sup> As spring arrives, Suttree begins to read her body more closely, the '[l]ight tracery of old razor scars on her inner wrists' recalling the omnipresence of death, and the memory and suffering Joyce's attempts at ending her life suggest and which are inscribed in her wrist for Suttree to read.<sup>154</sup> Not only does Joyce's scarred wrist remind Suttree of the omnipresence of death and lead him to regard his 'face in the mirror, letting the jaw go slack, eyes vacant. How would he look in death?' 'Her scarred paunch', suggesting abortion or cesarean section, also forcefully reminds him of his dead twin brother and the loss of his own son.<sup>155</sup> As Suttree pays more attention to Joyce's body and begins to read in it her memories and history of suffering and loss, the façade of their relationship begins to crumble, and the affair ends in a violent and destructive argument. Suttree reads in Joyce's body the reality of a woman's and prostitute's life at the margin of society. He recognises her struggles and is forced to realise the lie that had been their domestic bliss and his complicity in her suffering by living off the money she earns by selling her body to strangers.

'Scars,' the Dueña Alfonsa asserts in *All the Pretty Horses*, 'have the strange power to remind us that our past is real. The events that caused them can never be forgotten, can they?' In this scene, the Dueña reads John Grady's scarred face and the scar that 'was put there by a horse'.<sup>156</sup> The scar in John Grady's face not only recounts a history of working with horses or a single incident, but allows the Dueña

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<sup>152</sup> *Suttree*, pp. 465, 468.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 473.

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 486.

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 487.

<sup>156</sup> *All the Pretty Horses*, p. 139.

to read John Grady's character. For a horse to leave a scar visible years later, it must have either kicked or bitten John Grady, yet he continues to work with horses and displays an unequalled knack and passion for the animals. While most characters in the Border Trilogy are adequate horsemen, John Grady's abilities are consistently portrayed as exceptional. His continued work with horses and his unparalleled workmanship enable the Dueña to read and interpret his character. The scar tells the Dueña that John Grady has the potential to endure pain in the pursuit of his passions. This inscription on his face allows a reading and translation of his resilience to other aspects of his life, particularly where his passions are concerned.

The Dueña's reading of John Grady's scar has received McCarthy's careful attention. The first draft of the novel reads as follows:

[Section below crossed out, added above in pencil]

Scars endure, she said.

Scars & losses

The events that cause them can never be forgotten

She watched him, not unkindly. She smiled. Loss is what seems to be most enduring, she said. Losses and dreams. That is what endures. Those are what endure? One shouldn't pontificate in a foreign tongue.<sup>157</sup>

McCarthy's diversion away from 'loss and dreams' to scars emphasises the importance of the Dueña's recognition of John Grady's body. She recognises character traits not unlike her own in him and Alejandra, as the Dueña 'was also rebellious and so [she] recognize[s] it in others'.<sup>158</sup> Her rebelliousness, like John Grady's, is inscribed onto the Dueña's body in the fingers she lost 'in a shooting accident'.<sup>159</sup> Her recognition of John Grady thus leads to his 'not unkindly' reception as well as the Dueña's conviction that he will not be dissuaded from seeing Alejandra because he believes that their love for each other is righteous and will conquer the social barriers that separate them. The Dueña reads John Grady's character in his scar and concludes that to be successful in her attempt at separating the young couple she must make John Grady understand that the harm would be to

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<sup>157</sup> McCarthy, 'Typescript, First Draft [All the Pretty Horses]', p. 199.

<sup>158</sup> *All the Pretty Horses*, p. 140.

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 139.

her, Alejandra, rather than to himself. The scar is evidence that he would hazard the consequences for himself alone. Therefore, rather than cautioning John Grady as to what Don Héctor might do in retaliation, the Dueña explains that in Mexico ‘a woman’s reputation is all she has [...] There is no forgiveness. For women.’<sup>160</sup> John Grady’s scar tells the Dueña that he does not care about his own (physical) safety and therefore she tries to impress on him the severity of the possible consequences for Alejandra. The horse incident that has inscribed itself on John Grady’s face becomes a symbol of his character, as well as a legible inscription for other characters in the novel to read.

The Dueña’s reading and recognition of John Grady’s body and character is an explicit example of body recognition in McCarthy’s work. What is recognisable on the wounded and scarred body is a shared history, a shared experience that has marked the recognised and the recognising body in similar ways. As Arthur and Joan Kleinman state, ‘social experience interrelates social suffering and subjective suffering not as different entities but as an interactive process.’<sup>161</sup> The interactive process of suffering inscribed on the Dueña’s and John Grady’s bodies both relate to their social environment. The Dueña’s rebellion as a young aristocratic woman leads her to engage in a typically masculine activity, ‘[s]hooting live pigeons’, whereas John Grady’s proximity to and work with horses situates him in the proximity of the horse as a potential source of danger to his body, not unlike Robert McEvoy whose injury is a consequence of his proximity to machinery.<sup>162</sup>

However, such benign recognition across social strata is rare in McCarthy’s work. Another occasion of recognition across class boundaries is John Grady’s court hearing after his return to the US, during his attempt to restore Jimmy Blevins’s horse to its rightful owner. In this scene, McCarthy grants John Grady’s

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<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 141.

<sup>161</sup> Arthur Kleinman and Joan Kleinman, ‘How Bodies Remember: Social Memory and Bodily Experience of Criticism, Resistance, and Delegitimation Following China’s Cultural Revolution’, *New Literary History*, 25th Anniversary Issue (Part 1), 25.3 (1994), 707–23 (p. 712).

<sup>162</sup> *All the Pretty Horses*, p. 141.

memories a single sentence: ‘It took him almost half an hour.’ When he finishes no one speaks and while the judge appears favourable, such a fantastic story requires proof. The judge would ‘like for [John Grady] to show the court them bulletholes in [his] leg’ and finds them to be ‘nasty lookin holes’.<sup>163</sup> The healing wound here serves as testimony in John Grady’s favour, validating and verifying both his story and his memories of Mexico. The nastiness of the wounds highlights the violence of the story and marks John Grady’s body as recognisable evidence. The bullet holes have thus inscribed the truth of John Grady’s account of his memories onto his body for the judge and those present in the court to read. Relating how he cauterised the wound with a pistol barrel results in ‘absolute silence in the courtroom’, letting the wounds speak for themselves.<sup>164</sup>

#### ***2.4. The Classified Body***

John Grady’s treatment in the courtroom is not only a rare moment of recognition across social strata, but also a moment in which McCarthy depicts an agent of the justice system, the judge, as benevolent and just. The majority of encounters between McCarthy’s protagonists and law enforcement is fraught with prejudice and systemic injustice, like the aforementioned captain and the ensuing imprisonment of John Grady and Lacey Rawlins and the death of Jimmy Blevins in *All the Pretty Horses*. Across McCarthy’s work, law enforcement officers abuse their position of power, often to their own advantage and to reinforce hegemonic power structures. The criminalisation of specific bodies and the logic of the recognisable body form part of this practice. Those whose bodies do not adhere to mainstream ideals of beauty, the unbeautiful demographic, are significantly more likely to be arbitrarily selected and targeted by law enforcement.

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<sup>163</sup> Ibid., p. 296.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid.

Lacey summarises the abusive potentials of legislation respective of ‘a certain kind of person’, specifically the vagrancy laws.<sup>165</sup> Under this legislation, John Grady, for example, is committing a misdemeanour offence through his mode of existence, as he does not hold any means of supporting himself nor does he have a fixed abode.

Vagrancy is also occasionally used as a catch-all to permit prosecution of those whose conduct or opinions the police deem generally undesirable although it is not otherwise criminal [...] In the thirties it was alleged that vagrancy arrests were used as a method of breaking strikes. In one New Jersey case the defendant alleged that his arrest and conviction as a disorderly person for making a speech occurred because he was a political opponent of the mayor of the town in which the arrest took place. It has also been charged that the police initiate vagrancy prosecutions when they fear that the bringing of more serious charges will reveal their own inefficiency or corruption. Though law enforcement officers can abuse their powers with respect to almost any crime, the breadth and vagueness of the crime of vagrancy render it peculiarly susceptible to misuse.<sup>166</sup>

Lacey not only highlights the innate potential for abuse built into the legal system and hegemonic structures of power, but also that laws such as the vagrancy laws can and have been used to silence political dissent and resistance. Bourdieu suggests that

[s]trictly biological differences are underlined and symbolically accentuated by differences in bearing, differences in gesture, posture and behavior which express a whole relationship to the social world.<sup>167</sup>

This ‘relationship with the social world’ inscribes itself on the body and forms an aesthetic of membership of a specific social sphere. This membership can express itself in such superficial aspects as a police uniform, or Mrs Gregg’s fashionable pinned hat which contrasts with Mrs McEvoy’s apron, as discussed in the previous chapter (p. 11 above). Moreover, marks inscribed onto the physical body equally derive from bearing, posture, and behaviour and thus also have the potential to express membership. Wounds and scars, in a social context, carry the stigma of violent encounters and behaviours. Violence, in turn, is associated with lawlessness,

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<sup>165</sup> Lacey, 1205.

<sup>166</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 1219.

<sup>167</sup> Bourdieu, p. 192.

thus rendering a body marked by wounds and scars outside the law-abiding community and therefore outside mainstream society, a member of the undesirable lower class. Billy Parham intuitively understands this logic as he is searching for John Grady in *Cities of the Plain*. When the police captain describes John Grady as having ‘a cicatriz. A scar. Here.’ Billy instantly responds: ‘That dont make him a bad person [...] He’s as good a boy as I ever knew. He’s the best.’<sup>168</sup> Billy understands this allusion to the scar to imply a flaw in John Grady’s character and hurries to his defence. This is indicative of a reading of the body which regards scars and wounds as signifiers of a violent, anti-social past, a stigma on the recognisable body.

Indeed, the vast majority of wounded and scarred characters in McCarthy’s narratives have received marks on their bodies through acts of overt violence, forms of violence often detrimental to the social order of mainstream society. David Mitchell and Sharon Snyder trace a history of the classificatory reading of the body:

In cultures that operated upon models of bodily interpretation prior to the development of internal imaging techniques, the corporeal surface was freighted with significance. Physiognomy became a paradigm of access to the ephemeral and intangible workings of the interior body. Speculative qualities such as moral integrity, honesty, trustworthiness, criminality, fortitude, cynicism, sanity, and so forth, suddenly became available for scrutiny by virtue of the “irregularities” of the body that enveloped them.<sup>169</sup>

Moral integrity, paramount for the prosperity and success of mainstream society, is traditionally associated with the integrity of the material body, whereas morally questionable characters are, by definition, exposed to situations in which their bodies, and therefore their moral standards, can be corrupted. This logic defines the unbroken integrity of the body as desirable and beautiful, while the broken integrity of the body becomes undesirable and unbeautiful, creating an aesthetics of unbeauty of the undesirable underclass which is opposed to the aesthetics of the beautiful

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<sup>168</sup> *Cities of the Plain*, p. 245.

<sup>169</sup> David Mitchell and Sharon Snyder, ‘Narrative Prosthesis’, in *The Disability Studies Reader*, ed. by Lennard J. Davis, 4th edn (New York: Routledge, 2013), pp. 222–35 (p. 230).

mainstream. The presence of a ‘lacerated, mutilated figure bears the marks of trauma and experience’ and interrupts this ideal of beauty and social harmony.<sup>170</sup>

Cooper points out that ‘[i]n *Suttree*, human beings are aesthetically reduced to a material body through descriptions that focus exclusively on the carnal, the scatological, the sexually and physically deviant and deformed’.<sup>171</sup> By ‘reducing’ the human being in *Suttree* to merely a material body, Cooper implies that the material body is somehow unworthy of examination. McCarthy’s characters, by these standards, frequently fall short of the standard of having a graspable and explicit interior life. Where McCarthy does not provide clear insight into his characters’ psychological motivation, their history, or other traditional means of reading character, he does create an aesthetics of recognition through which his characters can be categorised into socio-economic demographics whose history and character is inscribed onto their bodies.

Luce suggests that it is in fact Suttree who reads the bodies and faces of his peers and that these instances, as Cooper’s analysis of the Border Trilogy in *No More Heroes* also shows, are reflected in the narrative perspective: ‘When he reads the faces of his neighbors Doll and Ab Jones, his immediate perspective and the authorial perspective merge.’<sup>172</sup> Indeed, Luce’s research of the archival material at the Wittliff Collections evidences that McCarthy’s original intention for his eponymous protagonist was to illustrate ‘Suttree’s desire to chronicle the lives of East Tennessee countrymen, as well as those of urban riverfront blacks and white McAnally toughs,’ an intention that the deletion of scenes from the earlier drafts has made ‘less pronounced in the novel as published’.<sup>173</sup> As chronicler and intended narrator of the novel, Suttree encounters and interprets the underclass body as observer, becoming more empathetic as his affiliations become more intuitive and

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<sup>170</sup> Susan M. Griffin, ‘Scar Texts: Tracing the Marks of Jamesian Masculinity’, *Arizona Quarterly*, 53.4 (1997), 61–82 (p. 62).

<sup>171</sup> Cooper, *Mystery*, p. 190.

<sup>172</sup> Luce, *Reading*, p. 209.

<sup>173</sup> Dianne C. Luce, ‘Tall Tales and Raw Realities: Late-Stage Deletions from Cormac McCarthy’s *Suttree*’, *Resources for American Literary Study*, 38 (2015), 213–56 (p. 250).

natural while his own body receives marks that situate him firmly within the underclass.

Cornelius Suttree occupies a rare space in McCarthy's work. He is one of the few characters whose interiority is glimpsed through the narrative and whose thoughts and insights are occasionally revealed through the narrative perspective. More importantly, Suttree, unlike his peers, is not born into the underclass, but comes from an upper class family and is university educated. He chooses to leave his native social sphere to join the underclass. This change of socio-economic situation problematizes the categorisation and classification of bodies through the notion of beauty and unbeauty. Suttree's upbringing and university education is acknowledged by his peers, albeit on occasion jeeringly and ironically.

Someone down the cell called up to Suttree was he through with the newspaper.

Yeah, said Suttree. Come and get it.

Fold it and pitch it here.

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

Goddamn Suttree, was you not ever a paperboy?

No.

I guess you was on allowance.

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

Here. Let me have it. Fuckin educated pisswillies. He goes to college but he cant roll a newspaper.<sup>174</sup>

Callahan exposes not just Suttree, but all 'educated pisswillies' who may have superior education, but lack basic life skills that the lower classes will learn and be familiar with as they are not 'on allowance'. Directed at both Suttree and at the upper classes, this criticism exposes the divide between the classes as well as the differing skill sets each group is likely to learn through the different uses of their bodies. Callahan's jibe at Suttree poses the question of what an education is – why academic education is valued higher than general life skills – and how education factors into the everyday lives of ordinary people.

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<sup>174</sup> *Suttree*, p. 56 [emphasis added].

In other situations, Suttree's education is mentioned admiringly, such as with the boy Reese and Gene Harrogate:

Did you go to college? the boy said.  
Why?  
I just wondered. Gene says you're real smart.  
Who, Harrogate?  
Yeah.  
Well. Some people are smarter than others.  
You mean Gene aint real smart?  
No. He's plenty smart. You have to be smart to know who's smart and who's not.  
I never figured you to be just extra smart.<sup>175</sup>

Suttree avoids a direct reply, yet his response, both philosophically and linguistically, shows his superior understanding when compared to the boy. Both instances highlight Suttree's origin in the upper class and the problematic nature of his residence of choice amongst the underclass.

However, where Suttree's class membership is chosen, it is already readable on his body at the beginning of the novel. When Harrogate asks why Suttree was in the workhouse, Suttree replies: 'Nothing. Laying drunk.'<sup>176</sup> The arrest and sentence to time in the workhouse for the crime of being drunk evokes Lacey's discussion of the 'offense [...] of being a certain kind of person', the vagrancy laws.<sup>177</sup> Suttree's body, as well as his behaviour, shows the signs of underclass membership that the police identify and use to single him out under the vagrancy legislation. In her work on the figure of the flâneur, Jillett discusses vagrancy laws in *Suttree*:

With the vagrancy laws being what they were, this enforced state of homelessness created a set of conditions in which prosecution became synonymous with persecution. In the general push toward beautification, little consideration is given to the further displacement of these already marginalized figures.<sup>178</sup>

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<sup>175</sup> Ibid., p. 387.

<sup>176</sup> Ibid., p. 66.

<sup>177</sup> Lacey, p. 1203.

<sup>178</sup> Louise Jillett, 'Flânerie, Vagrancy, and Voluntary Exile in *Suttree*', in *Cormac McCarthy's Borders and Landscapes*, ed. by Louise Jillett (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), pp. 143–62 (p. 160).

The beautification, or gentrification, of specifically urban spaces pushes the vulnerable further toward the margins and removes unbeautiful bodies from visibility. Thus, Suttree's unbeautiful body becomes the target of law enforcement and their biased practices to protect the aesthetics of mainstream society.

Suttree, however, is not a reliable character. In his conversation with the boy Reese he provides a different narrative as to his time in the workhouse.

I was with some guys got caught breaking into a drugstore.  
What did you break in for?  
They were trying to get some drugs. Pills. They got some cigarettes and stuff. I was outside in the car.  
I guess you was keeping the motor running and lookout and all.  
I was drunk.<sup>179</sup>

According to this version of events, Suttree was implicated in the crime of burglary, even if he did not directly participate. While the discrepancy in Suttree's stories complicates him as a character, either version of the story confirms that his body and his behaviour mark Suttree as fully transitioned member of the underclass. Despite his upper class upbringing, he is recognisable as belonging to the underclass both by his new peers and by those maintaining existing social hierarchies and power structures, that is, law enforcement. As Suttree practices behaviours deemed unlawful or undesirable by the dominant class, he continues to mark his body as unbeautiful. His upbringing does not prevent him from transitioning into the underclass, but his underclass practices may prevent him from transitioning back, as the marks and scars on his body are permanent. The question of Suttree's future remains open, as the novel ends with his leaving Knoxville with no indication of his plans for the future – a deliberate choice on McCarthy's part, as an earlier draft shows the deleted scene of an autopsy of a man who, albeit unnamed, could be Suttree.<sup>180</sup>

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<sup>179</sup> *Suttree*, p. 387.

<sup>180</sup> Cormac McCarthy, "'Left from Suttree' Typescript [Suttree]" (Alkek Library, Texas State University at San Marcos), pp. 874, 875, Cormac McCarthy Papers, The Wittliff Collections, box 19, folder 13.

Suttree, however, is not the most explicitly marked body in the novel. Amongst the multitude of the novel's derelict, wounded, and scarred bodies, the example of Ab Jones is one the most prominent and pertinent examples. Inscribed on Ab's body are memories and '[s]tories of the days and nights [...] the scars, the teeth' are written on Ab Jones's 'battered face,'

such galaxies of scars and old rendings mended and slick and livid suture marks [...] like some dusky movie monster patched up out of graveyard parts and stitched by an indifferent hand.<sup>181</sup>

Luce likens Suttree's perception of Ab's body to 'Frankenstein's monster imagery', yet this does not necessarily establish 'Ab as a comparable allegorical figure of human kind set in opposition to his or her maker'.<sup>182</sup> Ab Jones's scarred body is both profoundly personal and a result of his socio-economic environment, recounting a history of violence and rebellion against police forces and the social control of the black body in a Southern US city during the years immediately preceding the *de jure* abolition of segregation and the Jim Crow laws.

Ab Jones's story is a signifier of the inseparability of race and class in US society. His body, unlike Suttree's, is marked from birth by his racial identity in a racially divided, white dominated society. His body, superficially, adheres to the stereotype of the 'angry big black man' that continues to pervade the discourse about race in the Anglophone Western world. In 1944, less than a decade before *Suttree* is set, Gunnar Myrdal published a comprehensive study analysing race relations between the white and black population, particularly in the Southern states. Myrdal finds that '[p]ractically all public officials in the South are whites. The principle is upheld that Negroes should not be given positions of public authority even on a low level. This situation is, of course, closely related to their disenfranchisement.'<sup>183</sup> Within this structure of systemic exclusion from access to cultural and social improvement and capital, Myrdal further asserts that '[n]egroes

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<sup>181</sup> *Suttree*, pp. 280-1.

<sup>182</sup> Luce, *Reading*, p. 251.

<sup>183</sup> Gunnar Myrdal, *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy*, II vols (New York; London: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1944), I, p. 535.

are arrested and sentenced for all sorts of actual or alleged breaks of the caste rules, sometimes even for incidents where it is clear that their only offense was to resist a white person's unlawful aggression'.<sup>184</sup> Meanwhile,

the policeman in the South is not considered a professional man and is looked down on generally by the middle class whites, [yet] an appointment to the police force means an advance in income and economic security to poor and unskilled workers [...] He [the policeman] is a frustrated man, and, with the opportunity given him, it is to be expected that he becomes aggressive. There are practically no curbs to the policeman's aggressiveness when he is dealing with Negroes whom he conceives of as dangerous or as "getting out of their place".<sup>185</sup>

Myrdal's study illuminates the backdrop of Ab Jones's body classified as racial other and lower class. Ab's violent encounters with the police are not caused by his aggression, but originate in a prejudiced, poorly educated law enforcement system and Ab's experiences of and encounters with injustice.

Both the published novel and the archival materials show that McCarthy is aware of the racial politics and discriminatory practices in mainstream society in the early 1950s. After one of Ab's violent encounters with law enforcement, Suttree visits the Jones' and meets the derelict Smokehouse who works for them. The racial tensions of the time are immediately evident when Smokehouse, destitute and always scheming for money, his 'racked body like something disjointed and put back by drunken surgeons, the elbows hiked out, the feet bent wrong', remarks that '[t]hings is come to a sorry pass when a white man has to look to a nigger for work'.<sup>186</sup> Smokehouse's body and narrative firmly situate him within McCarthy's McAnally underclass. Yet, despite being economically worse off than Ab and Doll Jones, society's white racial default allows him to speak derogatively about those who employ him, highlighting how deeply rooted the racial bias rests even in those at the very margin of society.

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<sup>184</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 536.

<sup>185</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 539–40.

<sup>186</sup> *Suttree*, p. 245.

The following conversation ensues between Ab and Suttree:

He [Ab] shifted his huge frame and so clearly was he in pain that the fisherman [Suttree] sat at the foot of the bed and asked him what was wrong.

[...]

Same old shit. Your little blue friends.

[...]

Did they put you in jail?

[...]

Bein a nigger is a interestin life.

You make it that way.

They dont like no nigger walking around like a man, Jones said.

[...]

Suttree could see the huge veined hands in the gloom, black mannequin's hands, an ebon last for a glovemaker's outsize advertisement. They were moving as if to shape the dark to some purpose [...]

I was born in nineteen and hundred [...] I went on the river when I was twelve. I weighed a hunnerd and eighty pound then. This white man shot me cause I whipped him [...] I was older then, must of been fourteen [...] Thowed my black ass in the jailhouse. Went up the side of my head with they old clubs and shit. I laid there in the dark, they aint give me nothing to eat yet. That was my first acquaintance with the wrath of the path. That's goin on forty years now and it dont signify a goddamn thing [...]

Suttree bent to see his face. Jones blinked, eyeballs like eggs in the mammoth black skull. He must have read his pale friend's look because he said almost to himself: That's the truth.<sup>187</sup>

Ab's body, marked by his race, gender, and size, renders him a target for arbitrary policing and violent encounters with law enforcement, and has done so for forty years. Jones is clearly conscious that his pre-marked body (black, large, male) render him a target. To him, the only way to protect his body and masculinity is to counter violence with violence. In the transcribed conversation between James Baldwin and Nikki Giovanni, *A Dialogue*, Baldwin traces masculinity and emasculation of black men in US society:

You know if you lose your centre, and let's say the center is your sex, if you lose that, if you allow that to be destroyed, then everything else is gone [...] I had to watch my father and what my father had to endure to raise nine children on twenty-seven dollars a week – when he was working. Now, when I was a kid I didn't know at all what the man was going through; I didn't know why he was always in a rage; I didn't know why he was impossible to live with [...] he couldn't quit his twenty-seven-dollars-and-fifty-cents-a-week job *because* he had nine kids to feed. He couldn't say [...] "I don't like white

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<sup>187</sup> Ibid., pp. 247–8.

people.” He couldn’t say anything [...] how can you explain to a five-year-old kid? - “My boss called me a nigger and I quit.” The kid’s belly is empty and you see it and you’ve got to raise the kid. Your manhood is being slowly destroyed hour by hour, day by day. Your woman’s watching it; you’re watching her watching it [...] It’s not her fault, it’s not your fault, but there it goes because the pressures under which you live are inhuman [...] it’s not your father’s fault and it’s not your fault; it’s the fault of the people who hold the power because they have deliberately trained your father to be a slave.<sup>188</sup>

Coupled with Myrdal’s analysis of the systemic exclusion of the black population from the means of advancing themselves in US society, the prevention of African Americans from accessing the societal ideal of the American Dream, Ab Jones’s body traces not simply the history of a violent, large, black man. Rather, his body becomes the surface upon which injustices built into a society based on racial segregation and white supremacy have inscribed themselves.

McCarthy’s understanding of the historical context of the black body is evident especially when consulting the above scene in an early draft of the novel.

A black man’s life is hard.

You make it hard.

Maybe.

Any man’s life is hard. Particularly if he has nothing. Look at Smokehouse.

That aint what I mean. Smokehouse is a bigger nigger than me, <Niggers can be any color.> They got them on both sides of the track in McAnally. White on one and black on the other. Any side of the track over there is the wrong one. But bein black and bein a man is a hard thing. White ass dont want a black to act like a man. Look like one either. Well, I’m a man first and a nigger second and anything else you want to make of me comes after.<sup>189</sup>

Whereas the published novel implies that within McAnally there are some areas in which several black families live, the above scene, deleted during the editing process, clearly states that racial segregation is shaping the marginalised communities as well as mainstream society. Suttree’s frequent and friendly interactions with all members of the underclass, independent of race, indicates that the marginalised community is more flexible than the white middle- and upper-

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<sup>188</sup> James Baldwin and Nikki Giovanni, *A Dialogue* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1973), pp. 41–2 [italics in original].

<sup>189</sup> Cormac McCarthy, ‘Holograph Notes on Language and Vocabulary [Blood Meridian]’ (Alkek Library, Texas State University at San Marcos), p. 355, Cormac McCarthy Papers, The Wittliff Collections, box 35, folder 4.

class communities. In addition, Ab Jones's soliloquy resounds Baldwin's argument about the impossibility of black masculinity within a racist society, as well as Martin Luther King's criticism expressed in *Letter from Birmingham Jail*:

But when you have seen vicious mobs lynch your mother and father at will and drown your sisters and brothers at whim; when you have seen hate-filled policemen curse, kick and even kill your black brothers and sisters; when you see the vast majority of your twenty million Negro brothers smothering in an airtight cage of poverty in the midst of an affluent society [...] when you are humiliated day in and day out by nagging signs reading "white" and "colored"; when your first name becomes "nigger", your middle name becomes "boy" (however old you are) and your last name becomes "John" [...] when you are forever fighting a degenerating sense of "nobodiness" [...] There comes a time when the cup of endurance runs over, and men are no longer willing to be plunged into the abyss of despair.<sup>190</sup>

The aesthetics of Ab Jones's body, prior to his violent encounters with the police, already situate him low on the social scale and create an environment in which he must choose between passive acceptance and violent resistance. Social mobility and access to cultural, social, and economic capital are not options available to Ab.

Ab's body commemorates every encounter in its scars and provides a history of his life that will eventually lead to his violent death. McCarthy does not simply reduce Ab Jones to a material body, but offers 'galaxies of scars' as wondrous and perhaps beautiful as galaxies of stars. The scar galaxies on Ab's body demand to be read the way stars can be read, and the skilled reader can navigate Ab's body, tell where he has come from and where he is going according to the narrative written on Ab's body. McCarthy does not explicitly mention segregation and Jim Crow, nor does he situate Ab's struggles in the early stages of the Civil Rights Movement. The history of the black struggle for equal rights in US is inscribed, remembered, and epitomized on Ab's body and the scars that mark him.

In Ab's final scene Suttree finds him, weak and leaning against a wall. Yet, when the police cruiser stops for them, 'the black [begins] to come erect with a strength and grace contrived out of absolute nothingness.' The history between Ab

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<sup>190</sup> Martin Luther King Jr., *Letter from Birmingham Jail* (St Ives: Penguin Books, 2018), pp. 8-9.

and the police has become deeply ingrained in Ab's scarred body. Faced with his tormentors one last time, even weak and broken, Ab's body musters all his strength once more and enters into his final fight until he is dragged 'bleeding and senseless' into a cell. Days later, Ab succumbs to his injuries, his body finally giving way under the violence that has shaped his life and body. The final wounds on Ab's body form the final inscriptions of his history of violence and are prefigured in his description as 'dusky movie monster patched up out of graveyard', the graveyard to which his body will now return.<sup>191</sup>

## **2.5. Community of Broken Bodies**

Law enforcement's ability to recognise Ab Jones's and John Grady's bodies, however, is not unique. Indeed, the root of the word 'recognise' is the Latin *recognoscere*, 'to know again, to recall to mind,' *re* meaning 'again,' and *cognoscere* meaning 'to learn' or 'to become acquainted with', or 'to know'. Who, then, can really 'know again' those bodies marked by wounds and scars and, by extension, bodies marked by extra-legal behaviours? It may be more accurate to speak of the upper and law enforcement classes as those 'identifying' the underclass body aesthetic, whereas recognition, a 'recalling to mind' or 'knowing again,' occurs amongst members of the same aesthetic. Through scars and wounds, bodies become identifiable from without and recognisable from within specific social groups. Manier and Hirst point out that 'the identity of the community is constituted [...] by community members who share not simply similar narratives, but also patterns of thought and/or lived history', a lived history inscribed on the body which enables members of specific communities to recognise each other.<sup>192</sup>

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<sup>191</sup> *Suttree*, p. 530, 534, 281.

<sup>192</sup> David Manier and William Hirst, 'A Cognitive Taxonomy of Collective Memories', in *A Companion to Cultural Memory Studies*, ed. by Astrid Erll and Ansgar Nünning (Berlin; New York: De Gruyter, 2010), pp. 253–62 (p. 253).

*Suttree*'s Gene Harrogate is one of the characters who becomes recognisable to his peers during the course of the novel. Introduced as 'pale and weightless', Harrogate's body is as yet unmarked, if somewhat thin and small.<sup>193</sup> The section introducing 'the moonlight melonmounter' ends in 'blood oozing from that tender puckered skin' where it is torn by a shotgun.<sup>194</sup> The pristine body of the innocent country mouse changes into a scarred map that traces Harrogate's failings, a step in his transformation from country mouse to city rat. The wounds, healed into scars on his body, and his subsequent relocation to Knoxville foster his introduction into *Suttree*'s world of the McAnally underclass community. Yet, the rules of this community are not automatically accessible to the hapless Harrogate. Although his body has changed, Harrogate fully graduates as a member of the underclass in the workhouse where his undersized body initially separates him as 'the smallest prisoner' from the other imprisoned members of the underclass.<sup>195</sup> This is particularly evident when he is sent back from work detail to assist in the kitchens because his weak body is judged unfit for the hard physical labour involved. His wounds and scars speak both of transgression and of survival, and it is in prison that Harrogate acquires the necessary knowledge and skillset to fully graduate into a member of the McAnally underclass and to launch his career as petty criminal and repeat convict. Recognising Harrogate as one of his community, *Suttree*'s intervention protects Harrogate from harm in the cell brawl that Harrogate unknowingly and inadvertently initiates. *Suttree*'s intervention and guidance establish him as mentor-figure, helping Harrogate to break into his new environment and community.

Harrogate's transition from country mouse to city rat is fraught with moments simultaneously comical and tragic, as his lack of access to a socio-cultural understanding of McAnally Flats is painfully obvious. Monk states that

Harrogate's behaviour and existence are evidence of a modernity in the Appalachians of this period not yet dragging all behind it in the inertia of its

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<sup>193</sup> *Suttree*, p. 39.

<sup>194</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 58, 42.

<sup>195</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 46.

own momentum, but permitting more primitive creatures to inhabit its outskirts relatively untouched. Harrogate is the finest example in McCarthy of the non-modern's encounter with modernity, and McCarthy is at pains to impart to him an unworldliness, have him engaged in acts almost incomprehensible in the modern world, and surround him with language and images of times before the rise of technology.<sup>196</sup>

#### Yet Harrogate as “the hillbilly”

personifie[s] characteristics associated with the nation's founders and settlers, which many Americans saw as endangered by a modern, industrialized, and increasingly atomized society. Such elements included the pioneer spirit; strong family and kin networks ruled by benevolent patriarchs; a clear sense of gender roles; a closeness to nature and the land; authenticity and purity; rugged individualism and a powerful sense of self; and the “horse sense” of average people as opposed to scientific and bureaucratic ways of thinking.<sup>197</sup>

Despite his many misadventures and failures, Harrogate continues to seek the McAnally community, especially Suttree as the ‘benign patriarch’. He pioneers several projects, the bank vault heist or the telephone booth scheme, for example, that he identifies as possibilities to gain access to economic, if not social or cultural, capital. In all his ridiculousness, readable in his body and his dress, Harrogate is spirited and benign, if ignorant and doomed to fail.

Critics have hitherto suggested that the destitute of McAnally Flats are society's rejects. Palmer, for example, argues that ‘the denizens of McAnally Flats are society's rejects, not rebels. They are not united by choice, by institutions, by family, or by a shared philosophy. Only Suttree is there by choice.’<sup>198</sup> Yet, McCarthy frequently suggests that the inhabitants of McAnally Flats recognise each other – ‘If he aint from McAnally bust him’ – forming a community with strong bonds and support mechanisms.<sup>199</sup> In his study on the development of ideal-type bodies, Kenneth R. Dutton argues that ‘[i]n our attempt to derive meaning from our social environment, the body is a fundamental resource’ as it provides the

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<sup>196</sup> Monk, *True* p. 68.

<sup>197</sup> Harkins, p. 6.

<sup>198</sup> Palmer, ‘Encampment’, p. 197.

<sup>199</sup> *Suttree*, p. 226.

information as to our specific place and role within society.<sup>200</sup> After his initiation into McAnally, Harrogate becomes a member of the community, albeit initially viewed with suspicion by some. As such, his wellbeing is of concern to his peers, particularly Suttree who becomes Harrogate's reluctant friend and mentor. After Harrogate finds him in his houseboat, Suttree assists the newcomer in finding a living space:

Do you not know of any place?  
How about the viaduct? Have you looked under there?  
Where's it at?  
You can see it right here. See?  
Harrogate followed his pointing finger, looking out the open door.<sup>201</sup>

While the pointing out of the door and away from his own home could be read as Suttree sending Harrogate away, Suttree actually points him towards a place that is visible and visit-able, in short accessible, from Suttree's location. In the subsequent text, Suttree indeed visits Harrogate several times and passes on advice about, for example, the mattress needing a frame to stop it from moulding, or about the metal rod that could potentially electrocute passers-by. More importantly, Suttree dedicates several days to finding 'Harrogate wounded and covered in shit' after Harrogate descends into the city's tunnel system and blows up the mains rather than a bank vault.<sup>202</sup> Supporting Harrogate in his transition from his rural home into McAnally, Suttree becomes a spokesperson for the community and friend to the friendless.

Apart from a strong existing bond with the residents of McAnally, Suttree also approaches newcomers and passers-through with familiarity and kindness. When the goatman arrives in McAnally, Suttree visits him and eventually trades one of his fish for the goatman's old postcards, although he could have sold the fish for cash money on the market. Another such encounter is Suttree developing friendship with Michael the Indian. Michael, too, newly arrives on the riverbank

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<sup>200</sup> Kenneth R. Dutton, *The Perfectible Body: The Western Ideal of Physical Development* (London: Cassell, 1995), p. 169.

<sup>201</sup> *Suttree*, p. 138.

<sup>202</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 331.

and is visited by Suttree. Together they share drinks and turtle soup and Michael later attempts to find Suttree in the hotel, although it remains unclear if the visit is to seek assistance or to enquire after Suttree's health, which is deteriorating drastically at the time. The shared unbeautiful physicality and geolocation enables Suttree to recognise members of his chosen class whom he welcomes to McAnally through visits and presents of food or drink.

During winter, Suttree passes '[w]hole legions of the maimed and mute and crooked deployed over the streets in a limboid vapor of smoke and fog' to make sure his companions are safe in the cold.<sup>203</sup> He finds Harrogate in 'a pale blue color' and tells him that he will 'freeze down here'.<sup>204</sup> They share a Thanksgiving dinner and Suttree persuades Harrogate to find a place where he can pass the cold months safely. Suttree goes 'to see how the old man is' and makes sure his friend the ragpicker, too, is safe from the cold.<sup>205</sup> Similarly, when Suttree is injured in a bar brawl or severely ill, his friends find him and take him to hospital. Palmer disassociates the shared socioeconomic background of the McAnally inhabitants from the possibility of community, as the

group of strange and inappropriate characters that the narrative clusters around Cornelius Suttree is a community only in the broadest sense of the word, but they do share a class position at the bottom, in what we now euphemistically call the "underclass".<sup>206</sup>

The shared lived experience, the mutually recognisable bodies, and the struggles against shared injustices, however, do create a sense of community that is evident both across *Suttree* as well as other novels; and these factors also counteract what Monk calls 'the explosion of community and the separation of individuals into consuming bodies'.<sup>207</sup> Rather than rendering community questionable, the situation

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<sup>203</sup> Ibid., p. 204.

<sup>204</sup> Ibid., p. 206.

<sup>205</sup> Ibid., p. 210.

<sup>206</sup> Palmer, 'Encampment', p. 85.

<sup>207</sup> Monk, *True*, p. 69.

and geolocation of McCarthy's poor and vulnerable creates alternative unconventional, but valid and kind, social connections.

A sense of community and shared experience and suffering is common also throughout the Border Trilogy. The topology of the trilogy is decidedly different from McCarthy's only urban novel *Suttree*, yet the lower classes remain the central concern. Huddled together in the outskirts of Knoxville, the poor and destitute in *Suttree* form a large community, while the Border Trilogy traces the wanderings of poor young American men in the destitute and poor regions of Mexico and the southern US border states. John Grady, Rawlins, Billy and Boyd Parham all are frequently welcomed into the homes of the poor and destitute Mexicans they encounter and who share food and shelter with the young Americans. As John Grady and Rawlins encounter a group of workers, '[t]he vaqueros knew them by the way they sat their horses', recognising the fellowship of those who ride horses and herd cows in each other's bodies. As Bourdieu affirms, "'class" [...] only exists through the struggles for the exclusive appropriation of the distinctive signs which make "natural distinction".'<sup>208</sup> This natural distinction on the vaquero's, or cowboy's, bodies renders the young Americans' physicality, the 'way they sit their horses', recognisable as being off the vaqueros' own kind. Indeed, an earlier draft of *All the Pretty Horses* attests to the universality of recognition between working men, or farmhands. John Grady's and Rawlins's arrival at Don Héctor's hacienda is described as follows in the novel as published:

An hour later in the failing light they were helping the vaqueros drive the cattle into a holdingpen. The gerente had ridden up from the house and he sat his horse and picked his teeth and watched the work without comment. When they were done the caporal and another vaquero took them over and introduced them namelessly and the five of them rode together back down to the gerente's house [...] the gerente questioned them closely as to their understanding of ranch work while the caporal seconded their every claim and the vaquero nodded and said that it was so [\*] and the caporal volunteered testimony on his own concerning the qualifications of the güeros.<sup>209</sup>

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<sup>208</sup> Bourdieu, p. 250.

<sup>209</sup> *All the Pretty Horses*, p. 97.

The first draft of the novel reads ‘the caporal seconded their every claim and the vaquero nodded and said that it was so [\*] *such is the natural conspiracy among workingmen everywhere in the world*’, the italicised quotation crossed out in pencil during the editorial process.<sup>210</sup> The universally recognisable body of men who work with horses and cattle, McCarthy insinuates, creates a community bordering a ‘natural conspiracy’ of support and fellowship amongst men of that class. No names or credentials are required for this community to form, as the quality of the body of the working man speaks for the quality of the character and the membership in the community.

The importance of the recognition of the body marked by wounds and scars is particularly evident in *The Crossing*. The Cormac McCarthy Papers at the Wittliff Collections contain correspondences between McCarthy and a variety of experts contacted for advice. This includes a letter from Barry G. King, Jr. M.D, a medical doctor who read an early draft of the scene of Boyd Parham’s bullet wound and surgery. In this letter, King provides extensive commentary on the plausibility of the scene in the early draft, and a comparison with the published version shows McCarthy’s care and interest to render both the wound and the doctor’s treatment of it as plausible and realistic as possible.<sup>211</sup> Boyd’s bullet wound, caused by the hacendado’s man – who holds disciplinary powers not dissimilar to the power of law enforcement in the Southern US states – marks Boyd’s body as part of the revolutionary struggles against the oppressive upper classes in Mexico. His wounded body marks Boyd as one of the campesino class, especially since the wound was caused by a member of the oppressing class against which the revolutionaries had attempted to rebel in the preceding decades. As Kleinman and Kleinman explain, ‘social experience interrelates social suffering and subjective suffering not as different entities but as an interactive process.’<sup>212</sup> The reality of the

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<sup>210</sup> McCarthy, ‘Typescript, First Draft [All the Pretty Horses]’, p. 140 [emphasis added].

<sup>211</sup> Barry G. King Jr. M.D., ‘Barry G. King Jr. M.D. to McCarthy [The Crossing]’, 29 November 1993, Cormac McCarthy Papers, The Wittliff Collection, Alkek Library, Texas State University at San Marcos, box 55, folder 2.

<sup>212</sup> Kleinman and Kleinman, p. 712.

young American's story becomes secondary, since the visible memory inscribed in Boyd's body is interpreted by the campesinos in congruence with their own history and the collective memory of their bodies. The memories on Boyd's body and the bodies of the campesinos become interrelated and thus Boyd's story, as interpreted by the people, becomes the story of the corrido that eventually leads Billy to Boyd's grave.

## ***2.6. The Body as Site of Resistance***

The community that adopts Boyd Parham as one of their own, the oppressed campesino class in a Mexico torn by revolution and civil war, are the result and embodiment of what Scoones calls McCarthy's 'accounts of extraordinary human cruelty, violence, and disasters', their suffering the direct result of the struggles for power and wealth of the upper classes, feeding the system of continued exploitation of those already vulnerable in Mexican society.<sup>213</sup> Mementoes of the Mexican Revolution surface intermittently throughout the Border Trilogy, most regularly on the bodies of campesinos the young Americans encounter during their wanderings. One such memento of the revolution is the old man who shares a cell with John Grady and Rawlins and who 'had given his eyes for the revolution' in *The Crossing*.<sup>214</sup> He is left unbothered by the guards and captain because 'pain for the old [is] no longer a surprise'.<sup>215</sup> As the Dueña recalls Gustavo's analysis, the memory and experience of this shared history has created a community:

those who suffer great pain of injury or loss are joined to one another with bonds of a special authority and so it has proved to be. The closest bonds we will ever know are bonds of grief. The deepest community one of sorrow.<sup>216</sup>

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<sup>213</sup> Scoones, p. 132.

<sup>214</sup> *The Crossing*, p. 282.

<sup>215</sup> *All the Pretty Horses*, p. 176.

<sup>216</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 244.

The special bond formed amongst those who suffer the injustices that led to the Mexican Revolution and that continue to affect the lower classes of the country has created a community of shared suffering. The bullet wound on Boyd's body, in its resemblance to the wounds of the resistance during the revolution and the similarity in ill-treatment of the campesinos and revolutionaries mark Boyd as a member of the oppressed and establish his wound as a mark of resistance against oppressive forms of power.

The echoes of the Mexican Revolution that resound throughout the Border Trilogy are traces of the possibility of resistance to dominant power structures. Bourdieu suggests that

[T]he dialectic of downclassing and upclassing which underlies a whole set of social processes presupposes and entails that all the groups concerned run in the same direction, toward the same objectives, the same properties, those which are designated by the leading group and which, by definition, are unavailable to the groups following, since, whatever these properties may be intrinsically, they are modified and qualified by their distinctive rarity and will no longer be what they are once they are multiplied and made available to groups lower down.<sup>217</sup>

The presupposition that all members of society 'run in the same direction', or strive for the same aims, such as economic, social, and cultural capital, presupposes a social contract followed by all, that the biopolitical management of the populace successfully manages all bodies and thus avoids dissent and resistance. Yet, as the example of the Mexican Revolution shows, McCarthy does not offer a docile population, uniformly striving for access to capital and indifferent or insensitive to injustices within systems of power.

'Resistance,' Howard Caygill suggests,

is motivated above all by a desire for justice, its acts are performed by subjectivities possessed of extreme courage and fortitude and its practice guided by prudence, all three contributing to the deliberate preservation and enhancement of the capacity to resist.<sup>218</sup>

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<sup>217</sup> Bourdieu, p. 163.

<sup>218</sup> Howard Caygill, *On Resistance: A Philosophy of Defiance* (London; New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), p. 12.

An awareness of injustice, by definition, has to precede a ‘desire for justice’ that motivates resistance. Such injustices are manifold across McCarthy’s work and the characters are frequently, explicitly or implicitly, aware of them. John Grady knows that Blevins’s death had nothing to do with the horse and comprehends the captain as ‘a canting bully, blind to his own nature and drunk on municipal power’.<sup>219</sup> Equally, Ab Jones knows that the violence he has experienced at the hands of the police originates in ‘[w]hite ass dont want a black to act like a man. Look like one either.’<sup>220</sup>

While both John Grady and Ab Jones show awareness of their position in unequal power systems, their resistance is not necessarily entirely conscious or performed by ‘subjectivities possessed of extreme courage and fortitude [...] guided by prudence’.<sup>221</sup> Hillier suggests that

John Grady [is] wrestling with the tension between his longing for an ideal of unanimous human community and the lackluster reality he encounters in a world of social, ethical, and spiritual brokenness and apartness.<sup>222</sup>

John Grady, not unlike Suttree, has chosen his life of wandering and farm work by refusing to embrace the onslaught of modernity that changed his homestead into oil country. His choice has pushed him to the margins of a society whose brokenness John Grady is trying to resist by engaging and forming new, spiritually and morally intact, communities:

Throughout John Grady’s story he unflaggingly seeks to reawaken and forge such forgotten fellowship: in belonging to a ranching life that brings humans together to share a common cause in wholesome companionship; in his friendship with Rawlins and Blevins; and, not least, in relationship with the woman he loves.<sup>223</sup>

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<sup>219</sup> Hillier, *Morality*, p. 112.

<sup>220</sup> Cormac McCarthy, ‘Typescript Part 1 of 2 [Suttree]’ (Alkek Library, Texas State University at San Marcos), p. 355, Cormac McCarthy Papers, The Wittliff Collections, box 20, folder 1.

<sup>221</sup> Caygill, p. 12.

<sup>222</sup> Hillier, *Morality*, p. 101.

<sup>223</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 102.

His withdrawal from dominant society has left him at the lower end of societal power, a member of the underclass against which the dominant class can define their morality and power, Nietzsche's "common," "plebeian," "low" [...] transformed into the concept of "bad."<sup>224</sup> Yet, John Grady's desire to forge fellowship and seek community – after his rejection of and from mainstream society – creates the potential to form a resistance. To form a community of those rejected from dominant society and at the receiving end of the violence of unequal power structures both reaffirms humanity and creates systems of support that bear the potential to resist the dominant systems of power. The latter, however, often remains a whispered possibility throughout McCarthy's work.

Suttree, similarly, seeks kinship and community throughout the narrative. Palmer calls *Suttree*'s environment 'a wasteland with a population of waste humans', regarding the marginalised and ostracised of Knoxville from the perspective of dominant society.<sup>225</sup> Yet, Suttree's rejection of his family, his condemnation of his father, who married beneath him and so 'his children are beneath him' and who 'probably believes that only his benevolent guidance kept her [Suttree's mother] out of the whorehouse', suggest a consciousness of the harsh and unjust perspective of those higher on the social scale on those 'beneath' them.<sup>226</sup> Abandoning his privileged class position to join the Knoxville underclass, thus, is not simply an act of rebellion against a domineering father – Suttree is in his 30s and this reductive perspective is rather patronising given that he is a grown, educated man – but can be read as an act of resistance against the violence inherent in society's class hierarchy. Suttree, I suggest, refuses to participate in society's oppressive power structures on the side of the oppressor and instead chooses the side of the oppressed where he actively works to maintain a non-hierarchical community.

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<sup>224</sup> Nietzsche, p. 28.

<sup>225</sup> Palmer, 'Encampment', p. 185.

<sup>226</sup> *Suttree*, pp. 22, 23.

Like John Grady, Suttree finds himself amongst the most powerless of society, where he finds debauchery, criminality, and violence, but also kindness, friendship, dignity, and community. Suttree's resistance to the divisive and marginalising practices of mainstream society are conscious and his concern with human dignity and community perhaps most explicit in his interactions with Harvey the ragman. When he finds Harvey in bed 'with his eyes shut and his mouth set and his hands [...] clenched at either side' looking 'as if he had forced himself to death', Suttree chastises him: 'You have no right to represent people this way [...] A man is all men. You have no right to your wretchedness.'<sup>227</sup> He recognises in the ragman a member of his community, and in his lonely and desperate death the indignity of being forced to live the life of a waste human, a societal reject stripped of all human worth and dignity. Suttree expresses his recognition of the complexities of human connectedness during his Typhoid rambling: 'I know all souls are one and all souls lonely.'<sup>228</sup> Coming to terms with the existential loneliness of existence and the interconnectedness of all souls is the conundrum at the heart of Suttree's wanderings. Resisting the loneliness and alienation caused by society's unequal power structures and dominant narrative's use of the lower classes as negative foil through community is Suttree's attempt to unite the lonely souls into one.

Finally, the most conscious resistance in *Suttree* is enacted by Ab Jones, epitomised in Ab's above quoted soliloquy on the difficulty, if not impossibility, of black masculinity in the Jim Crow South. At around the same time that McCarthy writes *Suttree*, Bettina Aptheker writes that

there are many thousands of originally non-political people who are the victims of class, racial and national oppression. Arrested for an assortment of alleged crimes, and lacking adequate legal or political redress they are imprisoned for long years, in violation of fundamental civil and human rights though they are innocent of any crime.<sup>229</sup>

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<sup>227</sup> Ibid., pp. 507, 508.

<sup>228</sup> Ibid., p. 553.

<sup>229</sup> Bettina Aptheker, 'The Social Functions of the Prisons in the United States', in *If They Come in the Morning... Voices of Resistance*, ed. by Angela Y. Davis (London; New York: Verso, 2016), pp. 51–59 (p. 58).

Ab is not only conscious of these, but has been at the receiving end of ‘the wrath of the path’ for ‘forty year now’.<sup>230</sup> His continued violent struggle against the police is part of a black resistance that, within a few years of Ab’s death, will become the Civil Rights Movement. Whereas the formation of communities of shared suffering creates a benign and beneficial support system, Ab Jones’s resistance, while part of wider struggles, is individual and directly harmful to his body. In fact, his resistance is one that requires ‘extreme courage and fortitude’ as there is no protection for his body and those like him, and with his death Ab Jones is not granted the grace of seeing the end of Jim Crow or the building of the black resistance into a national, and even international, movement. Ab Jones’s resistance may or may not be ‘guided by prudence,’ but it contributes ‘to the deliberate preservation and enhancement of the capacity to resist’ of the African-American community.<sup>231</sup>

## ***2.7. The Impossibility of Female Beauty***

Few characters in McCarthy’s novels are described in detail as beautiful. Interestingly, characters who are thus described are all women, and only rarely do they survive to see the end of the novel. In *Suttree*, only one person is physically beautiful – the mussel fisher Reese’s daughter. Wanda is ‘extraordinarily well put together with great dark eyes and hair’, a description in stark contrast to other characters in the novel.<sup>232</sup> John Lewis Longley points out that Wanda’s mother, for example, ‘is never named, but considerable attention is given to her appearance: a potbellied slattern with lank hair.’<sup>233</sup> Her ‘long white goat’s udders’ mark her as a profoundly unbeautiful underclass body.<sup>234</sup> In contrast, Wanda’s ‘young breasts swinging in the light cloth of her dress’, ‘her perfect teeth, her skin completely

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<sup>230</sup> *Suttree*, p. 248.

<sup>231</sup> Caygill, pp. 12, 13.

<sup>232</sup> *Suttree*, p. 376.

<sup>233</sup> John Lewis Longley, Jr., ‘*Suttree* and the Metaphysics of Death’, *The Southern Literary Journal*, 17.2 (1985), 79–90 (p. 83).

<sup>234</sup> *Suttree*, p. 381.

flawless, not so much as a mole' stand in stark opposition to the unbeautiful bodies that otherwise roam *Suttree*.<sup>235</sup> In *Suttree*'s surroundings, Wanda is an extraordinary exception who does not appear to belong in her environment. Rather than simply marking her body and thus lessening her beauty, McCarthy takes extreme measures to annihilate her beautiful body in a landslide, leaving her crushed beyond recognition. Beauty within the underclass, this suggests, is antithetical and thus cannot last. Another beautiful character suffering annihilation is the young prostitute Magdalena in *Cities of the Plain* who 'was so goddamned pretty'.<sup>236</sup> Being a prostitute firmly situates Magdalena in the underclass, yet her beauty singles her out from her class and the other prostitutes. Like Wanda, Magdalena's beauty also has no place within the class she belongs to and, according to the logic of beauty and un beauty, has to be eradicated.

The only surviving beautiful woman in the four novels under discussion is Alejandra, John Grady's first love in *All the Pretty Horses*. Her beauty seems to John Grady 'a thing altogether improbable'.<sup>237</sup> Alejandra, unlike Wanda or Magdalena, does not belong to the underclass but is the daughter of Don Héctor and therefore a member of the Mexican aristocracy – she is the one beautiful character in McCarthy's novels that may survive. Following the logic of beauty and un beauty as class markers, Alejandra survives since her beauty is within its proper place and her decision against joining John Grady and the lower class reaffirms her position and protects her beautiful body.

## **2.8. Conclusion: Of Beauty and Un beauty**

Rarely in McCarthy's fiction is a body explicitly described as beautiful. Kathy Peiss traces the history of beauty and business, showing 'how businesses profited from their attention to beauty and influenced cultural ideals and social identities'. Peiss explains how '[b]eauty signifies difference in a number of registers, making

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<sup>235</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 421, 426.

<sup>236</sup> *Cities of the Plain*, p. 260.

<sup>237</sup> *All the Pretty Horses*, p. 254.

distinctions between high and low, normal and abnormal, virtue and vice' which renders beauty a decisive factor for economic success and social standing and grants access to what Bourdieu calls social, cultural, and economic capital.<sup>238</sup>

Following this trajectory, beauty and unbeauty become classifying categories for the good and the bad citizenry. It is this classificatory system that McCarthy's narratives examine through the material body. The scarred and wounded bodies that McCarthy describes cannot be classified as conventionally beautiful. While Ab Jones is explicitly likened to a movie monster, characters such as Suttree and John Grady fall into the category of rugged individuals, not ugly, but too marked, scarred, and wounded to be beautiful or socially desirable. Through the categories of beauty and unbeauty the material body becomes a political site, or as Mary Kosut phrases it,

the body can be a cultural resource or lack thereof, depending on the amount of raw material it possesses. A valued body – healthy, attractive, white, heterosexual, etc. – can by extension be more easily converted into economic, cultural, and social capital.<sup>239</sup>

The worth attached to the beautiful body becomes its value and status within the economic system and social order. McCarthy's characters are predominantly members of the lower classes, often with little education and unstructured lives, unable to or uninterested in maintaining employment or participating in conventional societal values. These characters are also described as physically marked through wounds and scars, linking the social under- and lower class to the marked body. McCarthy thus utilises his texts to 'turn signs of cultural deviance into textually marked bodies,' seemingly conceding to the logic of beauty as class marker.<sup>240</sup>

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<sup>238</sup> Kathy Peiss, 'On Beauty... and the History of Business', in *Beauty and Business: Commerce, Gender, and Culture in Modern America*, ed. by Philip Scranton, Hagley Perspectives on Business and Culture (New York; London: Routledge, 2001), pp. 7–22 (p. 8).

<sup>239</sup> Mary Kosut, 'Extreme Bodies/Extreme Culture', in *The Body Reader: Essential Social and Cultural Readings*, ed. by Lisa Jean Moore and Mary Kosut (New York; London: New York University Press, 2010), pp. 184–200 (p. 189).

<sup>240</sup> Mitchell and Snyder, p. 227.

However, through wounds and scars, McCarthy invests the body with a variety of meanings that are not otherwise explicitly stated in his texts. Offering minimal insights into his characters' interior life, McCarthy utilises the characters' bodies as a record of their past that serves as a site of memory. These memories can both trigger moments of remembrance, as in John Grady, and serve as site of recognition for other characters, as in Gene Harrogate. Wounds and scars as markers of the remembering body offer insights into McCarthy's characters that provide new routes to understanding motivation and character. Instead of offering narrative insights into his characters, McCarthy traces memory outwardly, be it on the body, the architectural structures of the stonemason trade, the settings and environments, or Judge Holden's ledger.

Moreover, marked by wounds and scars, the body becomes a site of recognition for other characters. Recognising other bodies creates a community of a shared lived history in which moments of kindness and kinship serve as affirmation of humanity. However, recognition is not unilateral but multidirectional, and wounded and scarred bodies can be recognised among members who share the same history as well as those who stand in opposition to it. McCarthy demonstrates how class division is created based through wounds and scars, stigmatising the lower-class body as violent and contrary to societal ideals by the economically powerful classes. Such stigmatised bodies become unbeautiful members of the lower classes. McCarthy pushes this logic of the unbeautiful body of the underclass to its logical extreme when beautiful underclass characters do not survive. Nevertheless, moments of kindness and kinship among members of the lower classes affirm a basic goodness in human kind that is independent of social, economic, or cultural capital.

## Chapter 3: ‘Here’s one that’s sick of livin’: Alcoholism and Illness

### 3.1. Introduction: Alcohol, Illness, Community, and Resistance

Reading markings on the body, as the preceding chapters show, offers insights into the mechanisms of societal systems of classification and class-allocation. Such

[s]ystems of classification would not be such a decisive object of struggle if they did not contribute to the existence of classes by enhancing the efficacy of the objective mechanisms with the reinforcement supplied by representations structured in accordance with the classification.<sup>241</sup>

Representations of the body classified as below mainstream societal standards regularly feature degrees of extra-legal behaviours that situate the unbeautiful body outside of dominant society not only aesthetically, but morally. As Bourdieu suggests, the focus on these markers of the unbeautiful body reinforces and perpetuates dominant society’s systems of power and classification. This chapter examines the correlation between the drunk and the sick body and systems of classification in the novels *The Orchard Keeper*, *Outer Dark*, *Suttree* and *Cities of the Plain*.

Jean-Charles Sournia establishes the conceptual connection between behaviours deviating from mainstream norms and the consumption of alcohol: ‘Alcoholics behaved in ways that threatened public morals and their violence, whether directed at themselves or inflicted upon others, had been recognized for millennia. Soon [...] all forms of criminality came to be regarded as products of alcoholism.’<sup>242</sup> Reading the intoxicated body factors into judging character and categorising the body into mainstream social hierarchy. The resulting effect is the criminalising of a social class, rather than actual perpetrators of criminal behaviour who might originate in any social stratum. Bourdieu asserts that ‘[i]t is well known that all dominant aesthetics set a high value on the virtues of sobriety, simplicity, economy of means, which are as much opposed to first-degree poverty and

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<sup>241</sup> Bourdieu, p. 480.

<sup>242</sup> Jean-Charles Sournia, *A History of Alcoholism*, trans. by Nick Hindley and Gareth Stanton (Oxford; New York: Blackwell, 1990), p. 101.

simplicity as to the pomposity or affectation of the “half-educated”<sup>243</sup> Dominant aesthetic values become self-perpetuating not in accordance with the dominant societal behaviours, but in opposition to behaviours and aesthetics perceived as common in the lower classes, or ascribed to those classes by others more powerful in the governing social hierarchy.

The value of the body within mainstream society is measured by its potential to create, attract, and produce value within a capitalist framework as well as to adhere to dominant standards of behaviour, morality, and beauty. As Dutton indicates, ‘[i]n a post-modernist world where appearance and “image” are both supreme values [...] not only does the body transmit messages to the society around us, it has itself become increasingly the content of the message.’<sup>244</sup> The appearance of the body is thus established as a site of value judgement, the carrier of classificatory signifiers that underlie social hierarchies. The body replaces personality and becomes a surface for dominant society to read and interpret according to mainstream ideals of beauty and morality. Within this framework, ‘[b]eauty signifies difference in a number of registers, making distinctions between high and low, normal and abnormal, virtue and vice.’<sup>245</sup> Within this context, alcohol consumption signifies a vice and excessive alcohol consumption becomes readable, marking the body as undesirable, unbeautiful, outside mainstream societal ideals and moral standards.

The consumption of alcohol, in mainstream American consciousness, is linked to excessive behaviour, criminality, and lower-class modes of existence. Roy Rosenzweig states that

it was in response to a complex set of social forces – tightened work discipline, shorter workdays, intensified regulations of public recreation, increased working-class incomes – that the saloon emerged as a center of working-class social life.<sup>246</sup>

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<sup>243</sup> Bourdieu, p. 227.

<sup>244</sup> Dutton, p. 178.

<sup>245</sup> Peiss, p. 9.

<sup>246</sup> Roy Rosenzweig, ‘The Rise of the Saloon’, in *Rethinking Popular Culture: Contemporary Perspectives in Cultural Studies*, ed. by Chandra Mukerji and Michael Schudson (Berkeley; Los Angeles; London: University of California Press, 1991), pp. 121–56 (p. 122).

‘Working-class dominance of public drinking places’, Rosenzweig continues, ‘produced a corresponding working-class predominance among those arrested for public drunkenness’, thus solidifying the correlation between public drinking and the lower classes in mainstream social consciousness.<sup>247</sup>

Engaging in communal, public drinking inherently harbours the potential not simply for illegality, but for staging protest and resistance. ‘Not only did the saloongoes implicitly question and sometimes explicitly reject the goals and values of industrial society, such as homeownership, thrift, social mobility, and punctuality; they also often found themselves in direct legal conflict with the police authorities.’<sup>248</sup> Engaging in activities that mark the body as intoxicated and jeopardise dominant ideals of the beautiful, sober, healthy body has the potential to stage the body as a site of protest. Through drinking and public intoxication, ‘the body [...] becomes a potential site for exploring difference and creates both an alternative to and a critique of the distorted narrative of dominant society.’<sup>249</sup> McCarthy’s characters often disengage from dominant society through drinking and sharing in a community of drinkers, rejecting and resisting dominant societal values. The part of the chapter analysing alcohol will focus specifically on *The Orchard Keeper* and *Suttree*. Both novels feature communities of drinkers and moments in which the drunk body directly or indirectly resists mainstream societal narratives and aesthetics as a means to protest and resist oppressive power systems.

Alcohol leaves traces on the body even after its last remnants have left the system. Especially repeated use and abuse of alcohol becomes legible on the body and the body becomes classified as alcoholic.

Doctors were not interested in alcoholism solely for medical reasons and their attitudes mirrored the concerns of the class from which they came. The

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<sup>247</sup> Ibid., p. 136.

<sup>248</sup> Ibid., p. 146.

<sup>249</sup> Olivia Burgess, ‘Revolutionary Bodies in Chuck Palahniuk’s *Fight Club*’, *Utopian Studies*, 23.1 (2012), 263–80 (p. 265).

Burgess’s article does not discuss McCarthy’s work, but fellow contemporary American writer Chuck Palahniuk’s *Fight Club*. Much of Burgess’s analysis can be applied equally to Palahniuk’s and McCarthy’s work, although McCarthy’s bodies do not become utopian sites or projections.

physical and mental degradation of the drinker was nothing compared to the threat posed to bourgeois society by a united band of alcoholics.<sup>250</sup>

Sournia reiterates the drinkers' potential for disrupting mainstream society, but also connects alcohol and illness. The body suffering from the effects of consuming alcohol, as well as related excessive behaviour, occurs frequently across McCarthy's work. An emblematic scene of derailed drinking is *Blood Meridian's* 'The banquet':

They arrived in good order, shaved and shorn and turned out in their new boots and finery [...] The governor had tapped his glass and risen to speak in his well-phrased english, but the bloated and belching mercenaries were leering about and were calling for more drink and some had not ceased to scream out toasts, now degenerated into obscene pledges to the whores of various southern cities [...] At dawn the shapes of insensate toppers lay snoring about the floor among dark patches of drying blood.<sup>251</sup>

Similarly, when the Glanton gang arrives in Jesús Maria, the locals on their way to church 'passed clutches of Americans crazed with drink and these grimy visitants would doff their hats oafishly and totter and grin and make obscene suggestions to the young girls'.<sup>252</sup> As a result of his abuse of alcohol, Glanton is taken ill:

By noon the day following Glanton in his drunkenness was taken with a kind of fit and he lurched crazed and disheveled into the little courtyard and began to open fire with his pistols. In the afternoon he lay bound to his bed like a madman while the judge sat with him and cooled his brow with rags of water and spoke to him in a low voice [...] After a while Glanton slept and the judge rose and went out.<sup>253</sup>

McCarthy directly links Glanton's illness to his drinking, thus connecting the similar markings left on the body and interrelatedness of alcohol and illness.

Rorabaugh traces doctors' and moralists' early discussions of the correlations between alcohol consumption, illness, and social standing, for example in the pamphlet 'Moral and Physical Thermometer': 'Water, milk, and small beer brought health, wealth, and happiness; mixed drinks made with spirits – sickness,

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<sup>250</sup> Sournia, p. 102.

<sup>251</sup> *Blood Meridian*, pp. 178–80.

<sup>252</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 210.

<sup>253</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 202.

idleness, and debt; straight rum and whiskey – crime, chronic disease, and severe punishment; incessant drinking – death.’<sup>254</sup> The connection between the consumption of alcohol and idleness, debt, and crime evidence the ideological undertones and addressees of such post-Revolution moral musings in America. While the connection between alcohol and illness shares the same ideological tone that remonstrates with the drunk and sick body for its inability to work and participate in mainstream society, the truth of that correlation is more immediate and intuitive. Lacey Rawlins and John Grady encounter this experience early on in *All the Pretty Horses*:

You want a drink of this?

I dont think so. I think it’s beginning to make me feel bad.

Rawlins nodded and drank. I think it is me too, he said.

By dark the storm had slacked and the rain had almost ceased. They pulled the wet saddles off the horses and hobbled them and walked off in separate directions through the chaparral to stand spraddlelegged clutching their knees and vomiting. The browsing horses jerked their heads up. It was no sound they’d ever heard before. In the gray twilight those retchings seemed to echo like calls of some rude provisional species loosed upon that waste. Something imperfect and malformed lodged in the heart of being. A thing smirking deep in the eyes of grace itself like a gorgon in an autumn pool.<sup>255</sup>

John Grady’s and Rawlins’s violent reaction and sickness caused by sotol, a distilled North Mexican spirit, echoes the many instances of alcohol-related illness throughout McCarthy’s work, and specifically throughout *Suttree*, the novel at the centre of this chapter,.

Inscriptions on the body, such as wounds and scars, while perhaps not intentional, are often a result of a way of life, an engagement with aspects of life that have the potential to leave traces on the body. John Grady’s work with horses, for example, or Ab Jones’s struggle against systemic police brutality, are both practices in accordance with each characters’ socio-economic situation and ensuing lifestyle that leave the body scarred and marked. The consumption of alcohol, similarly, has the potential to leave the body marked, both as a result of the

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<sup>254</sup> W. J. Rorabaugh, *The Alcoholic Republic: An American Tradition* (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), p. 43.

<sup>255</sup> *All the Pretty Horses*, p. 73.

interaction between alcohol and the body, such as above quoted scene from *All the Pretty Horses*, and through the disinhibiting effects of alcohol that can lead to reckless and violent behaviour, such as the Glanton gang's transgressions during their drinking bouts. Where consuming alcohol, at least before it becomes an addiction, is a choice; illness, on the other hand, is unplanned and often related to socio-economic and geographic situation.

With McCarthy's focus resting predominantly on lower and underclass characters, the spaces they inhabit fail to be conducive to the health of their bodies. Inadequate nutrition, lack of hygiene and clean water, and lack of shelter, among others, are all factors that render the body vulnerable to illness.

Studies of health inequalities have focused on those variables which comprise indicators of people's social circumstances. Social class, gender, "race" and geographical location all influence a person's access to material and social resources (including housing, education, transport, income and social support), living and working conditions, and their social status. In turn, patterns of health and illness are related to these variables. This is because some of the main determinants of health are social and environmental in origin.<sup>256</sup>

Significantly, these are the circumstances in which McCarthy's characters find themselves. 'Emaciate [...] with the wind among her rags [...] like something replevied by grim miracle from the ground and sent with tattered windings and halt corporeality into the agony of sunlight', Rinthy's body traces her poverty and vulnerability and her location at the far outskirts of society.<sup>257</sup> Similarly, McCarthy introduces *Suttree*'s Knoxville as a space where '*the drunk and the homeless have washed up in the lee of walls in alleys and abandoned lots [...] in the grim perimeters about*', socio-locating society's most vulnerable in the grim perimeters of the poor parts of the city, without access to shelter or social, cultural, or economic security.<sup>258</sup> Illness, therefore, is an inevitable aspect of McCarthy's characters' lives and it leaves traces on the body marking their bodies as members of the underclass.

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<sup>256</sup> Sarah Nettleton, *The Sociology of Health and Illness* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2006), p. 170.

<sup>257</sup> *Outer Dark*, pp. 101–2.

<sup>258</sup> *Suttree*, p. 3 [italics in original].

Bryan S. Turner traces the understanding of health and illness within Western societies, specifically within ‘pietist sanitarianism’:

Disease was part of the disequilibrium between body and environment, resulting from abuses of diet, poor hygiene, immorality and, above all, filth.

Health was the manifestation of the dialectic between order and chaos, purity and danger, responsibility and immorality. For pietists, the movement for urban sanitation was symbolic of human responsibility towards the physical environment in removing the evils of poor housing, congested sewers and inadequate ventilation.<sup>259</sup>

While there has long since been a recognition of the correlation between ill health and poor, unsanitary environments, the stigma continues to rest with those living under such conditions. Gregg’s violent diatribe, discussed in chapter one (p. 14 above), shows him, as representative of the power-holding class, condemning the poor for their situation, rather than considering other socio-economic factors and lack of access to social, cultural, and economic capital. This position removes all responsibility for social inequalities from society and places it on the individual. Disconnecting the impact of poverty and the accompanying lack of access to environments conducive to health places the responsibility on those in vulnerable living conditions and their perceived poor hygiene and immorality, rather than viewing their condition as part of wider social structures. Weir argues that ‘[n]ot only has the state become increasingly concerned with managing and maintaining the health of populations but it has supported the role of medicine in policing a social and moral order through public health’.<sup>260</sup> The connection between illness and undesirable characteristics, and thus bodies, is firmly established in dominant society’s consciousness and consequently subject to the policing of ‘social and moral order’, or biopolitics.

Like excessive drinking, illness and ill health are issues of the body and become legible on the body. Illness has, in a similar fashion to sharing alcohol, the

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<sup>259</sup> Turner, p. 72.

<sup>260</sup> Qtd. in: Alexandra Howson, *The Body in Society: An Introduction*, 2nd ed (Cambridge; Malden: Polity, 2013), p. 159.

potential to create communities based on compassion and kindness and originating in a shared history and lived experience of suffering.

The limit of these coincidences of homologous structures and sequences which bring about the concordance between a socially classified person and the socially classified things or persons which “suit” him is represented by all acts of co-option in fellow-feeling, friendship or love which lead to lasting relations, socially sanctioned or not. The social sense is guided by the system of mutually reinforcing and infinitely redundant signs of which each body is the bearer – clothing, pronunciation, bearing, posture, manners – and which, unconsciously registered, are the basis of “antipathies” or “sympathies”; the seemingly most immediate “elective affinities” are always partly based on the unconscious deciphering of expressive features, each of which only takes on its meaning and value within the system of its class variations (one only has to think of the ways of laughing or smiling noted by ordinary language).<sup>261</sup>

The sympathies between those who recognise expressive features, including the body marked by hardship and lifestyle, allow for the creation of communities within which members offer the support that dominant society withholds from its dominated and most vulnerable members.

Such communities based on shared suffering, empathy, and kindness form an opposition to the dominant capitalist ideology of fierce individualism as well as the logic of the worth and moral superiority of mainstream society, which implies the worthlessness of the underclass. Through the reaffirmation of empathy and kindness, McCarthy’s communities of shared suffering affirm their essential humanity and thus establish a form of resistance to the dominant narrative of lower class bodies’ worthlessness, anti-social behaviours and attitudes, and inhumanity. As Foucault posits, ‘[w]here there is power, there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power’, because all members of society are subject to its power structures and resistance can thus only ever operate from within these same structures.<sup>262</sup> Power and resistance, therefore, form a dialectic relationship in which the logic of power generates the resistance, and the logic of resistance generates the requirement for power and social control. As Erynn Masi de Casanova and Afshan Jafar point out,

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<sup>261</sup> Bourdieu, p. 241.

<sup>262</sup> Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction*, trans. by Robert Hurley (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), I, p. 95.

this ‘power-resistance dialectic plays out on and through bodies’.<sup>263</sup> Whereas much of resistance studies interpret this to mean that in order to resist a body has to place themselves in harm’s way, McCarthy, through his communities, offers a model of resistance focused on shared humanity and kindness in order to oppose oppressive structures and systems. Recognising their shared suffering, McCarthy’s underclass communities resist oppressive forces from within the system, creating alternative societal structures centred on community and kindness, in opposition to the fierce individualism of wider society.

### ***3.2. Community of Drinkers***

Max Lerner states that there is a marked difference between ‘those who perform social functions and those who perform social waste’.<sup>264</sup> Those of McCarthy’s characters who engage in communal drinking belong to the class performing social waste, the unbeautiful underclass. Their status as members of the underclass, through the biopolitics governing McCarthy’s work, situates them in a position of perceived powerlessness, both politically and economically, in ‘a society where people are only as valuable as their capacity to consume’ and to produce within the capitalist framework.<sup>265</sup> ‘The problem of the body is thus not simply an issue of epistemology and phenomenology, but a theoretical location for debates about power, ideology and economics.’<sup>266</sup> The trope of alcohol and communal drinking offers an approach to examine these power structures and the biased mainstream perception of the underclass, without romanticising poverty and marginalisation.

Alcohol as a means to disengage from life’s realities has a long-standing tradition across a multitude of cultures. Washington Irving’s short story ‘Rip van

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<sup>263</sup> Erynn Masi de Casanova and Afshan Jafar, ‘The Body as a Site of Resistance’, in *The SAGE Handbook of Resistance*, ed. by David Courpasson, and Steven Vallas, Sage Knowledge E-Book Collection (London: Sage Publications, 2016), pp. 139–55 (p. 140).

<sup>264</sup> Qtd. in: Tim Armstrong, *Modernism, Technology, and the Body: A Cultural Study* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 59.

<sup>265</sup> Burgess, p. 270.

<sup>266</sup> Turner, p. 56.

Winkle', a narrative at the intersection of colonial literature becoming American literature, is an early example of this trope. Rip's wanderings as a farmer of Dutch descent in the Catskill Mountains leads him to encounter a group of dwarfs with whom he shares a drink. He wakes up 20 years later, having slept through the Declaration and War of Independence and the change of rulers from King George to President George Washington. Upon his return to his community, he finds himself unable to cope with these changes and drifts into the margins of the community. Unlike many of McCarthy's characters, however, Rip van Winkle's community tolerates and regards him with benign irony. McCarthy's dropouts, on the other hand, find themselves ostracised from mainstream society, rather than tolerated. Their exclusion from general mainstream society leaves them isolated and marginalised. Unlike Rip van Winkle, McCarthy's characters often find strength in numbers and form communities around the bottle. Bourdieu states that

we can speak of a class fraction although it is nowhere possible to draw a demarcation line such that we can find no one on either side who possesses all the properties most frequent on one side and none of the properties most frequent on the other. In this universe of continuity, the work of construction and observation is able to isolate (relatively) homogeneous sets of individuals characterized by sets of properties that are statistically and "socio-logically" interrelated, in other words, groups separated by systems of differences.<sup>267</sup>

Roy Rosenzweig describes the ritual of treating each other to drinks as subversive, an 'embodied [...] resistance of sorts to the transformation of social relationships into "commodities" – a means of preserving reciprocal modes of social interaction within a capitalist world'.<sup>268</sup> Drinking together thus becomes a form of inclusivity through which the marginalised can form alternative communities independent of their status within wider society and can recognise each other as an excoriated group within that society.

McCarthy situates *The Orchard Keeper* at the peak of the stigmatisation of the consumer of alcohol. Prohibition in America lasted from 1920 and was repealed on 05 December 1933, yet the first official efforts to establish a control mechanism

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<sup>267</sup> Bourdieu, p. 259.

<sup>268</sup> Rosenzweig, p. 144.

over alcohol consumption began as early as 1813, with the foundation of the Massachusetts Society for the Suppression of Intemperance ‘to reassert the waning authority of an elite class through an attempt to control the drinking habits of the lower classes’.<sup>269</sup> The efforts of the Society, as well as the passing of the Prohibition laws a century later, asserted that those consuming alcohol at the time would automatically be classed as criminals and anti-social individuals. ‘The art of eating and drinking’, Bourdieu states,

remains one of the few areas in which the working classes explicitly challenge the legitimate art of living [...] peasants and especially industrial workers maintain an ethic of convivial indulgence. A bon vivant is not just someone who enjoys eating and drinking; he is someone capable of entering into the generous and familiar – that is, both simple and free – relationship that is encouraged and symbolized by eating and drinking together, in a conviviality which sweeps away restraints and reticence.<sup>270</sup>

Rather than understanding or practicing communal drinking as anti-social or illegal activity, the working class, and by extension the underclass, share the bottle as a form of ‘conviviality’ and reaffirmation of community and belonging.

Marginalising bodies marked by the consumption of alcohol, thus, is another of the many violent practices to protect the middle and upper classes from the visibility and reality of lower class life. ‘Critics of drinking,’ Rosenzweig asserts (quoting Benson), ‘frequently lumped together the very rich and the very poor as unproductive classes ‘most exposed to the temptation of intemperate drinking’, thus revealing dominant society’s biased biopolitics in regarding underclass drinking as anti-social and undesirable while simultaneously enjoying the community and conviviality of communal drinking amongst their own class.’<sup>271</sup> The opposition that these politics and different treatments of beautiful and unbeautiful bodies creates fosters the nurturing ground not only for behaviour deemed criminal, but for the creation of communities outside mainstream society.

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<sup>269</sup> John W. Crowley, *The White Logic: Alcoholism and Gender in American Modernist Fiction* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1994), p. 2.

<sup>270</sup> Bourdieu, p. 179.

<sup>271</sup> Rosenzweig, p. 145.

Crowley asserts that '[t]he culture of (literal) consumption in the saloon promises to fulfil a desire for such intangible blessings as inner peace and good will among men'.<sup>272</sup> In *The Orchard Keeper*, McCarthy places the community of 'good will among men' in 'the Green Fly Inn', a dilapidated building that 'would career madly to one side as though headlong into collapse' down the bordering steep incline after which the community of 'drinkers would pause, liquid tilting in their glasses, the structure would shudder violently [...] and the inn would slowly right itself and assume once more its normal reeling equipoise'.<sup>273</sup> To the regulars, 'the inn was animate as any old ship to her crew and it bred [...] a solidarity due largely to its very precariousness', resembling their own unsteady and intoxicated bodies the patrons of the Green Fly Inn establish a form of kinship with their local bar and commune there as a community around the bottle.<sup>274</sup>

Upon his return to the Green Fly Inn, Marion Sylder is welcomed back into the community unquestioningly. This contrasts starkly with Kenneth Rattner's reception at the Green Fly Inn or, indeed, at any location of communal drinking. Where Sylder offers a round for the house and is invited to join his peers, thus joining in the conviviality and community spirit, Rattner, who drinks alone, uses the moment of confusion when the porch of the inn collapses to beat his fellows senseless and rob them of their possessions, only to then immediately flee not just the scene but Red Branch all together, abandoning his wife and child. 'The solitary drinker was detached from society and its constraints; he was likely to become antisocial, to fight, steal, or otherwise indulge in malicious mischief, to be sexually promiscuous or beat his wife, or to squander on liquor money needed to feed his hungry children.'<sup>275</sup> What Rorabaugh here identifies as 'society' equality translates onto the smaller unit of marginalised communities in McCarthy's work, as they form alternative societies amongst themselves. The consumption of alcohol is not problematic among marginalised communities, but the refusal of the community

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<sup>272</sup> Crowley, p. 29.

<sup>273</sup> *The Orchard Keeper*, p. 12.

<sup>274</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13.

<sup>275</sup> Rorabaugh, p. 190.

constitutes a form of outsiderdom that does not cohere with the spirit of community and conviviality. As Rorabaugh asserts,

[a]fter 1800, drinking in groups to the point where everyone became inebriated had ideological overtones. For one thing, such drinking became a symbol of egalitarianism. All men were equal before the bottle and no man was allowed to refuse a drink.<sup>276</sup>

Rattner's solitary drinking communicates his rejection of the ideal of equality 'before the bottle' and thus leaves him excluded not only from mainstream society, but equally from the lower class community. As a respected member of the community, Sylder can return after several years' absence and be welcomed and included, while Rattner's poor reputation and rejection of the convivial spirit exclude him from this community even as a resident of the area.

Rattner is not McCarthy's only solitary drinker. Harvey the junkman in *Suttree* also shares the bottle with no one. Instead, he spends his time in his junkyard alone, barely raising himself to do business when required:

The man groaned and rolled over and reached under the car seat and pulled out a quart jar of white whiskey and sat erect enough to funnel a drink down his gullet [...] The man deftly reapplied the twopiece lid and laying the half filled jar against his ribs he subsided into rest and silence once again.<sup>277</sup>

Where the junkman can barely rouse himself to respond to Harrogate, he does offer the new arrival a job – not out of the goodness of his heart, but rather as an opportunity to have someone else do his job for him so that he, Harvey, can continue his solitary drinking. Yet, the exchange between the junkman and Harrogate is markedly different from Rattner's interaction, or lack thereof, with the guests of the Green Fly Inn. The junkman, while acting in his own interest, offers Harrogate remuneration which would give Harrogate, just released from the workhouse, an opportunity to earn towards his sustenance in the McAnally community. A later exchange between the two characters resembles their first encounter. The junkman greets Harrogate 'hanging half drunk from the one small window' and when it

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<sup>276</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 151.

<sup>277</sup> *Suttree*, p. 112.

becomes clear that Harrogate wants to build a boat from two car hoods, it becomes evident that the junkman has seen the weird and wonderful of McAnally before: ‘All you crazy sons of bitches. I wish I could catch whoever it is keeps sendin em down here.’<sup>278</sup> While Harrogate’s eccentricities appear peculiar even to the inhabitants of McAnally, the junkman does business with him just as he was willing to provide work for Harrogate during their first encounter. Harvey, while not joining in drink with other members of his community, remains rooted enough in McAnally’s underclass to engage with others fairly, if not politely.

The junkman’s membership becomes more obvious when Suttree finds Harvey ‘senseless and hanging half off the ragged army cot [...] among a mass of twisted shapes discarded here by the river’.<sup>279</sup> As discussed in the preceding chapter, Suttree recognises the importance of community and solidarity and cares for his fellow members of McAnally Flats. Members of this community ‘share not simply similar narratives, but also patterns of thought and/or lived history,’ a lived history that becomes legible on the body and marks the carrier of these marks as worthy of Suttree’s compassion and solidarity.<sup>280</sup> Suttree’s visit to check on Harvey highlights the junkman’s membership of Suttree’s community of the marginalised of Knoxville. Despite Harvey’s reclusive location in his junkyard, he is a member of the community that Suttree works to maintain through his visits, conversation, and sharing of food and drink. Suttree’s kindness and Harvey’s acceptance of his friendship form a bond of support between two of the unbeautiful bodies ostracised from mainstream society and its support structures.

Suttree himself frequently wanders into situations in which a group of drinkers has already congregated and is invited to join the community. Like Sylder in *The Orchard Keeper*, Suttree is an accepted member of the drinking underclass of Knoxville:

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<sup>278</sup> Ibid., pp. 254, 255.

<sup>279</sup> Ibid., p. 325.

<sup>280</sup> David Manier and William Hirst, ‘A Cognitive Taxonomy of Collective Memories’, in *A Companion to Cultural Memory Studies*, ed. by Astrid Erll and Ansgar Nünning (Berlin; New York: De Gruyter, 2010), pp. 253–62 (p. 253).

deeply couched in the mouse-colored and napless upholstery sat a row of drunks.

Hey Suttree, they called.

[...]

He threw an arm around Suttree's shoulders. Here's my old buddy, he said. Where's the whiskey? Give him a drink of that old crazy shit.

[...]

where you been? Where's the whiskey? Here you go. Get ye a drink, Bud.<sup>281</sup>

Even after being absent some time, as evident in the question 'where you been?', Suttree is welcomed back into the community as a member and invited to re-join through the rite of sharing a drink, which in this scene is not the beer Suttree bought prior to meeting the 'row of drunks', but the homemade whiskey 'Early Times'.<sup>282</sup> This scene of unquestioning welcome into 'this fellowship of the doomed' immediately follows Suttree's bitter conversation with his estranged uncle, but '[i]n the drift of voices and the laughter and the reek of stale beer the Sunday loneliness seeped away' and Suttree settles into his chosen community with ease and comfort, although without drinking from the whiskey which is 'almost too sorry to drink'.<sup>283</sup>

### ***3.3. Alcohol and Social Control***

McCarthy situates his underclass communities both ideologically and spatially at the margins of society. The McAnally community in *Suttree* not only consists of the scarred and wounded, but also of the drunk and the sick. The physical location of this community is the result of systematic exclusion from visibility in mainstream society and removal towards the heterotopic, transitional spaces of the underdeveloped, extra-societal outskirts of Knoxville.<sup>284</sup> Wesley Morgan's discussions of accounts of violence and lawless behaviour in Knoxville in *Suttree* in his articles "'A season of death and epidemic violence": Knoxville Rogues in *Suttree*' and 'Red Callahan in *Suttree*: The Actual and the Fictitious', support the

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<sup>281</sup> *Suttree*, p. 26.

<sup>282</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 26.

<sup>283</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 27, 28.

<sup>284</sup> For the discussion of heterotopias see Michel Foucault's essay 'Of Other Spaces'.

notion that alcohol and criminal behaviours were understood as intricately linked and class-specific. The Knoxville administration at the time was under some pressure to address the issue of public drunkenness and criminality in the inner city in the 1950s.

The connection between alcohol and criminality is firmly established in the American imaginary, as Rorabaugh argues: ‘Public drunkenness became a vehicle for the expression of anger and hostility. It also became evident to some people that drunkenness led to thievery, lechery, and brutality.’<sup>285</sup> Sournia’s discussion of the history of alcoholism supports Rorabaugh’s perspective: ‘Drunkenness was the cause of all violence and unleashed vile behaviour of the worst kind; consumption of distilled liquor led to poverty, ruin, domestic strife, unemployment and any other social problems in existence.’<sup>286</sup> It is in the interest of dominant society to exert control over public displays of intoxication and the blemish such behaviour constitutes to middle- and upper class values and sentiments, as well as the potential threat it poses to public safety and decency.

Nietzsche’s lawbreaker, the criminal as defined by the legal system, is indebted to the creditor, society. ‘The lawbreaker is a debtor’, Nietzsche states,

[t]he wrath of the disappointed creditor, the community, throws him back again into the savage and outlaw state against which he has hitherto been protected: it thrusts him away – and now every kind of hostility may be vented upon him.<sup>287</sup>

The lawbreaker’s debt allows society to punish and expel the criminal and become hostile towards them. During the development of modern punitive legislation, the understanding of criminality transformed from definition of specific acts to an understanding of certain characters.

Legal justice today has at least as much to do with criminals as with crimes. Or more precisely, while, for a long time, the criminal had been no more than the person to whom a crime could be attributed and who could therefore be punished, today, the crime tends to be no more than the event which signals

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<sup>285</sup> Rorabaugh, p. 30.

<sup>286</sup> Sournia, p. 30.

<sup>287</sup> Nietzsche, p. 71.

the existence of a dangerous element - that is, more or less dangerous - in the social body.<sup>288</sup>

The implementation of the ‘stop and frisk’ laws (described on p. 29 above), as well as the vagrancy laws, inscribed into the legal system the right of law enforcement and dominant society to place certain types of person under general suspicion and subjecting them to increased and unjust policing.

Courts frequently say that the essential element of crimes of this nature is that the accused have the “status” designated by the statute. Though “status” is a most ambiguous word, the courts apparently mean that being a particular kind of person (having a certain personal condition, as evidenced by certain facts) or one of a class of such persons is a crime.<sup>289</sup>

The vagrant thus becomes a perpetual criminal, constantly under suspicion, and subject to excessive policing and police harassment because their body adheres to an aesthetic that betrays their status and enables agents of the law to classify the person as criminal without evidence. One such mark of the vagrant is the excessive use of alcohol and the traces it leaves on the body.

McCarthy’s awareness of the vagrancy laws and its connection to drunkenness and homelessness is evident throughout *Suttree*. Michael the Indian, for instance, ‘got thowed in jail [... for] Vag[rancy]. You know. They got [him] once before.’<sup>290</sup> On another occasion, *Suttree* receives a warning from an anonymous black man that ‘[t]hey’ll vag you here’, meaning that the police are known to patrol the area and stop those they deem criminals of person for vagrancy.<sup>291</sup> A conversation between Cousin Buzzard and Michael the Indian, deleted from an earlier draft of *Suttree*, also shows McCarthy’s conscious engagement with both class and legality:

I come from Knoxville Tennessee. You aint from Chicago are ye?  
No.

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<sup>288</sup> Michel Foucault, ‘About the Concept of the “Dangerous Individual” in 19th-Century Legal Psychiatry’, trans. by Alain Baudot and Jane Couchman, *International Journal of Law and Psychiatry*, I (1978), 1–18 (p. 2).

<sup>289</sup> Lacey, p. 1204.

<sup>290</sup> *Suttree*, p. 272.

<sup>291</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 353.

I used to work in that town. Cleveland Ohio and Detroit Michigan too. I quit workin. What does it get ye? Look at me. What I got to show for it?

He shifted his lanky frame on the bunk. You here long time? he said.

Cousin Buzzard was sitting on his heels with his arms hanging between his knees and his knuckles resting on the floor in an attitude apelike and defecatory. He spoke in a high whisper and watched behind him constantly. Three months, he said. I'm still waitin trial for suspicion. You a vag?

Yeah.

I figured ye was.<sup>292</sup>

Cousin Buzzard has transitioned from working class to underclass, given the lack of reward or progress in his working class life. Further, he 'figures' Michael is a vagabond both because of the circumstances they each find themselves in, that is prison, and because Buzzard recognises Michael's body aesthetic as that of a fellow member of the underclass and therefore likely to be detained for vagrancy.

Vagrancy is the principal crime in which the offense consists of being a certain kind of person rather than in having done or failed to do certain acts. Other crimes of this nature include being a common drunkard, common prostitute, common thief, tramp, or disorderly person.<sup>293</sup>

Michael, evidently, is this 'certain kind of person'. Jillett discusses the vagrancy laws in *Suttree*, demonstrating their strategic and merciless enforcement in McCarthy's Knoxville. Under these measures, the 'marginalized are [...] yet further relegated to the sidelines.'<sup>294</sup> The vagrancy laws, Jillett asserts, render it impossible for the dispossessed to find rest or a safe space in the inner cities and thus relocate the underclass to the less policed, less controlled margins of the outskirts.<sup>295</sup> The brutal and ruthless enforcement of the vagrancy laws portrayed in *Suttree* exposes the rigid and authoritative social structures that prohibit movement both figuratively and literally.

Suttree sheds light on the reach of the stigma attached to the lower classes, as he perceives it, in a conversation with his maternal uncle: 'When a man marries beneath him his children are beneath him [...] If you werent a drunk he might see

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<sup>292</sup> McCarthy, "'Left from Suttree" Typescript [Suttree]', p. 781.

<sup>293</sup> Lacey, p. 1203.

<sup>294</sup> Louise Jillett, 'Flânerie, Vagrancy, and Voluntary Exile in *Suttree*', in *Cormac McCarthy's Borders and Landscapes*, ed. by Louise Jillett (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), pp. 143–62 (p. 159).

<sup>295</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 156–9.

me with different eyes. As it is, my case was always doubtful. I was expected to turn out badly.’<sup>296</sup> In his father’s judgement, Suttree’s affiliation with his lower class mother and alcoholic uncle, through his mother, situates him more firmly on the side of the lower classes as Suttree’s affiliation with his father situates him within the middle class. Suttree’s in-betweenness provides him with a broader and deeper understanding of the class conflicts at the time, as his ‘ability to move across and between social classes situates him ideally to critique social mores, established norms, and corrupt or outmoded authoritative figures and structures’.<sup>297</sup> Suttree is in a position to choose his allegiance, and his choice is a reaction against Suttree’s father and the associated middleclass moral and aesthetic codes. In this ability to choose and to move between classes, Suttree is no exception to the rules established in McCarthy’s novels: social mobility is downward. Only a few of McCarthy’s characters, John Grady Cole or Lacey Rawlins, for example, make this choice. The others’ movements are restricted to the realm of the lower classes, such as Ab Jones, Gene Harrogate, or Culla and Rinthy Holme, whereas Lester Ballard or Boyd Parham, are propelled from the fringes of society into complete marginalisation by forces outside their control.

While movement in McCarthy’s novels is a prominent theme, the flow of this movement remains physical and lateral, rather than demographic and vertical, hindering the lower classes from moving upwards on the social scale. It is precisely through forms of excessive policing and biased and discriminatory laws, such as the vagrancy laws or ‘stop and frisk’, that social mobility is rendered impossible for the majority of those with no or limited access to cultural, social, and economic capital. The body-politics governing McCarthy’s society decide between those ‘who perform social functions and those who perform social waste’; and those performing social waste, including public drunkenness, are systematically excluded from the potential to increase their access, such as education, medical care, or decent housing.<sup>298</sup> Instead, the aesthetics of their bodies and the stigma attached to

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<sup>296</sup> *Suttree*, p. 22.

<sup>297</sup> Jillett, pp. 143–4.

<sup>298</sup> Qtd. in: Armstrong, p. 59.

their class affiliation reinforces structural patterns that marginalise and disenfranchise those deemed undesirable in mainstream society. Upward social mobility, therefore, is not desired, as '[p]ower concedes nothing without a demand. It never did and it never will.'<sup>299</sup> As upward mobility for the lower classes, the poor, the alcoholic and sick, the maimed, the racial other, pose a threat to those already in the upper echelons of power, the ascent of the lower classes is systematically and systemically prevented in order to maintain the existing power balance. This lower class threat is especially poignant as there are also no systems in place, specifically not in the US, to prevent downward social mobility, such as a robust social security system. Accordingly, those of McCarthy's characters who find themselves transgressing social strata, Suttree or John Grady, for example, find themselves moving downward and into the lower strata of society, rather than upward.

It seems extraordinary, then, that McCarthy's characters continue with what dominant society has deemed anti-social and undesirable behaviour while knowing, as they must, the possible consequences of brutal responses. Yet, throughout the author's novels there is no instance in which police brutality and restrictive laws lead to a change of behaviour. On the contrary, when the police stop and beat Ab Jones, Suttree is compelled to join the resistance and exhibits ever more lawless behaviour as he steals the police cruiser and sinks it in the river. Severe policing and threat of punishment does not prevent Suttree or any of his companions from loitering, engaging in drinking binges, or rebelling against social structures in other forms – the majority of which result in bouts of violence and broken bodies.

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<sup>299</sup> Frederick Douglass, 'West India Emancipation, Speech Delivered at Canandaigua, New York, August 3, 1857', in *Frederick Douglass: Selected Speeches and Writings*, ed. by Philip Sheldon Foner and Yuval Taylor, The Library of Black America (Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books, 1999), pp. 258–69 (p. 267).

### *3.4. Inebriated Resistance*

The marginalised and disempowered of McCarthy's novels congregate around the bottle and form their own communities and social structures. Almost as a by-product, the voices of discord and dissent become louder as they unify at the edges of society and pass through 'the dim shires of McAnally singing rude songs and passing a bottle about'.<sup>300</sup>

While drinking in a group made the participants equals, it also gave them a feeling of independence and liberty. Drinking to the point of intoxication was done by choice, an act of self-will by which man altered his feelings, escaped from his burdens, and sought perfection in his surroundings. Because drinking was a matter of choice, it increased a man's sense of autonomy. To be drunk was to be free.<sup>301</sup>

Communal drinking thus counteracts social isolation, inequality, and unfreedom simultaneously, and is an act of dissent and revolt against the injustice of a system that classifies the body as worthy or worthless, or beautiful and unbeautiful, and attempts to render the latter invisible through legal and social practices such as the vagrancy laws, rather than seeking to integrate and consolidate.

The genuinely intentional strategies through which members of a group seek to distinguish themselves from the group immediately below (or believed to be so), which they use as a foil, and to identify themselves with the group immediately above (or believed to be so), which they thus recognize as the possessor of the legitimate life-style, only ensure full efficacy, by intentional reduplication, for the automatic, unconscious effects of the dialectic of the rare and the common, the new and the dated, which is inscribed in the objective differentiation of conditions and dispositions. Even when it is in no way inspired by the conscious concern to stand aloof from working-class laxity, every petit-bourgeois profession of rigour, every eulogy of the clean, sober and neat, contains a tacit reference to uncleanness, in words or things, to intemperance or improvidence; and the bourgeois claim to ease or discretion, detachment or disinterestedness, need not obey an intentional search for distinction in order to contain an implicit denunciation of the "pretensions", always marked by excess or insufficiency, of the "narrow-minded" or "flashy", "arrogant" or "servile", "ignorant" or "pedantic" petite bourgeoisie.<sup>302</sup>

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<sup>300</sup> *Suttree*, p. 91.

<sup>301</sup> Rorabaugh, p. 151.

<sup>302</sup> Bourdieu, pp. 246–7.

McCarthy's underclass employs agency in their choice to engage in drinking and thus inverts the notion 'uncleanness' and 'intemperance and improvidence' that renders them foils of the upper and dominant classes. Taking to drink in an environment that seeks to exclude and suppress becomes a form of resistance and empowerment.

The trope of intoxication as form of resistance is not unique to McCarthy's work. Indeed, American literature, specifically in the troubled post-WWII years, uses intoxication, by alcohol or drugs, as well as madness – or what is perceived as such by mainstream society – as a form of resistance against and liberation from oppressive societal structures. This trope is particularly evident in Beat Generation writings such as Alan Ginsberg's poem 'Howl', Ken Kesey's *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, William Burroughs's *Naked Lunch*, or Charles Bukowski's *Notes of a Dirty Old Man*. While Crews's archival research collected in *Books are Made Out of Books* does not identify the Beat and resistance writers as explicit influences, McCarthy came of age in the 1950s and 1960s and, as a young educated man, is likely to have been aware both of the literature and the controversy surrounding it. Like *Suttree*, much of this literature of resistance features not only forms of intoxication, but also forms of non-heteronormative, non-monogamist sexualities and relationships. Suttree's awareness of the deeply flawed moral codes of middle- and upper class society sees him gravitate towards his drinking companions and the ever present bottle throughout the novel. As Bourdieu suggests, 'the dominated have only two options: loyalty to self and the group [...] or the individual effort to assimilate the dominant ideal which is the antithesis of the very ambition of collectively regaining control over social identity.'<sup>303</sup> Across McCarthy's work, and specifically in *Suttree*, the characters' choice is for 'loyalty to self and the group'. The underclass body thus becomes a palpable form of resistance that showcases both unity within the underclass community, and the chasm between the lower class and mainstream society. Subjecting themselves to excessive amounts of alcohol leaves their bodies wasted and wasting, both mirroring the treatment as waste and

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<sup>303</sup> Ibid., p. 384.

refuse they receive from the ruling classes, and rendering those bodies recognisable to each other. Inscribing their class affiliation onto their alcoholic bodies, rendering them legible amongst each other, facilitates the creation of communities of shared experience and resistance.

Much of the alcohol consumed in *Suttree* is homemade in makeshift utilities such as bathtubs, although occasionally the quality is so poor that the whiskey is suspected to be ‘made in the toilet’.<sup>304</sup> While officially produced and licensed alcohol appears to be preferred whenever money is available, *Suttree*’s poor community has created a means to engage in drinking independent of their income, or lack thereof. The history surrounding the production of alcohol and its taxation has its origin in the post-Revolution era in the late 18th century. In his *Authority and the Mountaineer in Cormac McCarthy’s Appalachia*, Gabe Rikard traces the hostility towards alcohol taxation to the excise implemented by Alexander Hamilton who outlined

a policy for law enforcement’s handling of liquor sales [that lasted] from 1792 until post-Prohibition: arrest those who refuse to pay tax, seize their products, and ensure that those who abide by the law have a stable market in which to conduct their sales. Farmers turned grain into alcohol all over the western frontier, but selective enforcement created an opposition between the government and the distillers who paid the excise (mostly the larger operations who saw the tax as a limit on competition) and the distillers who refused to pay (whose distillation of smaller quantities of whiskey made them simultaneously competitors with the larger distillers and unable to pay the excise). Men considered patriots years earlier when they fought Great Britain over taxes and representation, men who now resisted the whiskey excise as undue taxation, became socio-political “delinquents” when they opposed the will of the United States government – the newly ratified representative of the people.<sup>305</sup>

By producing and sharing their homemade drink, the McAnally underclass engage in another tradition of dissent, as they reject participation in the commodity exchange at the heart of America’s capitalist consumer culture and societal systems of power. While the homemade whiskey might be produced, sold, and bought

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<sup>304</sup> *Suttree*, p. 28.

<sup>305</sup> Gabe Rikard, *Authority and the Mountaineer in Cormac McCarthy’s Appalachia* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2013), pp. 14–5.

among members of the McAnally community, these pecuniary exchanges are unregulated, uncontrolled, and guaranteed to be tax-free, further distancing the lower class community from the normalised trade structures of America's economy, while granting them a degree of economic independence.

This characteristic also appears in the community portrayed in *The Orchard Keeper*. 'Sylder's opposition [against the government], as a bootlegger, is primarily economic' and his job before the repeal of prohibition is to provide alcohol, albeit outside the law.<sup>306</sup> As bootlegger, Sylder engages in criminal activity in defiance of yet another law passed in order to exert maximum control over the lower classes, whose drinking had become increasingly problematic for social order and existing power structures. Indeed, in the early 1930s, Sylder delivers moonshine even to 'McAnally Flats [...] Smoking shacks yellow with coal-oil light and areek with the sweetmold smell of splo whiskey.'<sup>307</sup> While Prohibition decreased the overall consumption of alcohol in America, alongside WWI it also

bred deep scepticism about the wisdom and integrity of the elders and provoking rebellion against authority that exceeded the ordinary friction between generations. Simply because it became illicit, drinking possessed a singular importance; drinking in defiance of Prohibition was a sign of solidarity with the rising generation's resistance to what it called 'puritanism' and to what it considered to be the oppression of bourgeois American life.<sup>308</sup>

Sylder's activities as bootlegger, thus, firmly situate him alongside those resisting the dominant narratives concerning the underclass. Moreover, Sylder recognises the arbitrary use and abuse of power in Sheriff Jefferson Gifford, who pressures the 14-year-old John Wesley. Gifford 'knowed you [John Wesley] didn't have no daddy, nobody to take up for you [...] and he figured he could jump on you'.<sup>309</sup> Undertaking his illegal commerce of moonshine and calling Gifford's bluff and abuse of police power, Sylder finds means to resist the dominant power structures.

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<sup>306</sup> John Cant, *Cormac McCarthy and the Myth of American Exceptionalism*, Studies in Major Literary Authors (New York: Routledge, 2008), p. 67.

<sup>307</sup> *The Orchard Keeper*, p. 30.

<sup>308</sup> Crowley, p. 37.

<sup>309</sup> *The Orchard Keeper*, p. 170.

He may even have been the one supplying alcohol to the older generation of McAnally Flats, such as Ab Jones or Harvey the junkman.

### ***3.5. Alcohol, Lifestyle, and Illness***

The excessive consumption of alcohol not only leaves marks on the body, but also has the potential to cause illness, especially when the alcohol is of low quality. As Toadvine puts it in *Blood Meridian*, '[w]hat have you got that a man could drink with just a minimum risk of blindness and death.'<sup>310</sup> McCarthy describes the McAnally underclass as a 'lazaret of comestibles and flora and maimed humanity'.<sup>311</sup> In a scene reminiscent of John Grady and Rawlins's earlier discussed alcohol-induced illness, Suttree finds himself sick in a bar.

He began to grow queasy.

He was looking down into a tin trough filled with wet and colorful gobbets of sick. Scalloped moss wept from a copper pipe. A man sat sleeping on the toilet, his hands hanging between his knees. There was no seat to the toilet and the sleeper was half swallowed up in its stained porcelain maw.

Hey, said Suttree. He shook the man by the shoulder.

The man shook his head in annoyance. A foul odor seeped up between his lardcolored thighs.

Hey there.

The man opened one wet red eye and looked out.

Sick, Suttree said.

Yeah, said the man. Sick.

Suttree stood spraddlelegged before him, swazing slightly, one hand on the man's shoulder [...]

Suttree turned away [...] He tottered into the corner and vomited.<sup>312</sup>

Suttree's body violently expels the source of its own illness, the alcohol, leaving him standing 'spraddlelegged' and vomiting. Equally, the man Suttree finds sleeping and sinking into the toilet bowl has lost control of his faculties and has passed out from drinking. Both bodies display clear signs of the sickening effects

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<sup>310</sup> *Blood Meridian*, p. 106.

<sup>311</sup> *Suttree*, p. 80.

<sup>312</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 91.

of alcohol, Suttree in his vomiting and the man in his passing out and the unhealthy ‘lardcolored’ shade of his skin.

The following morning, Suttree wakes up, his body still suffering from last night’s intoxication:

Hot clotted bile flooded his nostrils [...] He rose from a dream, a rage-strangled face screaming at him [...] Dull moteblown eyeballs webbed with blood [...] He lay with his head in the moldy upholstery of an old car seat [...] He woke with the underside of his eyelids inflamed by the high sun’s hammering [...] Suttree lay with his hands palm up at his sides in an attitude of frailty beheld and the stink that fouled the air was himself.<sup>313</sup>

Suttree pays for his nightly sprees and violation of his body. His way home becomes an exhibition of the marginal, the abject, the disgusting – meeting and exceeding every prejudice and stigma applied to the unbeautiful underclass by the beautiful mainstream.

Suttree’s sprees and transgression eventually affect his body’s ability to regenerate. Towards the end of the novel, he becomes very ill and lies ‘aneled. Like a rapevictim.’<sup>314</sup> Yet, Suttree is not a victim of literal rape, but of both his continued abuse of his own body, and his chosen home among the McAnally poor and destitute. The diagnosis Suttree receives after J-Bone takes him to hospital is ‘Typhoid fever’.<sup>315</sup> Studies show that lack of ‘access to safe water is an important risk factor for typhoid fever’.<sup>316</sup> Souha S. Kanj et al. state that typhoid fever as ‘food and waterborne disease is strongly correlated with poor hygiene as well as overpopulated areas with poor sanitation’.<sup>317</sup> Their findings are ‘consistent with several epidemiological studies showing that low socioeconomic status and poor living conditions are risk factors for acquiring the infection’.<sup>318</sup> Moreover, J.L.

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<sup>313</sup> Ibid., pp. 93–6.

<sup>314</sup> Ibid., p. 555.

<sup>315</sup> Ibid., p. 563.

<sup>316</sup> Vittal Mogasale and others, ‘Burden of Typhoid Fever in Low-Income and Middle-Income Countries: A Systematic, Literature-Based Update with Risk-Factor Adjustment’, *The Lancet Global Health*, 2.10 (2014), e570–80 (p. e570).

<sup>317</sup> Souha S. Kanj and others, ‘Epidemiology, Clinical Manifestations, and Molecular Typing of Salmonella Typhi Isolated from Patients with Typhoid Fever in Lebanon’, *Journal of Epidemiology and Global Health*, 5.2 (2015), 159–65 (p. 160).

<sup>318</sup> Ibid., p. 163.

Murphy et al state that ‘[s]ymptoms include high fever, malaise, headache, abdominal pain, and constipation or diarrhea, and can lead to serious intestinal complications and death if untreated [...] Lack of improved sanitation and access to safe food and water among populations living in low- and middle-income countries is related to an elevated risk of typhoid fever infection.’<sup>319</sup> All three studies agree on the correlation between poor living conditions and the risk of typhoid fever. While America is today not considered a low- or middle-income country, the studies interestingly focus on what we today call ‘developing countries’, *Suttree*’s environs, the underclass poverty and lack of access to sanitation and clean foods and drinking water, are all conducive to a spread of the infection and render *Suttree*’s diagnosis plausible.

Many of *Suttree*’s symptoms could be classified as secondary symptoms, or symptoms that are caused by other symptoms. Vasha Gupta and Ritu Garg point out,

[e]arly intestinal manifestations include constipation (especially in adults) or mild diarrhea (in children) associated with abdominal tenderness. Mild hepatomegaly is detectable in the majority of patients. Bradycardia relative to the height of the fever may be clinical clue to typhoid but is present in only a minority of patients. [...] The major characteristics of untreated typhoid are persistent high fever, severe anorexia, weight loss, and changes in sensorium, but a variety of other complications also may develop including hepatitis.<sup>320</sup>

*Suttree* displays many of these symptoms during the chapter-long description of the progression of his illness.<sup>321</sup> The swollen and pulsing eyelids, gray crust at the mouth, swollen tongue, and hotness can be linked to the fever, vomiting, and diarrhoea, since the latter symptoms cause a loss of fluids and consequent dehydration. *Suttree* regularly drinks poor quality alcohol, often in large quantities, and eats unhealthily and irregularly as he has limited access to healthy and balanced

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<sup>319</sup> J. L. Murphy and others, ‘Environmental Survey of Drinking Water Sources in Kampala, Uganda, during a Typhoid Fever Outbreak’, ed. by Donald W. Schaffner, *Applied and Environmental Microbiology*, 83.23 (2017), pp. 1–2.

<sup>320</sup> Varsha Gupta and Ritu Garg, ‘Typhoid Fever and Water’, in *Water and Health*, ed. by Prati Pal Singh and Vinod Sharma (New Delhi: Springer India, 2014), pp. 93–106 (p. 98).

<sup>321</sup> *Suttree*, pp. 540–59.

nutrition. Suttree's drinking habits and living environment, therefore, are both factors leading to his near-fatal encounter with illness.

However, Suttree's symptoms are many and varied. 'The hallmark of typhoid fever is prolonged, persistent fever. The definitive diagnosis still depends on isolation of the bacilli from the patient by blood culture.'<sup>322</sup> Given that Suttree is treated in a hospital for the poor, it is unlikely that he has undergone blood testing. Instead, his lifestyle and environment could mean that he suffers from a variety of interconnected conditions. Suttree's organs may well be affected, especially by his consumption of poor-quality liquor, that is, specifically his liver and kidneys. A common illness for alcoholics and those who binge on alcohol is cirrhosis of the liver. The National Health Service (NHS) lists symptoms of cirrhosis as: loss of appetite, lack of energy or fatigue, weight loss or sudden weight gain, a brownish or orange tint to the urine, confusion, disorientation, personality changes, blood in stool, and fever.<sup>323</sup> These symptoms, too, closely resemble Suttree's condition. Yet, the acuteness of Suttree's illness suggests the possibility of a secondary illness that triggers the outbreak of the cirrhosis symptoms. Sudhamsu et al. connect the effects of acute hepatitis E infection in cases of pre-existing cirrhosis of the liver and describe how symptoms include 'fever, jaundice, dark urine, anorexia, nausea, vomiting, abdominal pain, myalgia [muscle pain], and arthralgia [joint pain]' and how the different forms of the 'virus can induce liver injury and de-compensation among patients with chronic liver disease (CLD)'.<sup>324</sup> Moreover, medical professionals state 'that more than 80% [of] patients of CLD are prone to this infection in endemic areas'.<sup>325</sup> Given Suttree's living arrangements in the poor quarters of Knoxville and his participation in the 'season of death and epidemic violence' prior to his illness, he could have contracted hepatitis during his binges or as a result of his untreated typhoid fever, as Gupta and Garg point out.<sup>326</sup> As

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<sup>322</sup> Gupta and Garg, p. 93.

<sup>323</sup> Information from the National Health Service (NHS) website on 25 March 2017: <<http://www.webmd.boots.com/digestive-disorders/cirrhosis-liver>>.

<sup>324</sup> Sudhamsu KC and others, 'Effect of Acute Hepatitis E Infection in Patients with Liver Cirrhosis', *Journal of Nepal Medical Association*, 48.175 (2009), p. 226.

<sup>325</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 227.

<sup>326</sup> *Suttree*, p. 501.

Sharma et al. state, ‘the prevalence of HCV [hepatitis C virus] infection in patients with a history of alcohol abuse is significantly higher than that seen on the general population [... and] alcohol abuse accelerates liver disease and increases risk of cirrhosis.’<sup>327</sup> Suttree’s alcohol-fuelled roaming through McAnally thus places his body at risk of contracting a series of potentially fatal illnesses.

Suttree’s illness not only traces the effects of his lifestyle and environment on his body, it also aligns his lifestyle and practices with what Caygill identifies as a Clausewitzian form of resistance, a version of the ‘preliminary step towards a revolutionary class war whose objective, a classless society, legitimates the violence necessary to achieve it’.<sup>328</sup> While Suttree, arguably, does not aim for a Lenin-esque class war, he does place his body at risk through his acts of resistance against power hegemonies and social hierarchies. Where Ab’s resistance is overtly violent and traceable in his scars, Suttree’s resistance also places his body at risk and becomes visible through his illness.

While communal drinking and engaging in behaviours that undermine and question mainstream society’s social, moral, and aesthetic standards has the potential for the creation of communities of shared experiences, as well as forms of resistance to the dominant narrative, it also bears potential dangers for the health of the body. Another character whose body receives markers of the ill-health of underclass existence is Leonard who ‘had gonorrhoea of the colon and was otherwise covered with carbuncles’.<sup>329</sup> Destitute and homosexual, Leonard works as a male prostitute and contracts a sexually transmitted disease (STD) that marks his body as uncomfortable and unwell as he ‘hobbled over to Suttree’s table and sat uneasily’.<sup>330</sup> The ‘catamite’, or lust boy, is no longer able to earn money through

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<sup>327</sup> Anil Sharma, Andrei Dolganiuc, and Angela Dolganiuc, ‘Alcohol Fuels Hepatitis C Virus Propensity for Infection in ISGylation/Proteasome-Dependent Manner’, *Alcoholism: Clinical and Experimental Research*, 41.1 (2017), 23–25 (p. 23).

<sup>328</sup> Caygill, p. 11.

<sup>329</sup> *Suttree*, p. 502.

<sup>330</sup> *Ibid.*

the sale of his body and instead appears to attempt to enter into more respectable work as an unskilled, low-paid waiter.

McCarthy's characters, especially in *Suttree*, engage in the extremes of underclass life for as long as possible. Yet, ultimately, they are forced to re-examine their mode of existence. Ab Jones dies as a consequence of a final violent encounter with the police and 'Clarence Raby [is] shot to death by police'.<sup>331</sup> Similarly, Suttree finds the ragman 'with his eyes shut and his mouth set and his hands lay clenched at either side. He looked as if he had forced himself to death.'<sup>332</sup> Many of Suttree's friends and fellow members of the underclass die, are (re)imprisoned like Harrogate, or like Leonard attempt a working class life, although it remains unclear how successful these attempts are. Significantly, McCarthy's published version of the novel allows for a similar interpretation for Suttree himself. As McNally is demolished to make way for a new highway, Suttree leaves the area of his chosen home without any clear indications of where he goes or what his plans are. The open ending of the novel is made possible by the deletion of what Luce terms the 'autopsy scene' in the leftover notes from earlier drafts in which the body removed from Suttree's houseboat is autopsied:

Uh huh, said the coroner, lighting a cigarette.  
How old do you make him?  
I don't know, forty maybe.  
The mortician took hold of the cadaver's scalp with both hands.<sup>333</sup>

In this scene, the coroner's guess of the age constitutes the hint that it may be Suttree who is dead, as he may appear a few years older than his early 30s due to his lifestyle and abuse of alcohol. In another version of an earlier draft, there is more evidence that an ambulance may have transported Suttree's dead body:

You dont know who it was do you?  
No suh. Dont know who lived here?  
No suh.  
Come on Ramsey, we got to go.  
I heah you, man.

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<sup>331</sup> Ibid., p. 501.

<sup>332</sup> Ibid., p. 507.

<sup>333</sup> McCarthy, "Left from Suttree" Typescript [Suttree]', p. 874.

The driver closed the door and motioned with his hand. They climbed into the ambulance and pulled away. The boys watched them go. Shit, one said. Old Suttree aint dead.<sup>334</sup>

This version appears to indicate that McCarthy had intended for Suttree to die. Yet, an unnamed man, shortly after, walks along a round and a construction side, prefiguring the scene depicting Suttree's departure from Knoxville in the published novel. Ultimately, it seems, the detriment to the body of a life in destitution and marginalisation allows for few future prospects or securities and forces the members of the underclass, or those who survive and do not go to prison, to find alternatives. McCarthy cannot, therefore, be charged with romanticising poverty and underclass life, and is clearly aware of the limits of resistance to the dominant mode of existence under capitalism.

### **3.6. Sick Women**

Whereas the illnesses discussed above are all ascribed to men, McCarthy's female characters suffer from their own illnesses. In *Suttree*, all members of the underclass participate in activities deemed immoral and unlawful by mainstream society, such as excessive alcohol consumption. Like the men, women wake up the following morning with their bodies suffering from the aftermath of their excesses. Notably,

a female simpleton is waking naked from a gangfuck in the back seat of an abandoned car by the river [...] Reeking of stale beer and dried sperm, eyes clogged, used rubbers dangling senseless from the dashboard knobs. Her clothes lie trampled in the floor. They bear bootprints of mud and dogshit and her cunt looks like a hairclot fished from a draintrap [...] She bends moaning to sort among her clothes.<sup>335</sup>

Initially, this scene resembles Suttree's mornings after his alcohol excesses. However, McCarthy's description of a woman of substandard intelligence, as the phrase 'simpleton' implies, in overtly sexual and dehumanising terms is more

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<sup>334</sup> Cormac McCarthy, 'Typescript. Part 2 of 2 [Suttree]' (Alkek Library, Texas State University at San Marcos), p. 853, Cormac McCarthy Papers, The Wittliff Collections, box 21, folder 1.

<sup>335</sup> *Suttree*, p. 502.

problematic than his description of Suttree. The focus on the sexual aspect of the woman's experience, as well as her sexual organs and sexualised body, the 'cunt [that] looks like a hairclot fished from a draintrap', positions women bodies and women's illness as separate from similar experiences of the male body.

Whereas McCarthy's treatment and representation of women, or lack thereof, remains an important discussion of his work as a whole, within the framework of this project I highlight illness and the female body separately, but briefly. Women in McCarthy, woefully underrepresented, are also commonly members of the underclass. Their experience of marginalisation, however, has the added burden of their gender and the accompanying forms of discrimination, the sexualisation and objectification of their bodies or, at the opposite end of the pole, the understanding of their role in life as *matres dolorosae*. Both the mother and the whore, especially within the lower classes, are subject to gender expectations and male dominance and violence, and their needs come second to the men or children in their lives. In *Outer Dark* and *Cities of the Plain*, McCarthy offers a mother and a whore whose bodies are marked by illness and abused by men. Reading and understanding their bodies and illness, as well as the different form of community that exists between women, allows for a more thorough understanding both of the classified female body and McCarthy's participation in patriarchal and misogynistic discourses.

Sickness, especially women's sickness, in McCarthy's work, is as much of a spectacle as violence or the landscape. Indeed, even nature performs its own illness with vicious force:

A warm wind on the mountain and the sky darkening, the clouds looping black underbellies until a *huge ulcer* folded out of the mass and a crack like the earth's core rending rattled panes from Winkle Hollow to Bay's Mountain. And the wind rising and gone colder until trees bent as if borne forward on some violent acceleration of the earth's turning and then that too ceased and with a clatter and hiss out of the still air a *plague of ice*.<sup>336</sup>

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<sup>336</sup> *The Orchard Keeper*, p. 181 [emphases added].

McCarthy's novels are riddled with such personifications of natural forces and echoed descriptions in the sick body: 'The spume of vomit roiled up from the pit of his stomach and he staggered away through the brush and saplings, retching, finally falling to his knees and heaving in dry and tortured paroxysms.'<sup>337</sup> The sudden and violent onset of such sickness both in nature and in the body highlights the impossibility of control over the functions of the body and render illness an involuntary and abject spectacle. Illness and its concomitant unbeauty become visible, and the outer spaces mirror the broken and sick body. Culla consistently finds nature that resembles his sister's sick post-natal body wherever he goes: 'tracks of wagons crossed everywhere with channels of milky gray water' echoes 'her breasts where thin blue milk welled', whereas 'the sun bleed[ing] across the east' anticipates Rinthy's breasts 'startin to bleed'.<sup>338</sup> Where Culla does not see his sister's actual sick body, nature serves as a constant reminder.

Like the residents of *Suttree's* McAnally Flats, Rinthy and Culla live in poverty. 'Where people dwell, both physically and within social hierarchies, impacts their health', and the Holme siblings dwell at the outer edges of society, in a situation of transition and poverty.<sup>339</sup> As members of the Appalachian hillbilly underclass, Rinthy and Culla's health is precarious, their socioeconomic situation preventing them not only from access to appropriate health care, but also from accessing nutrition, clean water, and hygiene routines that would be conducive to their health. Like the group arriving in *The Gardener's Son*, moreover, Rinthy and Culla can also be classified as hillbillies.

What defines the hillbilly more than geography are cultural traits and values. In this regard, "hillbilly" is no different than dozens of similar labels and ideological and graphic constructs of poor and working-class southern whites coined by middle and upper-class commentators, northern and southern. These derisive terms were intended to indicate a diet rooted in scarcity ("clay eater," "corn-cracker," "rabbit twister"), physical appearance and clothing that denoted hard and specifically working-class laboring conditions ("redneck," "wool hat," "lint head"), an animal-like existence on the economic and

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<sup>337</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 47.

<sup>338</sup> *Outer Dark*, pp. 37, 104, 95, 159.

<sup>339</sup> Darrin Hodgetts and Otilie Stolte, *Urban Poverty and Health Inequalities: A Relational Approach* (New York: Routledge, 2018), p. 1.

physical fringes of society (“brush ape,” “ridge runner,” “briar hopper”), ignorance and racism, and in all cases, economic, genetic, and cultural impoverishment (best summed up by the label “poor white,” or more pointedly, “poor white trash”).<sup>340</sup>

As impoverished, marginalised mountain dwellers, Rinthy’s and Culla’s body immediately bear a series of marks classifying them as unbeautiful and undesirable, while exposing their bodies to the potential of increasing their markings through illness and ill-health.

It is specifically Rinthy who suffers from poor health, initially as a result of her having given birth with little or no assistance and no medical care. Interestingly, an earlier draft of the text portrays Culla as involved in the actual process of giving birth:

It hurts. Bad now, I mean.

Then lets get on with it he said.

But that still wasnt it. It was late afternoon before she screamed and he went to the bed and jerked off the quilt, his stomach beginning to grind up in a hard knot, and knew that he wouldnt have to wait any more, the contractions deep and agonized now like the labored breathing of some [inserted: thing] wounded. It took two hours, him standing there with one knee up in bed between her legs, bending, his back in agony, wrestling with it ~~like~~ as with some (wily) [above in pencil: brute] antagonists, pausing only to throw his head back and clear the hair from his eyes or to wipe the sweat from his forehead, ~~and in his eyes,~~ all the time her screaming and once trying to crawl down off the bed so that he had to hold her down by one leg, talking to her. And then in a great well of blood the head came free. With two fingers he flicked the mucous from its mouth, cleared its nose, then pulled it all the way clear, the fantastically long cord strung in anneloid writhing down the bloodslimed bedcover, and laid it down, a scrawny beetred thing looking more like a dressed squirrel than anything else he could think of. She had stopped moving and he reached and leaned down to her and looked at her eyes.

[...]

It still hurts.

You tore some, he said [...] He laid it down and fishing the handleless clasp knife from a pocket opened that and severed the cord. Then he tied a crude knot in it as close up as he could manage and cut away the rest of the cord and tied off the other end. She was breathing slowly and hard [...] He got up from the bed and went to a cupboard at the far end of the room and fetched down some towels. One of them he wet in the bucket of water, still standing just inside the open door, and came back and (with it) began ~~washing~~ [inserted:

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<sup>340</sup> Harkins, p. 5.

wiping off] the baby [...] and pushing the wet towel up between her legs recovered her with the quilt.<sup>341</sup>

This scene is both problematic and more detailed than the published version. McCarthy's focus on Culla, his not having to wait longer, his labour during the birthing process, Rinthy's almost complete removal from this scene, and both men's, Culla's and McCarthy's, disregard and violent handling of Rinthy's body, are reminiscent even of Ernest Hemingway's misogyny in some of his narratives, especially, perhaps, 'Indian Camp', with its parallels to a woman in labour and the focus on the man's struggle during the process. Importantly, this scene sets the stage both for Rinthy's days following the birth during which she is unable to move out of bed and remains in the soiled sheets in which she gave birth, and for the ensuing progress of Rinthy's lactation and ill-health.

Rinthy Holme's 'weeping breasts' are an instance of immediate visibility both of her femininity and her illness.<sup>342</sup> As Palmer asserts, 'McCarthy's fictional world has been widely acknowledged to be masculine-centered, defined by male relationships and patterns of homosociality. Given this focus, women tend to have temporary, idealised, or ghostly roles.'<sup>343</sup> To Cant, Rinthy's 'continued lactation in the absence of the child renders her a symbol of maternal plenitude'.<sup>344</sup> Both reaffirm a positive image of the Rinthy as woman and mother, and her breasts 'that ha[ve] readily been used to stand in, not only for the whole subject, but for the very idea of wholeness – the nurturing earth mother, the divine spirit of holiness, the beneficence of the universe itself'.<sup>345</sup> Yet, this view of the mother in general and Rinthy in particular cannot be substantiated by any of the female figures in

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<sup>341</sup> Cormac McCarthy, 'Typescript, Early Draft [Outer Dark]' (Alkek Library, Texas State University at San Marcos), pp. 10–11, Cormac McCarthy Papers, The Wittliff Collections, box 8, folder 1.

<sup>342</sup> Dianne Luce used this expression in her key note address at the 2016 Cormac McCarthy conference *Crossroads and Transgressions: Cormac McCarthy Between Worlds* in Berlin in 2016.

<sup>343</sup> Louis Palmer, 'Full Circle: The Road Rewrites *The Orchard Keeper*', *Cormac McCarthy Journal*, 6 (2008), 62–68 (p. 62).

<sup>344</sup> Cant, p. 82.

<sup>345</sup> Fiona Giles, 'The Tears of Lacteros: Integrating the Meaning of the Human Breast', in *Body Parts: Critical Explorations in Corporeality*, ed. by Christopher E. Forth and Ivan Crozier (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2005), pp. 123–41 (p. 123).

McCarthy's work. Women in McCarthy are not naturally maternal and good. Those women in McCarthy who have some semblance of goodness also have the potential to undo those around them. Alejandra in *All the Pretty Horses*, who is beautiful and good, ultimately undoes John Grady with her decision to remain within her own class; Wanda in *Suttree*, who is beautiful and young, reminds Suttree of his own life choices and mortality and is ultimately annihilated in a landslide; and the mother in *The Road* is beautiful and good, but she chooses suicide over the continual threat to her body and life and thus abandons her husband and child to fend for themselves – or these, at least, are the father's feelings toward her after her death.

McCarthy's description of Rinthy's 'continued lactation' are not wholesome and nurturing, but alienating and troubling. As Culla cares for Rinthy during her confinement, he finds her 'sitting in the chair, demurely and half-smiling, her figure thin and wasted under the ragged shift she wore as if great age had come upon her and her eyes huge and fever-black [...] he could see two milkstains in the thin cotton cloth. He looked away.'<sup>346</sup> To Culla, it is not the wasted figure and the face that speaks of Rinthy's suffering, but the cloth stained with mother's milk that forces him to turn away – they are the reminder of his own transgressions.<sup>347</sup> Yet, McCarthy's description of Rinthy unambiguously portrays an unhealthy body, thin, wasted, feverish, recovering from childbirth, lactating without having a child to nurture. A test sentence in an earlier draft of the novel describes her as having a 'delicate skull, the thin roselit bone, like [...] a china mask'.<sup>348</sup> Descriptions of Rinthy's fragility and doll-like helplessness weave throughout the drafts and published novel and regularly focus on her continuously lactating breasts.

Karen A. Wambach, in her study of lactation mastitis, states that '[i]ncomplete drainage of the breast' can contribute to an infection or inflammation

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<sup>346</sup> *Outer Dark*, p. 30.

<sup>347</sup> The issue of Culla and Rinthy's incestuous relationship is part of the study in the subsequent chapter.

<sup>348</sup> Cormac McCarthy, 'Corrected Typescript [*Outer Dark*]' (Alkek Library, Texas State University at San Marcos), p. no pp/test page, Cormac McCarthy Papers, The Wittliff Collections, box 9, folder 1.

in the lactating breast which ‘is usually accompanied by systemic flu-like symptoms’.<sup>349</sup> Wambach also confirms that ‘most cases of mastitis occur [...] early postpartum’ and that often ‘mothers believe [...] that not emptying the breast and exposure to bacteria [are] potential causes of mastitis’.<sup>350</sup> Initially, Rinthy’s feverish appearance and general weakness can be attributed to recently giving birth. However, her continued lactation allows for the diagnosis of lactation mastitis. At the early stage of Rinthy’s illness specifically, the infection could plausibly be caused by poor hygiene and her remaining in the bed and the covers in which she has given birth, as the above quote scene from an early draft shows. The bed is soiled with blood and seems to remain unchanged and unwashed during her confinement. McCarthy, at least, makes no mention of Culla undertaking such chores or helping Rinthy out of bed. Only ‘[a]t the end of a week she climbed from the bed and walked to the foot of it and back. The next day she couldn’t get up at all. But within the week she was walking about the cabin painfully each time he left.’<sup>351</sup> In her delicate state, Rinthy mostly remains in a heavily soiled bed with no access to even most basic forms of personal hygiene or medical attention which makes the diagnosis of an infectious illness such as lactation mastitis probable. Experts ‘consider that broken integrity of the nipple creates a gateway for the invasion of the breast tissue by potential pathogens’.<sup>352</sup>

Linda J. Kvist’s review of lactation mastitis lists further causes for the illness as ‘[s]ore, cracked nipples and nipple pain [...] Stress and fatigue [and...] Oversupply of milk’, among others.<sup>353</sup> Rinthy continues to lactate for several months after giving birth without ever breastfeeding. This suggests both an oversupply of milk, further supported by the doctor’s advice to milk her breasts, and the possibility that Rinthy’s nipples are sore and cracked, since she operates on

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<sup>349</sup> Karen A. Wambach, ‘Lactation Mastitis: A Descriptive Study of the Experience’, *Journal of Human Lactation*, 19.1 (2003), 24–34 (pp. 24).

<sup>350</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 31, 33.

<sup>351</sup> *Outer Dark*, p. 29.

<sup>352</sup> Linda J. Kvist, ‘Toward a Clarification of the Concept of Mastitis as Used in Empirical Studies of Breast Inflammation During Lactation’, *Journal of Human Lactation*, 26.1 (2010), 53–59 (p. 57).

<sup>353</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 57.

a minimum of personal hygiene and uses no creams or ointments to treat her increasingly distressed body and breasts, until she sees the doctor. The flow of milk ceases to be continual, but since Rinthy does not seem to wipe away any remaining milk after she has lactated, the milk likely dries on her breast and nipples and adds to the discomfort, the soreness and rawness of the nipples, in addition to the stress and fatigue she experiences during the long hours of walking, often without food or water, on her quest for the chap. Kvist also states that there are suggestions ‘that it [mastitis] may be the result of complicated social, physiological, and pathological interactions’.<sup>354</sup> Rinthy certainly experiences these factors as a member of the underclass, living in abject poverty, herself an orphan who has ‘nary’n [family]. Ceptin just a brother’ whose incestuous child she gave birth to and who ‘run off’, and finally she is a mother whose child has been taken from her.<sup>355</sup> The complexities and complications weaving through Rinthy’s life and quest render her body at the mercy of forces that she has neither the means nor the understanding to control.

Rinthy, whose maternal instincts and fierce pursuit of the chap are predicated upon having conceived a child with her brother, has broken one of society’s most sacrosanct taboos: the sin of incest. Her ‘continued lactation’ is not a sign of ‘maternal plentitude’ but rather the visible manifestation of her transgressions, ‘where thin blue milk well[s] from the rotting cloth’ of her dress. Nelson suggests that

Rinthy’s portrayal as a “fallow doe” (237) indicates her unthinking wide-eyed naïveté on display in the glade, but also implied in her unthinking reproduction is her status as a “fallow” female. Despite their absolutely opposite intentions, both Culla and Rinthy share in the child’s death – which in turn contests the meaningfulness of intention.<sup>356</sup>

McCarthy’s depiction of Rinthy does show a young and naïve woman, she is a teenager with little or no education or parental support, after all. However, the author does not judge Rinthy’s morality when he describes the pursuit of her child,

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<sup>354</sup> Ibid , p. 57.

<sup>355</sup> *Outer Dark*, p. 106.

<sup>356</sup> Christopher R. Nelson, ‘A Style of Horror: Is Evil Real in Cormac McCarthy’s *Outer Dark*’, *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction*, 53.1 (2012), 30–48 (p. 39).

nor does he laude her actions as heroic and motherly. Instead, Rinthy appears lost, not unlike the chap himself, as the dialogue with the doctor shows:

You couldn't still have milk after six months.

If he was dead. That's what you said wasn't it? She was leaning forward in the chair watching him. That means he ain't, don't it? That means he ain't dead or I'd of gone dry. Ain't it?

Well, the doctor said. But something half wild in her look stopped him. Yes, he said. That could be what it means.

I knowed it all the time, she said. I guess I knowed it right along.<sup>357</sup>

Interestingly, the same early draft that has Rinthy virtually absent from the birth of the child, portrays a kinder and more humane scene at the doctors:

She started to cry [...] She had her face down and he could see her shoulders start to jerk and he knew himself that it was the first time she had cried over it and that this soundless grief was of seven months duration and accretion.

[...]

She kept looking at him with that expression of anguish triumphant. He looked down at his hands. All he could think of was to ask her name.

Rinthy, she said. Rinthy Holme.

Mrs Holme, tell me ---: When did you last see your baby. You said you never nursed it.<sup>358</sup>

Evidently McCarthy decided that Rinthy, as a member of the hillbilly underclass, should be met with more suspicion and rejection by the middle class doctor and included his silence at her wild eyes in the later draft, thus losing some of the humanity and kindness in the earlier scene.

Wambach states that 'mastitis is painful, and serious complications such as breast abscess and septicemia [sic] can develop, especially in untreated or undertreated cases'.<sup>359</sup> The pain and discomfort caused by lactation mastitis increases to the point where Rinthy seeks help from a doctor and thus chooses, with the little money she has, to address her illness and discomfort rather than her hunger, indicating that her ailments have taken precedence even over her body's need for sustenance. The treatment the doctor prescribes, likely an antibiotic ointment, may bring temporary relief of her pain, yet she continues to lactate. It seems her body drives her on, and the unceasing lactation of blue milk and blood and the pain that

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<sup>357</sup> *Outer Dark*, pp. 104, 160.

<sup>358</sup> McCarthy, 'Typescript, Early Draft [Outer Dark]', pp. 131–2.

<sup>359</sup> Wambach, p. 24.

accompanies it serve as a reminder that a life exists that she has created, although her sick body would no longer be able sustain that life with her rotten milk. When she finds the tinker and pursues him, her dress is ‘already dark with milk’ although, at this point, she has pursued the chap in excess of seven months.<sup>360</sup>

Yet, Rinthy’s existence as transgressive *mater dolorosa* does not exclude her from the community of the marginalised, where she finds compassion and assistance from her peers. Illness, it seems, has the potential to strengthen community bonds through acts of kindness and compassion. Contrasting Rinthy’s reception into the travelling family with the doctor’s treatment of her emphasises Rinthy’s membership of the lower class community. When Rinthy enquires if she ‘could just rest a spell’ the matriarch of the house instantly replies ‘Yes. Tell her yes’ and the family proceeds not only to share food with her but to offer her a bed and to take her into town and back the next day.<sup>361</sup> As Rinthy’s lactating breasts betray some aspect of her secret, the grandmother rises and stares ‘down at her as if beset by dogs or some worse evil. The two girls were whispering and peering from behind their hands.’<sup>362</sup> It is again the matriarch whose compassion and understanding protects Rinthy from detection and embarrassment and her command to ‘[s]et down, mamma’ expresses both her sympathy for Rinthy and checks the behaviour of her female family members.<sup>363</sup> The doctor, in the published text, on the other hand, shows compassion for Rinthy but does not offer understanding. He expresses his compassion in saying ‘I’ll give you something for that. It must be very painful’ while challenging Rinthy’s account of her illness: ‘No woman carries milk six months for a dead baby.’<sup>364</sup> The doctor patronisingly dismisses Rinthy and her story and refrains from correcting her interpretation of her illness due to ‘something half wild in her look’ that he does not seem to want to engage with.<sup>365</sup> Where the woman refrains from judging Rinthy and only seeks to help her soothe the sore and

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<sup>360</sup> *Outer Dark*, p. 193.

<sup>361</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 60.

<sup>362</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 79.

<sup>363</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>364</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 160, 159.

<sup>365</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 160.

broken body of a fellow poor woman, the doctor detachedly establishes his perceived moral and intellectual superiority and offers treatment instead of kindness, recognising Rinthy as not his equal.

The moment Rinthy finds her child is also the moment she fades out of the narrative, as if, upon discovering the truth, her body would dissolve and become inconsequential. If her body drives her, through sickness and hardship, to find her child, then the cessation of her quest and the end of her lactation and her own death appear a logical consequence of her finding the chap dead. Marilyn Yalom cites one of Hippocrates's case studies:

A woman of Abdera had a carcinoma of the breast and there was bloody discharge from the nipple. When the discharge was brought to a stand-still she died.<sup>366</sup>

Similarly, as Rinthy finds the dead chap her milk ceases and she dies. After finding 'the charred billets and chalk bones, the little calcined ribcage' by the fire place, McCarthy describes how 'little sister was sleeping', a phrase reminiscent of the German expression 'entschlafen', literally 'to sleep away', or 'sleep out of', a common euphemism for 'dying', much like 'passing away'.<sup>367</sup> Rinthy, it seems, sleeps out of the narrative as she finds the dead child. McCarthy no longer even dedicates an entire chapter to her, but ends the section with the tinker whose 'bleached and weathered brisket [alone] hung in that lonesome wood like a birdcage'.<sup>368</sup>

The birth scene of Rinthy's and Culla's incestuous child first references Rinthy's body under duress and '[t]he spasms in which she writhed put [Culla] in more mind of death'.<sup>369</sup> This scene, incidentally, echoes another scene of a female body under duress, Magdalena's epilepsy fits in *Cities of the Plain*. 'The old one-eyed criada was the first to reach her [...] pushing open the door to find her bowed

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<sup>366</sup> Marilyn Yalom, *A History of the Breast* (London: Pandora, 1998), p. 207.

<sup>367</sup> *Outer Dark*, pp. 246, 247.

<sup>368</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 247.

<sup>369</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 14.

in the bed as if some incubus were upon her.’<sup>370</sup> The historical and medical connotations of epilepsy broaden the insight into the otherwise largely muted and peripheral character of Magdalena.

The word “epilepsy” is of Greek origin and means to seize, to take hold of or attack. The word “seizure” is of Latin origin from “sacire”, i.e. to claim. These words reflect the ancient belief that the sufferer has been seized or claimed by a supernatural power, spirit, or god.<sup>371</sup>

This enlightens the treatment Magdalena receives from the other prostitutes, but also continues the dominant theme of her life: being seized and taken hold of, claimed by forces beyond her control. Both inside and outside her body, Magdalena is subject to forces that reduce her to a body without agency, forces pushed on her by both her illness and the various men in her life, including her pimps and John Grady, all debase her into object-ness.

Like Rinthy during labour and her body’s diseased mothering functions, Magdalena is unable to control her epileptic fits. Turner describes the historical understanding of epilepsy, together with leprosy and hysteria, as an illness that was ‘traditionally regarded as both an outcome of human sinfulness and as a sign of sacred election’, a view that is confirmed in the ensuing scene in the brothel.<sup>372</sup>

Es como una mujer diabólica,<sup>373</sup> the women said [...] they gathered clamoring about the bed and one pushed forward with a statue of the Virgin [...] The girl’s mouth was bloody and some of the whores came forward and dipped their hand-kerchiefs in the blood as if to wipe it away but they hid the handkerchiefs on their persons to take away with them [...] some of them were chanting and some were blessing themselves and the girl bowed and thrashed and then went rigid and her eyes white.<sup>374</sup>

Without medical understanding, the women regard Magdalena’s epilepsy as both diabolic and sacred, reading her writhing body as possessed either by the devil or by the Holy Spirit. Oswei Temkin discusses the ancient origins of the idea of the

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<sup>370</sup> *Cities of the Plain*, p. 72.

<sup>371</sup> Edward H. Reynolds, ‘History of Epilepsy’, in *Introduction to Epilepsy*, ed. by Gonzalo Alarcón and Antonio Valentín, Cambridge Core (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp. 1–5 (p. 1).

<sup>372</sup> Turner, p. 61.

<sup>373</sup> Translation: ‘She is like a diabolic woman’.

<sup>374</sup> *Cities of the Plain*, p. 73.

sacredness of epilepsy in *The Falling Sickness: A History of Epilepsy from the Greeks to the Beginnings of Modern Neurology*. Among others, Temkin refers to the first known monographic publication on epilepsy within the Hippocratic oeuvre, *On the Sacred Disease*.<sup>375</sup> The conflicted treatment Magdalena receives is rooted in this ancient understanding of her affliction.

Evidence from the archives show that McCarthy researched the history and medical implications of epilepsy, one reference in the notes on *Cities of the Plain* stating ‘See Thorndike’s History of Magic and Experimental Science EPILEPSY’, with two more specialised titles immediately below on the same page.<sup>376</sup> Temkin discusses the various terms and names that have been used throughout history to describe what is today called epilepsy. One of the most influential and enduring names is ‘falling sickness’, which Temkin chooses as the title for his monograph and which ‘was taken from the most noticeable symptom, that of the fall of the patient’.<sup>377</sup> This, of course, refers to the actual, physical falling down of a person who suffers an epileptic fit during which the mind is unable to exert any control over the physical body and therefore the body assumes the position which requires least conscious control over the muscles. However, the word ‘to fall’ or ‘fallen’ is also an archaic, morally significant expression for a woman fallen from grace and into sin, a description of the prostitute or ‘fallen woman’. Like the terms epilepsy and sacred disease, therefore, the name falling sickness further illuminates Magdalena’s character in the novel. The language McCarthy employs to describe her body, both figuratively and literally, more strongly determine her character, social circumstances, and history.

She was from the State of Chiapas and she had been sold at the age of thirteen to settle a gambling debt [...] The procurer himself appeared on the convent steps the following morning and in the pure light of day paid money into the hand of the mother superior and took the girl away again.

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<sup>375</sup> Owsei Temkin, *The Falling Sickness: A History of Epilepsy from the Greeks to the Beginnings of Modern Neurology*, 2. ed., rev (Baltimore: Hopkins Univ. Press, 1994), p. 4.

<sup>376</sup> Cormac McCarthy, ‘Holograph, Typescript [Cities of the Plain]’ (Alkek Library, Texas State University at San Marcos), no pagination, Cormac McCarthy Papers, The Wittliff Collections, box 71, folder 3.

<sup>377</sup> Temkin, p. 85.

This man stripped her naked and beat her with a whip made from innertube of a truck tire. Then he held her in his arms and told her that he loved her. She ran away again and went to the police. Three officers took her to a room in the basement where there was a dirty mattress on the floor. Then they sold her to the prisoners for what few pesos they could muster or traded her for cigarettes. Finally they sent for the procurer and sold her back to him.

He beat her with his fists and slammed her against the wall and knocked her down and kicked her [...] In his rage he seized her up by the arm but the arm broke in his hand...

Mira, he shouted. Mira, puta, que has hecho.<sup>378</sup>

The arm was set by a curandera<sup>379</sup> and now would not straighten.<sup>380</sup>

The indignities Magdalena has suffered since she was sold at the age of thirteen all speak of the impossibility to gain agency over her life and body. She has equally little agency in the indignities she has suffered at the hands of men as she does at the hands of her illness during an acute fit. She frequently finds herself in situations where she is ‘within the power of a supernatural being whose will [s]he must obey’, as Temkin describes the definition of epilepsy in the Middle Ages.<sup>381</sup> This ‘supernatural being’, in Magdalena’s case, signifies both the men and the illness in her own body. Rather than an object of sexual desire and male pleasure, reading illness in Magdalena’s body affirms her humanity and traces the tragic and violent history of a young woman whose underclass membership offers her no protection from the violent men who enter her life.

Interestingly, it is the pimp Eduardo who frees Magdalena’s body from the constraints put on her by the women in the scene quoted above; an action diametrically opposed to Magdalena’s reality while her body does not betray her illness, since, as her pimp, Eduardo has no interest in any form of autonomy or free movement for Magdalena. Ultimately, the young prostitute is never granted ownership over her own body nor does she receive the grace of community and kindness. Her attempt to escape to America ends in her violent death and ‘her body [is] found in the river’.<sup>382</sup> She is found by rushcutters, washed up on the banks of the river, reduced to a lifeless body with ‘[h]er hair damp and matted [...] Hung

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<sup>378</sup> Translation: ‘Look, he shouted. Look, whore, what you have done’.

<sup>379</sup> Translation: ‘Female (faith) healer, literally healer-ess’.

<sup>380</sup> *Cities of the Plain*, p. 140.

<sup>381</sup> Temkin, p. 86.

<sup>382</sup> *Cities of the Plain*, pp. 241.

with strands of dead brown weed [...] Her good blue dress [...] twisted about on her body and her stockings [...] torn.’<sup>383</sup> In her death Magdalena is discarded and found among the waste of the river, her body – having lost her value to Eduardo – has become superfluous waste for disposal, not unlike Rinthy at the end of her quest.

### ***3.7. Conclusion: Communities of Breaking Bodies***

Throughout his work, and especially in the four novels under discussion in this chapter, McCarthy describes environments conducive both to violence and lawlessness, as well as human kindness and non-physical beauty. The author’s awareness of the connections between excessive alcohol consumption, lawless behaviours, communities of drinkers, and sickness of the body, show him as an unromantic observer of the human condition amongst America’s poor and marginalised. Unlike dominant society, McCarthy’s work shows little value judgement of the lower classes and much of it has survived the value judgement of McCarthy’s editor of many years, Albert Erskine. In a letter written to McCarthy on 27 May 1977, two years prior to publication, Erskine complains:

If you think this book is the best you can make it as it stands, I’ll turn it in, with great misgivings, for copy-editing and production. But I want once again to plead for something better and more compact.

Let me try to focus on a few episodes. We have the early scene in which S gets very drunk, wakes up in the negro section and is picked up and jailed. This one has value in setting scene, theme, character, etc. Later on comes the nightclub riot where he is hit with a floor-buffer and taken to the hospital, has some cute repartee with the nurses and departs; this one is tedious and contributes nothing that I can see except additional pages of more or less the same thing, and is inferior to the hospital business near the end, which though too long does contribute (I think) to the whole.

In other words, I think the night-club-riot-to-hospital scene (unless it is meant to establish brain damage for explaining later behavior) could come out not only with no loss to anyone but with considerable gain to everybody.

I know that for reasons of your own (and they may be better than I can see) that you are determined to keep the whore-keeping-Suttree bit and the mussel-gathering bit (more than a bit, being still over the per cent of the book), but

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<sup>383</sup> Ibid., p. 230.

I'd like to repeat that I believe they not only pull their weight but might even sink the boat – a boat that deserves to float.

Please keep in mind that I've not said one word against junkman, ragman, railroad man, the Indian, Harrogate (though there is a little overmuch there), Ab Jones and his establishment, even the goatman, even Leonard of dubious value apart from the author's skull-beneath-the-skin obsession. But these good elements are asked to tote an awful lot of extraneous baggage.<sup>384</sup>

Many of the scenes Erskine criticises (and deems a considerable gain if deleted) remain in the novel with few, if any, changes and some deletions. As Luce establishes, 'McCarthy chose to delete some of his most egregious scenes and morally ambiguous material, rather than to draw more explicit ethical judgments about his characters.'<sup>385</sup> The author evidently did not share Erskine's concerns regarding the lack of moral fibre he perceived in *Suttree*, rather, he chose to publish an observation of humanity outside of the immediate visibility and realm of experience of those expected to read his novels, that is, the educated and literary middle- and upper class.

With his portrayal of the use and abuse of alcohol, of sickness and ill-health, the wanderings of the poor and marginalised, McCarthy invites neither sympathy nor abhorrence, but illuminates the condition of the most vulnerable in society, and depicts their struggles and their humanity. The poor underclass, their bodies unbeautiful and their moral compass occasionally misaligned, are engaged in struggles magnified and exacerbated by poverty and social exclusion, yet their actions remain profoundly human and even trivial.

The call for the recognition, literally the 'calling to mind again', of the humanity of the poor and marginalised, the racial other, and perhaps even the women, in McCarthy's work, is not a romantic blur of the purity of the poor. McCarthy's underclass, especially the men, maintain their agency in many ways and often make questionable decisions, as human beings are wont to do, that exacerbate their situation, such as the often portrayed excessive drinking. Yet, while

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<sup>384</sup> Albert Erskine, 'Albert Erskine to McCarthy [box 19, Folder 1]', 27 May 1977, pp. 1–2, Cormac McCarthy Papers, The Wittliff Collection, Alkek Library, Texas State University at San Marcos.

<sup>385</sup> Luce, 'Tall Tales', p. 217.

these characters are flawed, often severely, they are not the monstrous destroyers of dominant social, moral, and aesthetic norms that they are often made out to be in mainstream media and discourses.

## **Chapter 4: ‘Practitioner of ghastrliness, a part-time ghoul’: Appalachian Monsters**

### ***4.1. Introduction: Versions of Monstrosity***

The preceding chapters centre on a reading of the body focussing on class-affiliation and community, efforts and societal mechanisms to maintain order and social control, and modes of resistance against social and power structures. Class-affiliation becomes legible on the body alongside the lifestyles and struggles connected especially to lower class positions, such as engagement in violence and extra-legal behaviours, alcohol consumption, and illness caused and exacerbated by poor hygiene and unsanitary living environments. McCarthy’s focus on descriptions and representations of the body frequently replace a focus on psychology and interior or emotional life of the characters, who are frequently misread as flat and superficial. McCarthy’s characters, however, are complex individuals and their complexities and struggles are readable on their bodies through wounds, scars, excessive alcohol consumption, and illness. The author does not depict his lower and underclass as abject monsters, but as human beings capable of both violence and kindness, compliance and resistance. This focus on the underclass offers an alternative perspective on an aspect of society that is frequently overlooked in literature, theory, and society. Our understanding of society as a three-tier hierarchy (working class, petit-bourgeoisie, bourgeoisie) fails to include the underclass, those at the very margin of society whose position outside of our consciousness renders them vulnerable when unseen, and monstrous when forced into our field of vision. McCarthy’s focus on the underclass, as the preceding chapters show, offers a kinder, if unromantic, perspective on this vulnerable demographic and reinvests the characters with humanity and dignity.

Yet, McCarthy also writes a series of individual characters whose bodies possess monstrous qualities. These monsters are not of the fantastical and supernatural, no werewolves or vampires, but rather, his work is riddled with characters whose bodies and actions induce horror and disgust, incomprehension and despair, and questioning the very concepts of humanity and dignity. Throughout the violence and bleakness of his work, McCarthy introduces

characters whose appearance and behaviour is violent and vile beyond comprehension and comparison. The aim of this chapter is to examine those incomprehensible characters in their socio-cultural context, and to situate them within McCarthy's body aesthetics.

The monster is a common trope in literature as early as *Beowulf* or the *Nibelungenlied*, and has become a common cultural reference at least since Mary Shelley's 1818 *Frankenstein*. Many a monster has since been created for the page, the stage, or the screen. Like Shelley's Creature, Bram Stoker's vampire myth *Dracula* has had significant cultural impact and is regularly revisited in popular culture. The undead, vampires, werewolves, Golems, and, more recently, cyborgs, zombies, and aliens, have become an integral part of Western popular culture. These monster-types share a physical abnormality, bodies that mark them as other than human. Frankenstein's Creature, with its physical enormosity, its strength, and its body constructed from various corpse parts, or Count Dracula, the prototype of the undead figure in popular culture, the vampire schemer, seducer, dangerously attractive immortal and inhumanly strong cold body. David Gilmore traces monsters in North American tribal legend and argues that '[t]he metaphor of monstrosity [...] has both a psychological and a temporal referent: monsters represent primitive instinct over which civilization spreads a thin veneer.'<sup>386</sup> The thin veneer over humanity's primitive instinct is what makes the monster narrative attractive in popular culture and what McCarthy examines in his monstrous characters and their environs.

Especially in his Appalachian works, these monstrous characters emanate from the predominantly lower class communities that form the backdrop of the characters' socio-location. At the centre of this chapter are McCarthy's Appalachian novels *Outer Dark* and *Child of God*. Both feature characters – Lester Ballard and the unholy trinity – whose capacity for violence and immorality situate them outside of society and moral expectations. However, both novels also include infants born of incest whose physicality and actions, or lack thereof, are both disturbing and uncanny and resemble the monstrous. The inclusion of the children,

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<sup>386</sup> David D. Gilmore, *Monsters: Evil Beings, Mythical Beasts, and All Manner of Imaginary Terrors* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), p. 95.

both born of incest and both male infants, complicates the category of monstrosity and raises the question of the parameters of the category, the classification of certain characters as monstrous.

Rasmus Overthun asserts that the principle of the monstrous cannot be reduced to only the body, yet, the body functions as the visible incorporation of monstrosity. On the hybrid, the misshapen and colossal, Overthun continues, on the dysfunctional body, monstrosity becomes ‘legible’.<sup>387</sup> Monstrosity is thus readable in signs and markers on and of the body, yet is constituted of aspects beyond the purely physical. The combination of vile body and violent character justifies the term *monster* or *monstrous* as descriptor, inviting a teratological approach to the reading of these characters. The etymology of teratology, or monster studies, Picard and Browning assert, derives from the Greek word *teras*, meaning ‘monster,’ and the Latin *logy*, which in turn is derived from the Greek *logia*, meaning ‘a speaking discourse, treatise, doctrine, theory, science’.<sup>388</sup> This as well as the subsequent chapter, then, theorise monstrosity in McCarthy’s novels.

What constitutes monstrosity in general, and in McCarthy’s work specifically? Jeffrey Cohen argues that

[t]he monster's body quite literally incorporates fear, desire, anxiety, and fantasy (ataractic or incendiary), giving them life and an uncanny independence. The monstrous body is pure culture. A construct and a projection, the monster exists only to be read: the monstrosity is etymologically “that which reveals,” “that which warns,” a glyph that seeks a hierophant. Like a letter on the page, the monster signifies something other than itself: it is always a displacement, always inhabits the gap between the time of upheaval that created it and the moment into which it is received, to be born again.<sup>389</sup>

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<sup>387</sup> Rasmus Overthun, ‘Das Monströse und das Normale: Konstellationen einer Ästhetik des Monströsen’, in *Monströse Ordnungen: Zur Typologie und Ästhetik des Anormalen*, ed. by Achim Geisenhanslüke, Georg Mein, and Rasmus Overthun, *Literalität und Liminalität*, 12 (Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2009), pp. 42–79 (p. 51).

My translation from the German: ‘Wenngleich sich das negative Prinzip des Monströsen nicht auf den Körper reduzieren lässt, fungiert der monströse Körper doch als dessen sichtbare Inkorporation. Am hybriden, unförmig-kolossalischen und dysfunktionalen Körper wird das Monströse “lesbar”’.

<sup>388</sup> Caroline Joan Picart and John Edgar Browning, ‘Introduction: Monstrosity and Multiculturalism’, in *Speaking of Monsters: A Teratological Anthology*, ed. by Caroline Joan Picart and John Edgar Browning (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), pp. 1–12 (p. 1).

<sup>389</sup> Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, ‘Monster Culture (Seven Theses)’, in *Monster Theory: Reading Culture*, ed. by Jeffrey Jerome Cohen (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), pp. 3–25 (p. 4).

Monsters are not monstrous in appearance only, but monstrous within their time and cultural and social surroundings. They are ‘pure culture’ by virtue of being apart from the cultural expectations of their time. Like the underclass body, monsters constitute a negative foil against which to measure societal standards. Monsters, therefore, are monstrous not only in body but within their social and cultural context. As signs or warnings, and not unlike the above discussed underclass characters, they embody transgressions that undermine or contradict contemporary codes of behaviour and break laws and moral standards in opposition to, or rejection of, social standards and power structures.

#### ***4.2. Lester Ballard: Community and Exclusion***

McCarthy does not offer strict binaries of good (i.e. moral) and bad (i.e. immoral). Rather, the author creates landscapes and communities in which the very essence of such moral codes is ambiguous and dubious. Throughout several of his novels, McCarthy describes his monsters against a backdrop of failed communities, rather than embodiments of evil. Where the marginalised of *Suttree*'s McAnally Flats, or the campesinos and revolutionaries of Mexico in the Border Trilogy, form communities of support and kindness in opposition to and rejection of mainstream societal practices and standards, other marginalised communities become themselves exclusive and violent towards their weakest members. As Bourdieu suggests, ‘[a]esthetic intolerance can be terribly violent. Aversion to different lifestyles is perhaps one of the strongest barriers between the classes.’<sup>390</sup> Such violent aesthetic intolerance and aversion to other lifestyles is what leads to *Child of God*'s Lester Ballard's exclusion from Sevier County's mountain community – a community itself marginalised and rejected from America's wider mainstream society.

McCarthy introduces Lester as ‘small, unclean, unshaven’ who ‘stands straddlegged, [and] has made in the dark humus a darker pool wherein swirls a pale foam with bits of straw. Buttoning his jeans he moves along the barn wall, himself

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<sup>390</sup> Bourdieu, p. 56.

fiddlebacked with light, a petty annoyance flickering across the wallward eye.’<sup>391</sup> Lester’s jaw moves incessantly, as if he was chewing up his annoyance. His lack of hygiene, both his unclean body and his urinating in public, indicate in this first appearance his outsiderdom from the community, the ‘fat man with guitar grinning and gesturing to others’, or the ‘man in a blue suit gesturing from the truckbed’ forming both the physical opposition to and the target of Lester’s ‘petty annoyance’.<sup>392</sup> Incidentally, the description of light on Ballard’s body as ‘fiddleback’ and his walking along the wall evoke the image of the brown recluse spider, colloquially called ‘fiddle back spider’, an arachnid native to large parts of North America.<sup>393</sup> Evoking the image of a spider correlates Ballard with the animalistic, specifically the disgust and loathing associated with arachnids more generally. Further, the brown recluse spider is venomous, its toxin causing necrosis and skin lesions.<sup>394</sup> The brown recluse spider’s reputation is worse than it deserves, yet the loathing and rejection the necrotic toxin carrying spider experiences from mainstream society is not unlike that of the necrophiliac Lester Ballard increasingly receives throughout the novel. The hint to Lester’s spider-like, animalistic body foreshadows the trajectory of Ballard’s decline.

Early on, the community meets Lester with judgement and ostracism, rather than kindness, even before his body is marked by the animalistic. John Lang is left ‘to wonder what internal scars Lester himself bears after’ the childhood trauma.<sup>395</sup> After all, his ‘mother had run off’ and ‘his daddy killed hisself’, as a member of the community reports:

Me and Cecil Edwards was the ones cut him down. He come in the store and told it like you’d tell it was raining out. We went up there and walked in the barn and I seen his feet hanging. We just cut him down, let him fall in the floor. Just like cutting down meat. He stood there and watched, never said

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<sup>391</sup> *Child of God*, pp. 5–6.

<sup>392</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>393</sup> Richard S Vetter, *The Brown Recluse Spider* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2015), p. 7.

<sup>394</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 94.

<sup>395</sup> John Lang, ‘Lester Ballard: McCarthy’s Challenge to the Reader’s Compassion’, in *Sacred Violence*, ed. by Wade H. Hall and Rick Wallach, Cormac McCarthy’s Appalachian Works, 2nd edn, II vols (El Paso: Texas Western Press/University of Texas at El Paso, 2002), I, 103–11 (p. 106).

nothin. He was about nine or ten year old at the time. The old man's eyes was run out on stems like a crawfish and his tongue blacker'n a chow dog's.<sup>396</sup>

'They say he never was right after' in Sevier County, where the young Lester receives neither kindness nor consolation after seeing his suicide father cut down from the barn ceiling like meat.<sup>397</sup> It seems that Lester's detachment from the scene is perceived as eerie and abnormal, rather than a symptom of trauma. The Sevier County community excludes and shuns Ballard at a time when he most needs support and kindness. Later exacerbating the trauma by dispossessing the then young man and ousting him from his family farm which severs Ballard's last remaining connection to a family life and to the community as a whole.

Ballard's marginal position in the community is already evident when he is a child and finds his father hanging from the barn ceiling. Bourdieu suggests that

[t]o say that the members of a class initially possessing a certain economic and cultural capital are destined, with a given probability, to an educational and social trajectory leading to a given position means in fact that a fraction of the class (which cannot be determined a priori within the limits of this explanatory system) will deviate from the trajectory most common for the class as a whole and follow the (higher or lower) trajectory which was most probable for members of another class [...] The correlation between a practice and social origin (measured by the father's position, the real value of which may have suffered a decline concealed by constant nominal value) is the resultant of two effects (which may either reinforce or offset each other): on the one hand, the inculcation effect directly exerted by the family or the original conditions of existence; on the other hand, the specific effect of social trajectory, that is, the effects of social rise or decline on dispositions and opinions, position of origin being, in this logic, merely the starting point of a trajectory, the reference whereby the slope of the social career is defined.<sup>398</sup>

At the time Lester's father commits suicide, the family is already in disarray and disrepute, as the mother has left her husband and child. While breaking the marriage vows always carries a stigma, the conservative Puritan community Sevier County is likely to assume that it is the husband's failure not to be able to keep his wife. It is likely, therefore, that Lester's father was ostracised by the community to a degree and that this may have been a factor in Ballard senior's suicide. This stain on the Ballard family, coupled with Lester's difficult behaviour evident in the Finney boy

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<sup>396</sup> *Child of God*, p. 22.

<sup>397</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>398</sup> Bourdieu, p. 111.

scene, has led to Lester's early rejection by the Sevier County community.<sup>399</sup> Measured, as Bourdieu suggests, by the father's standards and the social and cultural capital, which Ballard does not possess in Sevier County, the 'slope of [Lester's] social career is defined' early on in Lester's life and with minimal input from or consideration for his circumstances.

The importance of Ballard's exclusion from the community is evident throughout the published novel as well as earlier drafts. In an early scene describing Ballard looking for help after his father's suicide, the boy is ignored for some time:

He come in the store and told it like you'd tell a hog had died. Unless it was a first rate hog. We looked at him and went right on playing mumblepeg and he said it again after a few minutes and we looked at him again and cecil [sic] said what was wrong with him and he said it a third time and we had to go up there. We never did believe it.<sup>400</sup>

Whereas the scene in the published novel delineates the lack of care and consideration the men have for Lester, the earlier draft shows them ignoring him entirely and requiring of a young boy to repeat three times that his father is dead, hanging from the barn ceiling. McCarthy's emphasis on Lester's isolation and marginal position in a community already at the fringes of mainstream society evidences the importance the author places on community and his interest in the possible outcomes of being excluded entirely from all forms of human communal interaction and support.

The earlier draft of the novel also shows that Ballard originally had a wife, a detail deleted from the published version. Whereas the deletion of the scene softens, if marginally, the treatment the young Lester receives in his community, the deletion of the wife emphasises the degree of his isolation. A few pages that appear left over and added to the draft, in the box with a folder titled 'Ballard (inc. Blacksmith) (leftovers)', show that McCarthy experimented with the idea of Lester's wife. On the first of those added pages, the insinuation is that Lester murdered his wife and her 'shcorpse' is found in a cave in similar circumstances as the dead women are found in the published version. Later on, the High Sheriff

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<sup>399</sup> *Child of God*, pp. 18–9.

<sup>400</sup> Cormac McCarthy, 'Typescript [Child of God]' (Alkek Library, Texas State University at San Marcos), pp. 1–9, Cormac McCarthy Papers, The Wittliff Collections, box 16, folder 2.

ruminate about the consequences of Lester 'being upset over his wife leavin him'.<sup>401</sup> While the language used to describe Mrs Ballard's corpse and the insinuation that she may have been the main trigger for Lester's downward spiral are in keeping with McCarthy at his most misogynistic, as shown in previous chapters, the deletion of the wife from the published version emphasises both Lester's isolation and the degree to which the Sevier County community is complicit in his fall from disgrace to monstrosity. It also demonstrates, moreover, the sheriff's, and by implication, the community's rejection of all responsibility for Lester's condition; as before, the individual alone carries the responsibility for their situation, their socio-economic environment discounted or ignored.

In the final leftover page, the High Sheriff, the same man who harasses Ballard throughout the narrative, offers the following soliloquy:

I can understand a man bein upset over his wife leavin him [...] And maybe takin to drink. Even that. Or even to the extent of doin like he done and lettin his farm go back because he was too drunk to work it or hire some body else to do it either. And it was all right him movin up to the old Speare's place and holin up there like some description of varmint because that's all the place he had to go to I reckon. And a steady diet of hard liquor will make a man pretty varmintish. But when his farm goes down on the block at a perfect legal auction and the feller that buys it puts damn near half [~~a third~~] of the [~~aski~~] bid price down in cash [...] even if maybe he didnt want to give his place up. Which I dont blame him, bein his family home and all... But to hold it against him to the point of shottin him down pointblank with a 30-30 rifle... I guess I just dont understand this world.<sup>402</sup>

Sheriff Fate's contemplations in this deleted scene show a man in a position of power with empathy, if limited, for a character like Lester who holds neither power nor status within his community. Yet, while Fate suggests some form of understanding for Lester at the early stages of his downward spiral, his ability to empathise ends with Lester's attempt to violently reclaim his homestead. Foucault suggests that 'the most intense point of a life, the point where its energy is concentrated, is where it comes up against power, struggles with it, attempts to use its forces and to evade its traps'.<sup>403</sup> Ballard's attack on Greer, the man who bought

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<sup>401</sup> McCarthy, 'Typescript [Child of God]', pp. 3, 9.

<sup>402</sup> Ibid., p. 9.

<sup>403</sup> Michel Foucault, 'Lives of Infamous Men', in *Power*, ed. by James D. Faubion, trans. by Robert Hurley, Essential Works of Foucault 1954-1984 (New York: The New Press, 2001), III, 157-75 (p. 162).

his house, is the logical culmination of his struggle with and against the community that has excluded him from its ranks, dispossessed him, ridiculed his existence and struggles, and consistently denied him the dignity of his humanity, especially evident in the sheriff's likening of Lester to varmints. With his experience of constant violation of his person, Lester applies the same logic in his failed attempt to reclaim his homestead. Ballard's overt attempts at stopping the proceedings, and by extension the workings of power, however, is where the sheriff, as a person of power and authority, ends his empathy for Ballard.

### ***4.3. Lester Ballard: Community, Power, and Becoming Monster***

Critics of *Child of God* are divided between a redeeming, if not sympathetic, view of Ballard, and complete condemnation of his misogyny and monstrosity. Nell Sullivan claims that the 'seeds of narrative misogyny lying dormant in *Outer Dark* come to fruition in *Child of God*',<sup>404</sup> while Lang suggests that '[i]n his isolation even among these representatives of the ethic of love for one's neighbor, Lester [...] becomes an object of some sympathy' to the reader.<sup>405</sup> Matthew Boudway calls Ballard 'just a pathetic misfit' in the first part of the novel, to then invert his rather sympathetic reading of the character 'as the novel proceeds [and] he gradually becomes a monster. The violence one encounters in *Child of God* is not unusual for McCarthy, but that probably isn't what bothers readers most. What really bothers us is Ballard's depraved abnormality.'<sup>406</sup> The challenge of *Child of God* is to decide whether, as readers, we side with a necrophiliac serial killer of women, or with the Sevier County community, who are complicit in their indifference, unkindness, and exclusionary practices, in creating the monster that is Lester Ballard in the second and third part of the novel. The question then becomes one of recognising Ballard

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<sup>404</sup> Nell Sullivan, 'The Evolution of the Dead Girlfriend Motif in *Outer Dark* and *Child of God*', in *Myth, Legend, Dust: Critical Responses to Cormac McCarthy*, ed. by Rick Wallach (Manchester; New York: Manchester University Press; St. Martin's Press, 2000), pp. 68–77 (p. 73).

<sup>405</sup> Lang, I, p. 106.

<sup>406</sup> Matthew Boudway, 'Children of God? Cormac McCarthy's Misfits', *Commonweal*, 2016, 18–23 (p. 23).

as ‘a child of God much like [ourselves] perhaps’,<sup>407</sup> who ‘just wants to be a member of the community that shuns him’, or acknowledging Lester’s ‘journey into homicidal madness’ as an aberration and departure from acceptable societal norms, justifying his exclusion from the Sevier Country community.<sup>408</sup> Is Lester Ballard a monster made or a monster born?

This question condenses into one of culpability and guilt – is Lester Ballard guilty, or is the verdict ‘not guilty by reason of insanity’? McCarthy’s exposition of his title character establishes a young man who has been traumatised and abandoned by both his family and his community, and who lives in isolation on the family farm until his home, too, is taken away from him, presumably because Lester has not been paying his taxes.<sup>409</sup> As the auctioneer explains, ‘I didn’t take your place off of ye. County done that. I was just hired as auctioneer.’<sup>410</sup> ‘The Lester Ballard we meet in Part One is certainly unpleasant enough in language and appearance and conduct’ as he attempts to defend his property against those who would dispossess him.<sup>411</sup> Yet, during the auction scene, Lester threatens the auctioneer with a gun, violence being the only way he seems to be able to communicate. Benjamin West<sup>412</sup> points out that ‘[e]ven with the gun in his face, the auctioneer continues to antagonize Lester, indicating that Lester inspires humorous scorn, rather than murderous fear, in his community’.<sup>413</sup> Buster, the aptly named community member, proceeds to come to the aid of the auctioneer and deals a violent blow to Lester’s head: ‘Lester Ballard never could hold his head right after that. It must of thowed his neck out someway or another [...] I seen him laying on the ground [...] He just laid there

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<sup>407</sup> *Child of God*, p. 6.

<sup>408</sup> Coughlin, p. 131, 129.

<sup>409</sup> Tax evasion remains a common practice in the US South, as Southerners insist on their independence from state government. A government, no less, that they often perceive as having abandoned them through the abolition of slavery which worked to the detriment of the agricultural communities of the South, justifying, to their reasoning, their continued resentment against any governmental interference with Southern customs and practices. Tax evasion thus is a practice of private resistance and defiance.

<sup>410</sup> *Child of God*, p. 9.

<sup>411</sup> Lang, I, p. 107.

<sup>412</sup> Benjamin West presented his paper on Lester Ballard’s acquired sociopathy during the 2014 Cormac McCarthy conference in Sydney, Australia. Subsequently he kindly provided me with an extended version of the manuscript of his research titled ‘Personal Foul: Lester Ballard’s Post-Concussion Syndrome’ which remains, as of February 2019, unpublished.

<sup>413</sup> Benjamin S. West, ‘Personal Foul: Lester Ballard’s Post-Concussion Syndrome’ (unpublished manuscript: SUNY Delhi), p. 5.

and he was bleeding at the ears.’ Lester is taken away and the auction proceeds ‘like nothing never had happent’.<sup>414</sup>

In a repetition of his childhood trauma, Lester sees something, or someone, taken away from him and receives neither kindness nor comfort from the community, but is violated and removed from sight. While it is conceivable that Lester carries ‘internal scars’ from witnessing his father’s suicide,<sup>415</sup> this first violent blow to Ballard’s head leaves perceivable physical traces as ‘the narrator focuses [...] on the physical effects of the ax blow, speculating that it must have damaged his neck while also causing his crossed eyes, a large welt on his head, and bleeding ears’.<sup>416</sup> The physical impact of Lester’s untreated head injury, ‘a clear indication that his injury has long term physical, if not psychological, consequences’, opens a new chapter in the monster book of Lester Ballard.<sup>417</sup>

At the time Lester finds refuge in the cabin in the woods, he already ‘looked half crazy’.<sup>418</sup> This description of Lester is in line with Foucault’s identification of the treatment of the madman, as

[i]n the Middle Ages and during the Renaissance madmen were permitted to exist in the midst of society. What is called the “village idiot” did not get married, did not participate in games, and he was fed and supported by others. He would roam from town to town, sometimes he would enter the army, he would become a peddler; but when he became too worked up and dangerous, the others would construct a little house outside town where they would temporarily confine him.<sup>419</sup>

Removing Lester from the community by auctioning his property and place of residence, the community effectively condemns him to exist at the margins and in the derelict cabins and structures out of sight. Lester becomes the ‘village idiot’ who, by threatening the auctioneer with a rifle, has become too dangerous and thus

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<sup>414</sup> *Child of God*, p. 10.

<sup>415</sup> Lang, I, p. 106.

<sup>416</sup> Travis Franks, “‘Talking about Lester’”: Community, Culpability, and Narrative Suppression in *Child of God*, *Mississippi Quarterly: The Journal of Southern Cultures*, 67.1 (2014), 75–97 (p. 7/13).

<sup>417</sup> West, p. 5.

<sup>418</sup> *Child of God*, p. 15.

<sup>419</sup> Foucault, 'Madness', II, p. 341.

has to be confined away from the community to become ‘a misplaced and loveless simian shape’.<sup>420</sup>

Where his appearance prior to the first incident was unpleasant and uncomfortable, Lester now begins his spiral into homelessness, marginality, and monstrosity. This is, however, not before he receives another blow to the head in another moment of public humiliation and lack of intervention and kindness from those in a position to show compassion: ‘The deputy had one knee in the small of Ballard’s back. The woman had risen. She cocked her elbows and drew back her foot and kicked Ballard in the side of the head’ after which Ballard, instead of receiving medical attention, spends ‘[n]ine days and nights in the Sevier County jail’.<sup>421</sup> The authority vested in the state officials of the sheriff’s office to ‘serve and protect’, here neither serves nor protects Lester Ballard, but rather participates in the violation of his body and dignity by refusing to intervene when the situation transgresses into chaos and violence. As Foucault puts it,

what defines a relationship of power is that it is a mode of action that does not act directly and immediately on others. Instead, it acts upon their actions: an action upon an action, on possible or actual future or present actions. A relationship of violence acts upon a body or upon things; it forces, it bends, it breaks, it destroys, or it closes off all possibilities. Its opposite pole can only be passivity, and if it comes up against any resistance it has no other option but to try to break it down. A power relationship [...] can only be articulated on the basis of two elements that are indispensable if it is really to be a power relationship: that “the other” (the one over whom power is exercised) is recognized and maintained to the very end as a subject who acts; and that, faced with a relationship of power, a whole field of responses, reactions, results, and possible inventions may open up.<sup>422</sup>

Both circumstances under which Lester receives the blows to his head clearly delineate the power structures at play. Lester, through his physicality and demeanour, offers resistance that must be broken down. Hence the blow to his head at the auction and the subsequent removal of his person from the scene and visibility. Equally, being retained at the police station without charge, and, on the second incident of the head injury, being left to the attack of the woman who claims Lester raped her, demonstrate the callous and arbitrary treatment Lester receives at

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<sup>420</sup> *Child of God*, p. 21.

<sup>421</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 50.

<sup>422</sup> Foucault, ‘Subject’, III, p. 340.

the hand of law enforcement. The ensuing denial of medical attention to Lester's injuries in both scenarios situates the value of Lester's life and wellbeing low on the list of law enforcement officers' priorities; his lack of power does not induce the officers to treat him kindly or fairly.

There is evidence in a folder with leftover scenes from earlier drafts of *Child of God* that McCarthy meant for the High Sheriff of Sevier County to be a questionable character and habitual abuser of power. In one of the deleted memories of a community member, the speaker recounts in more detail how he and the sheriff found a couple in a car on Frog Mountain

and the old boy scratched around for the longest time, couldnt find his pocketbook nor nothing. Fate finally told him, said: Step out here [...] Well, the old boy opened the door and out he climbed [in pencil above: stepped]. Fate just looked at him. Directly he hollered ~~back~~-at me, said John, come here and see this.

I got out and went on up there and this old boy is standin by the side of the car lookin down and the sheriff is lookin down, got the light on him. We're all standin around looking ~~down~~ at this old boy and he's got his britches on inside out. ~~Old~~ pockets hanging [inserted: outside] all around. Looked crazier'n hell.<sup>423</sup>

While John, the speaker, concludes that the sheriff let the couple go because '[t]hat's the kind of feller he is', he only releases the man and the terrified woman, 'settin there [...] white as a sheet', after he has humiliated them in front of his sidekick.<sup>424</sup> This scene, read alongside the many instances of the sheriff's treatment and humiliation of Lester, clearly indicates McCarthy's intention of showing exactly what 'kind of feller' the sheriff is, namely one who is not above humiliating and shaming those with less power and authority than himself, the members of his community he is supposed to serve and protect.

The documents in the Cormac McCarthy Archive further show that McCarthy made significant changes to the scene of Ballard's initial head injury at the auction. In an earlier draft, the sheriff, not Buster, hits Ballard in the head:

Whether he would or would not of shot CB I wouldnt know. The high sheriff hit him as awful a lick as ever you saw a man take. He [Ballard] just fell in a pile. Sheriff got him by the shirt-collar and just drug [added in pencil, crossed

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<sup>423</sup> McCarthy, 'Typescript [Child of God]', p. 33.

<sup>424</sup> Ibid.

out: ‘hauled’] him on off and they went on with the auction like he never of been there, but CB did say that it kept some folks from biddin that otherwise would of, which may of been what Lester set out at, I dont know. John Greer was from up in Grainger County [end of page].<sup>425</sup>

This early scene depicts the high sheriff’s abuse of his position of authority and power. Rather than negotiating with Lester, the sheriff attacks him with ‘as awful a lick as ever you saw’ leading to Lester falling down ‘in a pile’. It takes considerable force for a grown man to immediately lose consciousness and fall to the ground after being hit in the head. The sheriff, in this earlier draft, appears to neither hesitate nor show any remorse or concern at the result of his attack, as he grabs Lester ‘by the shirt-collar and just [drags] him off’. The sheriff acts in the interest of the auction, of the continuance of commerce and official business, rather than in protect the members of his county, including Ballard.

During the editing process, McCarthy decided that this scene should show a member of the public, rather than the high sheriff, hit Ballard. In the published version, the sheriff’s complicity in the process of marginalising and excluding Ballard from the community is amply evident, as he repeatedly fails to protect Ballard from being violated by members of the community. However, letting Buster take the sheriff’s place in hitting Ballard further amplifies the larger community’s active involvement and complicity in Ballard’s exclusion. Both the early and the published version of the scene show that the auction continues ‘like nothing never had happent’, but in the earlier version, this could be attributed to the sheriff’s obvious abuse of power whereas the published version depicts a community complicit in Lester’s abuse.<sup>426</sup>

In the published text, the sheriff and the community become equally culpable as they are equally involved in violating Lester’s body. Interestingly, the narrator of this scene, clearly marked in both versions through the use of strong local dialect, mentions that the ultimate buyer of Lester’s farm is from Grainger County, rather than Sevier County: ‘John Greer was from up in Grainger County. Not sayin nothin against him but he was.’<sup>427</sup> By highlighting that the new owner of

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<sup>425</sup> Ibid., no pagination.

<sup>426</sup> *Child of God*, p. 10.

<sup>427</sup> Ibid.

Ballard's farm was a stranger to the Sevier County community, McCarthy invites the reader to consider the scene and question the community's violation of one of their own in order to benefit a stranger. After all, Lester was being forcibly removed from the scene so that the land owned by one of their community, the Ballard farm, could fall into the hands of someone who is not a member of this community. The careful change to this scene enforces a much more careful consideration of the question of abuse of police authority and power as well as the role and complicity of the members of the community in violating and excluding one who should, by rights and tradition, be one of their own, a member of the tight-knit Sevier County community.

#### ***4.4. Lester Ballard: Monster Made***

Rather than focussing on the psychological impact that those humiliating and emasculating situations may have had on Lester Ballard, McCarthy offers a description of Ballard's body that allows for an actual reading of the physical consequences of those head injuries that likely have some effect on Ballard's deterioration. The trauma to Ballard's body not only marks him physically, he 'never could hold his head right after that',<sup>428</sup> but West states that 'two traumatic brain injuries (TBIs) [...] may go a long way towards explaining some of his behavior'.<sup>429</sup> There is no assertion 'that Lester's head injuries are the only cause, or the primary cause, of his violent crimes. Rather, Lester's head injuries, while adding to his social alienation, may also result in changes in his brain's functioning, making him, among other things, more impulsive and aggressive.'<sup>430</sup> Like Suttree's, Rinthy's, and Magdalena's illnesses, the physical repercussions of the violence Lester experiences at the hands of his community have an impact both on how he is perceived, and on how he interacts within, or rather reacts against, the community.

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<sup>428</sup> Ibid.

<sup>429</sup> West, p. 4.

<sup>430</sup> Ibid., p. 7.

Bartłomiej Piechowski-Jozwiak and Julien Bogousslavsky offer an explanation for different pathologies that might be superimposed on Ballard. The authors suggest that, generally speaking, there are two types of psychopathy: ‘developmental psychopathy and acquired sociopathy. The latter form may follow brain injury [...] In these cases, the impulsive aggression and antisocial behaviour is triggered by external factors and may be the leading presentation.’<sup>431</sup> West further explores the symptomology of Ballard’s head injury and the ensuing societal neglect and ostracism Ballard experiences: ‘Twice in the novel’s first section, Lester Ballard suffers violent blows to the head, and these repeated blows and the potential resultant combination of Post-Concussion Syndrome (PCS) and/or Chronic Traumatic Encephalopathy (CTE) may help explain Lester’s later behavior.’<sup>432</sup> Head trauma, in combination with the societal ostracism Ballard experiences, may lead to Lester’s deterioration into a spiral of violence, death, and necrophilia.

The rejection Ballard experiences pushes him to the margins even of the marginal rural community of his home county. Combe and Boyle trace the becoming-monster of Mary Shelley’s Creature in *Frankenstein* only after it experiences rejection from society: ‘Any monstrous behavior it adopts comes as a result of being driven to such action by the harsh and unfair treatment it receives from people in general and, in particular, from its creator.’<sup>433</sup> Ashley Craig Lancaster connects *Frankenstein* directly to *Child of God*: ‘By reinventing Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*, McCarthy grounds his argument in a historical pattern of social isolation and also forces his audience to pay attention to the progressive horror associated with allowing this system of social othering to continue.’<sup>434</sup> While Combe and Boyle acknowledge that the Creature’s actions remain ‘terrible acts of violence’, they also emphasise that the reader is more likely to empathise with the

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<sup>431</sup> Bartłomiej Piechowski-Jozwiak and Julien Bogousslavsky, ‘Psychopathic Characters in Fiction’, in *Literary Medicine: Brain Disease and Doctors in Novels, Theatre, and Film*, ed. by Julien Bogousslavsky and Sebastian Dieguez, *Frontiers of Neurology and Neuroscience* (Karger, 2013), XXXI, 60–68 (pp. 61–2).

<sup>432</sup> West, pp. 1–2.

<sup>433</sup> Kirk Combe and Brenda Boyle, *Masculinity and Monstrosity in Contemporary Hollywood Films*, *Global Masculinities* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p. 20.

<sup>434</sup> Ashley Craig Lancaster, ‘From Frankenstein’s Monster to Lester Ballard: The Evolving Gothic Monster’, *Midwest Quarterly: A Journal of Contemporary Thought*, 49.2 (2008), 132–48 (p. 133).

creature than with its creator, Victor Frankenstein.<sup>435</sup> Likewise, McCarthy's introduction of Ballard as 'a child of god, much like yourself, perhaps' suggests that the author asks his readers to look beyond the superficial gruesomeness and monstrosity of the protagonist.<sup>436</sup> As Lancaster suggests, 'humans may not be able to identify personally with Frankenstein's Monster, they are able to see through Lester how even the Monster represents a being in constant search for personal companionship that neither his creators nor his community will provide for him.'<sup>437</sup> This is reflected in much of the criticism on *Child of God*, which shows many critics empathising with Lester and condemning the Sevier County community for their injustices towards Ballard. Michael Madsen asks:

How do we otherwise explain a kinship with a man who is a brute, a murderer, and a necrophile? The answer is, of course, that Lester is above all a human being, searching for and desperately desiring security, love, and a sense of belonging. His actions and motivations evoke an experience of the uncanny because they are equally strange and understandable, familiar and unfamiliar.<sup>438</sup>

For Maria O'Connell, Lester simply 'takes up with the dead because the living will have nothing to do with him'.<sup>439</sup>

In fact, it appears that rejection and loneliness are a common theme among necrophiles, as Julie Peakman suggests: 'Psychiatrists have claimed that sex with dead bodies is related to the feeling of insignificance experienced by the necrophile.'<sup>440</sup> Lester's desire to partake in a community has been commented on by several critics, notably by Luce who claims that 'most necrophiles do not love or find arousing death itself [...] it is human connection [...] they desire',<sup>441</sup> while Eric Loy argues that 'Lester's banishment from society [...] removes the moral obligations that may have otherwise constricted Lester's behavior. In other words,

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<sup>435</sup> Ibid., p. 20.

<sup>436</sup> *Child of God*, p. 6.

<sup>437</sup> Lancaster, p. 133.

<sup>438</sup> Michael Madsen, 'The Uncanny Necrophile in Cormac McCarthy's *Child of God*; Or, How I Learned to Understand Lester Ballard and Start Worrying', *Cormac McCarthy Journal*, 9.1 (2011), 17–27 (p. 18).

<sup>439</sup> Maria O'Connell, 'Home Is Where the Body Is Buried: Place, Space, Homelessness in *Child of God* and *The Crossing*', *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment*, 21.3 (2014), 588–99 (p. 590).

<sup>440</sup> Julie Peakman, *The Pleasure's All Mine: A History of Perverse Sex* (London: Reaktion Books, 2013), p. 261.

<sup>441</sup> Luce, *Reading*, p. 162.

no longer a member of society, Lester is free to act without moral attribution.<sup>442</sup> Membership in society, Loy suggests, requires that the member adheres to the laws and moral standards of said society. The exclusion from society, either by choice or by circumstance and force, therefore breaks the societal contract and enables Lester to act outside society's moral and legal codes.

To understand the paradox of *Child of God* – the simultaneous condemnation and acquittal of Lester Ballard – his monstrosity has to be defined. Several critics, including Lang and West, have identified the three parts of the novel as sections in Ballard's becoming-monster. While Ballard is introduced as inhabiting the outmost fringes of Sevier County society, the narrative follows retrospective reports by members of the community from which Ballard is excluded and are therefore hostile to varying degrees and marked by unkindness and bias against the child of god. Franks describes this as 'the theme of communal scapegoating running through the novel', as none of the narrating voices claim any understanding, compassion, or responsibility for Lester Ballard's decline from oddball to necrophiliac serial killer.<sup>443</sup>

To begin with, Ballard is not a monster but an awkward and bothersome non-member of a tight-knit community. As such, Ballard does not enjoy the protection of the law and is therefore attacked and receives serious head-injuries that are likely to have later sequela in his behavioural choices and ability to cope with stress and anger: 'Lester demonstrates numerous symptoms related to CTE [Chronic Traumatic Encephalopathy], including paranoia, aggression, irritability, agitation, impulsiveness, and confusion.'<sup>444</sup> From there, Lester 'quickly transitions from the community clown to a psychopathic serial murderer and necrophiliac'.<sup>445</sup> During the second part of the novel, McCarthy emphasises Ballard's ineptness, describing him as '[a] crazed gymnast laboring over a cold corpse' or as looking 'like a crazy winter gnome', maintaining the focus on Ballard's physicality and

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<sup>442</sup> Eric Loy, 'Savage Garden: Edenic Motif and the Paradox of Civilisation in *Child of God*', *The Cormac McCarthy Journal*, 12.1 (2014), 44–68 (p. 58).

<sup>443</sup> Franks, p. 2/13.

<sup>444</sup> West, p. 15.

<sup>445</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13.

observable behaviour, rather than offering an insight into Ballard's psyche.<sup>446</sup> With the increasing deterioration of Ballard's physical appearance, his humanity decreases and gives way to the monster that tells a young woman to 'Die, goddamn you' and allows him to burn a house while the idiot child sits 'watching him, berryeyed filthy and frightless among the painted flames'.<sup>447</sup> Ballard's becoming-monster can be read in the sequence of changes to his body. From the awkward and scrawny non-member of Sevier Country society, to 'scratching at the hole with a piece of stone or his bare hand' like a burrowing animal, Ballard loses his connection to humanity both inside and out, and transforms into a monstrous body whose transgression against society, morality, and humanity can be read by reader and fellow characters alike.<sup>448</sup>

#### **4.5. Incest Monsters**

Lester Ballard, however, is not the only monster McCarthy offers in *Child of God*. In fact, the novel is littered with monsters and monstrosities which find echoes in other novels and which largely adhere to the poor white southerner 'stereotypes of the hillbilly [...] socially and economically backward, drunken, promiscuous, dirty, and inbred', not unlike the band of paupers in *The Gardener's Son*.<sup>449</sup> One such echo resounds from *Outer Dark*, in which the offence to moral sensibilities is incest. Yet, where the actual act of incest in *Outer Dark* occurs before the narrative begins, McCarthy's provides a scene of incestual rape in the abject white trash trailer family of the junkman, including this explicit scene:

One day in the woods and kudzu jungles on the far side of the dump he [the junkman] came across two figures humping away. He watched from behind a tree until he recognized one of his girls. He tried to creep up on them but the boy was wary and leaped up and was away through the woods hauling up his breeches as he went. The old man began to beat the girl with the stick he carried. She grabbed it. He overbalanced. They sprawled together in the leaves. Hot fishy reek of her freshened loins. Her peach drawers hung from a

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<sup>446</sup> *Child of God*, pp. 84, 102.

<sup>447</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 113.

<sup>448</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 179.

<sup>449</sup> Jennifer Brown, *Cannibalism in Literature and Film* (Hampshire, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p. 108.

bush. The air about him grew electric. Next thing he knew his overalls were about his knees and he was mounting her. Daddy quit, she said. Daddy. Oooh.

Did he dump a load in you?

No.

He pulled it out and gripped it and squirted his jissom on her thigh. Goddamn you, he said. He rose and heisted up his overalls and lumbered off toward the dump like a bear.<sup>450</sup>

This scene clearly and explicitly depicts an act of father-daughter rape which the daughter seems to enjoy and the father rejects all responsibility for, laying the blame on her: ‘Goddamn you.’ Yet, despite the clarity and unmistakability of the scene, the monstrosity and yet banality is problematic to the extent that critics such as James R. Giles gloss over when summarising the scene as if the dumpkeeper/father ‘after chasing the unknown young man away, *tries to force himself on her*’.<sup>451</sup> The dumpkeeper does not, in fact, *try*, but rather succeeds without intention, or so it seems. There is no narration of any conscious but failed attempt, as Giles appears to imply, but of an ‘air [that...] grew electric’ and before he knows it, his penis, as an uncontrolled and uncontrollable agent, is in his daughter.

The deliberation of squirting ‘his jissom on her thigh’ problematises the initial description of the father’s lack of agency when he commits this father-daughter rape, since this action is controlled and suggests agency. The scene portrays the junkman as both morally culpable of rape and incest, and as animal without control. After ejaculating on, rather than in, his daughter, the junkman ‘lumber[s] off *like a bear*’.<sup>452</sup> This simile equates the father with a wild beast that traditionally stands for untamed power, violence, and wildness – an uncontrollable force of nature. The junkman, therefore, is both culpable as a moral being, as well as being subject to natural forces and instincts, like the bear, that cannot be controlled or held morally responsible for its actions. As Lester Ballard, therefore, the junkman’s monstrosity, to a degree, is both abhorrent and related to what lies below the thin ‘veneer of humanity’ – the untamed, instinctual beast within.<sup>453</sup>

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<sup>450</sup> *Child of God*, p. 28.

<sup>451</sup> James R. Giles, ‘Discovering Fourthspace in Appalachia: Cormac McCarthy’s *Outer Dark* and *Child of God*’, in *Cormac McCarthy*, ed. by Harold Bloom, Bloom’s Modern Critical Views (New York: Bloom’s Literary Criticism, 2009), pp. 107–31 (p. 124) [emphasis added].

<sup>452</sup> *Child of God*, p. 28 [emphasis added].

<sup>453</sup> Gilmore, p. 95.

An earlier version of this scene of father-daughter rape exists that would complicate the narrative significantly, had it been included in the published novel. After the father lumbers off, the early draft includes the sentence ‘<Or> so she told a suitor <who told Sevier County>’.<sup>454</sup> Calling the rape into question not only allows a reading of the daughter as deviant and monstrous, but also complicates the reading of the monstrous child. The a-chronological narrative of *Child of God* renders it impossible to situate the incestual rape scene firmly within a specific chronological time frame. There is also no clear indication of which girl the father rapes, perhaps because the father seems unable to tell one from the other himself. It is evident, however, that the junkman has a cohort of unruly reproduction machines for daughters, a ‘gangling progeny with black hair hanging from their armpits’, who ‘fell pregnant one by one [...] The house was filling up, both rooms, the trailer. People were sleeping everywhere.’<sup>455</sup> There is also a strong suspicion, later in the novel, that the last girl in the house is the mother of ‘the stained and drooling cretin’, as Ballard insists: ‘He’s yourn, ain’t he?’<sup>456</sup>

Blair supports this hypothesis: ‘Billy, the “idiot child” who is probably a product of incest, becomes “it,” “the thing,” and a “slobbering primate” in the narrator’s description.’<sup>457</sup> The language McCarthy uses to describe the child creates little room for empathy or compassion, questioning the very humanity of the infant. Billy is

[a] hugeheaded bald and slobbering primate that inhabited the lower reaches of the house, familiar of the warped floorboards and the holes tacked up with foodtins hammered flat, a consort of roaches and great hairy spiders in their season, perennially benastied and afflicted with a nameless crud.  
 [...] the ... what? child? child [...] The child’s dull eyes followed. It stirred into sluggish motion.  
 [...] The child took it in fat gray hands.<sup>458</sup>

In fact, when the child passively regards the flames that will become his death, the memory of a child that has just chewed off a living bird’s legs is still vivid: ‘Its

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<sup>454</sup> McCarthy, ‘Typescript [Child of God]’, p. 20.

<sup>455</sup> *Child of God*, pp. 27, 28.

<sup>456</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 110.

<sup>457</sup> Alexandra Blair, “‘The Wanted Stared Back’: Biopolitics, Genre, and Sympathy in Cormac McCarthy’s *Child of God*”, *The Southern Literary Journal*, 47.2 (2015), 89–106 (p. 92).

<sup>458</sup> *Child of God*, p. 74.

mouth was stained with blood and it was chewing.<sup>459</sup> Billy is a violation of nature and the passivity and obvious lack of understanding he displays are unnatural and leave little space for concern for him. As Andrew Ng states, '[t]he abhuman [...] is also the ab-ject body, one that transgresses boundaries, exposing what is obscene and should be kept hidden (inside).'<sup>460</sup> The child, Billy, is both bodily abject and transgressive, his obscenity epitomised by his chewing off the legs of a live bird and his lack of reaction when he sits 'berryeyed filthy and frightless among the painted flames' in which he will die.<sup>461</sup> The incestual child is more abhorrent and monstrous than the raping father or the necrophile Ballard, even if agency cannot rationally be expected of an infant of Billy's age, nor is he responsible for his incestuous origin.

The explicitly incestuous child of Rinthy and Culla Holme in *Outer Dark* receives similar narratorial treatment: 'his old man's face flushed and wrinkled, small fingers clenched.'<sup>462</sup> The first physical description of the chap is simultaneously his first marker of unnaturalness and ab-humanity – the new born child with the face of an old man, defying the natural order of chronological time from the moment he is born. The incestuous origin of the chap, as in *Child of God's* Billy, exposes the obscenity of incest: the unnatural, ab-human, a-chronological child that is the result of sibling parentage. The clenched fists, further, signal anger and defiance, sentiments unnatural in a child born only moments ago.

The chap's anger and defiance continue as Culla takes him away: 'It howled execration upon the dim camarine world of its nativity wail on wail while he lay there gibbering with palsied jawhasps, his hands putting back the night like some witless paraclete beleaguered with all limbo's clamor.'<sup>463</sup> Peakman suggests that the deformed incestuous child was historically perceived as an ill omen as well as an abhorrence, especially so in the early Puritan writing, as for example Anne Bradstreet's poetry shows.<sup>464</sup> The tinker's violent reaction to finding out about the

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<sup>459</sup> Ibid., pp. 75–6.

<sup>460</sup> Andrew Hock-soon Ng, *Dimensions of Monstrosity in Contemporary Narratives: Theory, Psychoanalysis, Postmodernism* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), p. 147.

<sup>461</sup> *Child of God*, p. 113.

<sup>462</sup> *Outer Dark*, p. 15.

<sup>463</sup> Ibid, p. 18.

<sup>464</sup> Peakman, p. 287.

child's parentage supports Peakman's analysis: 'The tinker did not turn loose of her arm. That's a lie, he said [...] That's a lie, he said again. You say it's a lie [...] The tinker puller her close. You say that's a lie damn you [...] The tinker rose and stood trembling above her.'<sup>465</sup> The tinker's disgust in these scene is palpable as he seeks to discredit Rinthy's statement of the chap's parentage by attempting to force her to admit that her claim is fabricated. Yet, his anger at Rinthy is superseded by his disgust at the child, which, the tinker acknowledges, has an illness.

The tinker's reaction to the child mirrors the readers' reaction, especially when the child's body is graphically described just before he dies:

It had a healed burn all down one side of it and the skin was papery and wrinkled like an old man's. It was half naked and half coated with dust so that it seemed lightly furred and when it turned to look up at him he saw one eyeless and angry red socket like a stokehole to a brain in flames.<sup>466</sup>

As after the birth, the child's appearance just before his death is linked to several layers of unnaturalness. The child's age, at this point, is likely to be around eight months, yet his skin is that of an old man, revisiting the trope of the unnaturalness of the child's appearance within the chronological passing of time. The ash on the child appears to be fur, likening the child to something more animal-like, with its papery skin covered in fur, reminiscent more of an aye-aye than a human child.<sup>467</sup> The burn marks and missing eye render the child angry-looking, even his deformations speaking of anger and destruction.

While they [the child's physical markers] stress the child's vulnerability and showcase his violent abuse, they do not invite sympathy: "It made no gesture at all. It dangled from his hands like a dressed rabbit, a gross eldritch doll with ricketsprung legs and one eye opening and closing softly like a naked owl's". Implicitly equating the cannibalistic consumption of the child to a "skinned squirrel" or "dressed rabbit" dampens moral outrage, as does deliberately invoking horror through natural ("ricketsprung legs," "naked owl") and supernatural ("gross eldritch doll") abnormality.<sup>468</sup>

Nelson surmises that, despite the obvious abuse of the demented, incestuous child, there is no empathy for the chap. The healed burn scars down one side, the angry

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<sup>465</sup> *Outer Dark*, p. 200.

<sup>466</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 239–40.

<sup>467</sup> Aye-eyes are a species of lemur native to Madagascar. They are active during the night and frequently listed as one of the ugliest and most revolting animals on the planet.

<sup>468</sup> Nelson, p. 40.

eye socket, and the lack of agency the child displays render it alien, ab-human, a monstrous sight to behold.

Billy, the bird-leg-eating idiot child in *Child of God*, and the demented chap in *Outer Dark*, receive no empathy, but appear monstrous and disturbing, while their parents can be read with compassion and sympathy, not least because McCarthy deleted the scene that calls into question the father-daughter rape. The unknowing, unsuspecting victims of incest, the children generated through familial sexual contact, symbolise and embody the immoral act and are thus, in their witnessing bodies, abhorrent. They are children without innocence through no fault of their own. Portraying perpetrators of incest and even necrophiliac serial killers, like Lester Ballard, as subjects deserving of compassion, albeit perhaps not likeable, while the innocent child-victims of their parents' transgressions receive no compassion, not authorial, nor narratorial, nor from the reader, exposes a deeply flawed system of morality that judges more the physical monstrosity of children than the act of incest itself.

The treatment of the incestuous children in these novels exemplifies the violence inherent in reading the body. The aesthetics of their bodies categorises the chap and Billy as ab-human and monstrous and removes all dignity and humanity from the children and all empathy and kindness from the reader. The almost universally understood ab-humanity of the children's' bodies, evident in the treatment they receive from critics, epitomises the systematic and systemic categorisation and classification of the unbeautiful body. McCarthy's incest children demonstrate levels of complicity beyond the upper classes of the novels, in the endemic nature of value judgement according to aesthetic standards, practiced within the novels as well as by the novels' readers.

#### ***4.6. The Early Agents Provocateurs***

Foucault asks if there are intrinsically dangerous individuals and, if so, how to recognise them or even react to their presence. Where Foucault argues that the legal definition of such individuals gradually expanded to include the mundane 'common

everyday figure of the degenerate, of the pervert, of the constitutionally unbalanced, of the immature', McCarthy offers a series of characters whose monstrosity is all but the mundane everyday occurrence.<sup>469</sup> Early on in his work, McCarthy explores the extent of human monstrosity, for example so in *The Orchard Keeper*'s Kenneth Rattner. Sylder has the 'profound and unshakable knowledge of the presence of evil' when in Rattner's company, and he felt 'he could not touch him' and 'a terrific need to be clean', suggesting that there is something loathsome about Rattner.<sup>470</sup>

The demented child is not the only monster in *Outer Dark*, and the chap's parents do not qualify for this category. Giles suggests that Culla is haunted by his consciousness, as mirrored in the disturbing scenes of abject mother nature, suffering 'a desperation born of degrading poverty and stultifying ignorance'.<sup>471</sup> Although there are arguments for and against Culla's culpability, there seems little to suggest that he is a moral or criminal monster. What acts of immorality he commits, with exception of his incestuous relationship, can be read as a young man's desperate attempt to find his place in life – an attempt that, the final few pages suggest, fails. However, it seems that Culla's wanderings are accompanied by the remaining monstrous characters, the unholy trinity roaming the novel.

To Nelson, '[b]odies are empty signs [...] that arbitrarily communicate false purpose beyond their control', yet, the descriptions of the three agents of chaos roaming *Outer Dark* speak of their monstrosity before it becomes evident in their actions.<sup>472</sup> Their appearance marks them as harbingers of destruction. The unholy trinity, as Spencer calls them,<sup>473</sup> are introduced as '*parodic figures transposed live and intact and violent out of a proletarian mural and set mobile upon the empty fields, advancing against the twilight, the droning bees and windtilted clover*'.<sup>474</sup>

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<sup>469</sup> Foucault, 'Dangerous Individual', p. 17.

<sup>470</sup> *The Orchard Keeper*, pp. 34–5, 35.

<sup>471</sup> James R. Giles, *The Spaces of Violence* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2006), p. 17.

<sup>472</sup> Nelson, p. 41.

<sup>473</sup> William C. Spencer, 'Cormac McCarthy's Unholy Trinity: Biblical Parody in *Outer Dark*', in *Sacred Violence*, ed. by Wade H. Hall and Rick Wallach, 2nd edn, II vols (El Paso: Texas Western Press/University of Texas at El Paso, 2002), I, 83–91 (p. 83).

<sup>474</sup> *Outer Dark*, p. 35 [italics in original].

Combe and Boyle assert that there are two types of monsters, those made through nurture, such as Lester Ballard, and monsters found who

are beasts emerging out of nature, from beyond the current sphere of human knowledge and endeavour [...] whether from the darkest jungle, deepest sea, or farthest reaches of outer space, these monsters appear without warning and threaten our status quo.<sup>475</sup>

The emergence of the marauding triune appears both organic, from a place deep down where they '*might have risen from the ground*', and otherworldly, from a place not quite graspable as they emerge '*marvelously armed with crude agrarian weapons, spade and brush-hook [...] in an explosion of guineafowl and one screaming sow*'.<sup>476</sup> Indeed, throughout the novel, the grim triune appears within natural settings within which they seem to belong. In their second intermittent chapter they appear '*attended by a constant circus of grasshoppers catapulting from the sedge*'.<sup>477</sup> Their movement creates a chaotic scene in nature that prefigures the dust rising over the marauding Glanton gang riding in the desert sands of *Blood Meridian*, headed by the archetypal agent provocateur, Judge Holden.

In an early scene, the bearded one's 'lawless authority and destruction' becomes evident as he incites mob violence that leads to '*the bodies of two itinerant millhands*' hanging from a tree.<sup>478</sup> The initial cause for unrest is the squire's murder, perpetrated by the bearded one and his companions themselves, but the mob suspected Culla of committing. Spencer asserts that

[t]he three marauders of *Outer Dark* comprise a triple allegory of evil, with the bearded leader symbolizing lawless authority and destruction, Harmon representing violence, and the idiot corresponding to ignorance. Evil [...] in this novel's view includes violence and ignorance under the control of malevolent authority and often operating under a deceptive guise.<sup>479</sup>

Leading the mob away from Culla, '*in the glare of the torches nothing of his face visible but the eyes like black agates [...] nothing about his hulking dusty figure*

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<sup>475</sup> Kirk Combe and Brenda M. Boyle, *Masculinity and Monstrosity in Contemporary Hollywood Films* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p. 2.

<sup>476</sup> *Outer Dark*, pp. 238, 35 [italics in original].

<sup>477</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 53 [italics in original].

<sup>478</sup> *Outer Dark*, p. 99 [italics in original].

<sup>479</sup> Spencer, I, p. 91.

other than its size to offer why these townsmen should follow him along the road.’<sup>480</sup> ‘[I]t is none other than the triune’s leader who, clothed in the dead man’s suit, assumes the role of a satanic agent provocateur, inciting the crowd.’<sup>481</sup> In this scene, the bearded one exposes the townspeople’s lust for violence and unflinching engagement with revenge and mob justice. Wierschem asserts that ‘[l]ike other authorities, Christianity in *Outer Dark* seems a mere shell of peripheral social dictates devoid of its ethical core. It is consequently absorbed in the ravages of communal violence.’<sup>482</sup> Spencer suggests that ‘[i]n the world of *Outer Dark*, the townspeople are so predisposed to rash violence that they are easily seduced and controlled by this parodic counterpart to Yahweh: this destroyer, this bringer of darkness. They passively follow simply because he assumes authority and gives commands.’<sup>483</sup> The moral codes upon which Rinthy and Culla’s incest are judged, the novel suggests, are as arbitrary and inconsistent as the immorality of the Holme siblings and the grim triune. The community whose members call down from the upper window of a closed store ‘We still Christians here. You’ll have to come back a weekday’, preventing someone in need from accessing supplies, is the same community that conveniently forgets their Puritan Christian values when incited by the agent provocateur.<sup>484</sup> This narrative, too, it seems, is scraping at the thin veneer of Christian morality and community bonds and exposes the weakness and profound self-interestedness of humanity.

When Culla first encounters the triune, ‘there were three men standing on the bank of the river [...] with the fire behind them projecting their shapes outward into soaring darkness and with no dimension to them at all.’<sup>485</sup> Their shapelessness merging with the light of the fire as well as the utter darkness of the night, echoing Overthun assesses monstrous appearance as not exclusively a phenomenon of the visible, but it threatens to undo the borders of corporeal appearance.<sup>486</sup> In this

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<sup>480</sup> Ibid.

<sup>481</sup> Markus Wierschem, “‘Some Witless Paraclete Beleaguered with All Limbo’s Clamor’”: On Violent Contagion and Apocalyptic Logic in Cormac McCarthy’s *Outer Dark*, *Contagion: Journal of Violence, Mimesis, and Culture*, 22 (2015), 185–202 (p. 189).

<sup>482</sup> Wierschem, p. 193.

<sup>483</sup> Spencer, p. 89.

<sup>484</sup> *Outer Dark*, pp. 26–7.

<sup>485</sup> Ibid., p. 175.

<sup>486</sup> Overthun, p. 44.

description of the borderless physical appearance of the grim triune, their existence between light and shadow, becomes a marker of the hybridity, the monstrous immateriality of their bodies.

Apart from their appearance as inseparable trio, each member's body in itself is unwholesome and prefigures danger and monstrous actions. The leader's body appears to be an array of ill-assembled parts, echoing, again, that of Frankenstein's Creature:

He wore a shapeless and dusty suit of linen that was small on him and his beard and hair were long and black and tangled [...] his bare feet were out at the toes of a pair of handmade brogans [...] nothing of his face visible but the eyes like black agates [...] nothing of his hulking dusty figure other than its size.<sup>487</sup>

Particularly the hulking figure, the repeated focus on the leader's oversized appearance, likens him to the traditionally monstrous. Michael Niehaus argues that the monstrous is, more than anything else, a bulky largeness, the unilateral excessively grown. The monster, Niehaus continues, is insatiable because the emptiness inside it is boundless.<sup>488</sup> Combe and Boyle assert that '[m]onsters tend to be very big and to have large, scary biting mouths,' the oversized appearance constituting fears other than simple physical strength, specifically the large facial features are associated with further threats such as oral aggressiveness and the possibility of anthropophagy.<sup>489</sup>

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My translation from the German. The original quotation reads: ‚Grundlegend zu berücksichtigen wäre, dass das Monströse keinesfalls exklusiv ein Phänomen der Sichtbarkeit ist, sondern die Grenzen des Feldes der körperlichen Erscheinung zu überschreiten droht – dies betrifft u.a. die interpellatorische Semiotik des monströsen Körpers, der auf etwas Anderes verweist, aber auch Formen praktisch-moralischer und psychostruktureller Monströsität, die nicht an körperlichen Merkmalen manifest werden‘. Overthun, in this quote, continues to assert not only that with the monstrous, the borders of the physical appearance are under threat, but also that the moral, or rather amoral, and psycho-cultural dimensions of the monstrous are invisible.

<sup>487</sup> *Outer Dark*, p. 99.

<sup>488</sup> Michael Niehaus, ‚Das verantwortliche Monster‘, in *Monströse Ordnungen: Zur Typologie und Ästhetik des Anormalen*, ed. by Achim Geisenhanslüke, Georg Mein, and Rasmus Overthun, *Literalität und Liminalität*, 12 (Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2009), pp. 81–102 (p. 87).

My translation from the German. Niehaus's original reads: ‚Nun aber ist das Monströse im bildgebenden Sprachgebrauch vor allem das unförmig Große, das einseitige Überwachstum. Unersättlich ist das Monster, weil die *Leere* in seinem Inneren unermesslich ist‘ (Niehaus 87)

<sup>489</sup> Combe and Boyle, p. 18.

McCarthy focuses significant attention on the faces and facial expressions of the trio: ‘*the smiling face, black beard, the tautly drawn and dusty suit of black* [...] *His assassin smiled upon him with bright teeth*’, reinforcing Niehaus’s, and Combe’s and Boyle’s assessment of the intimidatingly large monster and their matching faces and mouths and hunger.<sup>490</sup> The leader’s face, moreover, is never described as a whole, but rather, like his body, an assembly of parts held together by the black beard which frames his other features: ‘his beard shone and his mouth was red, and his eyes were shadowed lunettes with nothing there at all.’<sup>491</sup> It seems to be the beard that bestows the face with some coherence, the other features, specifically the eyes, may or may not be part of his face, again resounding descriptions of the monstrous. Perhaps ‘McCarthy does intend that *Outer Dark*’s terrible threesome be viewed as embodiments of evil, for he endows them with diabolical attributes’,<sup>492</sup> such as the eyeless face or the boot ‘cleft from tongue to toe like a hoof’, clearly evoking the image of the devil’s hooved foot.<sup>493</sup> This image of the leader as devil-like is reinforced when he ‘seemed to be seated in the fire itself, cradling the flames to his body as if there were something there beyond all warming’.<sup>494</sup> It also prefigures the ungodly figures yet to come in McCarthy’s later novels *Blood Meridian* and *No Country for Old Men*, as I will demonstrate in the following chapter.

Resembling the leader, ‘*the faces of the other two peering from either shoulder in consubstantial monstrosity, a grim triune that watched wordlessly, affable.*’<sup>495</sup> Like Lester Ballard, the second in command and only named member of the triune, Harmon, constantly carries a rifle and regards the world rather impassively: ‘One was holding a rifle loosely in one hand and picking his teeth.’<sup>496</sup> Harmon will listen to the leader and obey his commands, such as not shooting Culla or leaving the circle of the camp fire to collect more wood, yet the rifle always at the ready symbolises Harmon’s constant availability to cause chaos and

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<sup>490</sup> *Outer Dark*, p. 133 [italics in original].

<sup>491</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 178.

<sup>492</sup> Spencer, I, p. 84.

<sup>493</sup> *Outer Dark*, p. 183.

<sup>494</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 186.

<sup>495</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 133 [italics in original].

<sup>496</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 176.

disharmony, rendering the one name to the unholy trinity, Harmon(y) an ironic inversion.

The mute's inability to speak resembles that of the mute incestuous children. No affect shows in the man's face, other than the occasional '*mindless smile*', resembling both the demented, bird-legs eating Billy in *Child of God* and the demise of Rinthy's chap, in which the mute, of course, participates.<sup>497</sup> The posture and body language of the mute further distance him from expectations of the mainstream, cultural, beautiful body as he stands 'with long arms dangling at his side, slightly stooped, his jaw hanging and mouth agape with a slavering smile'.<sup>498</sup> His apparent inability to stand straight or to check the demented smile on his face, are reminiscent of his abhumanity and unbeautiful, abject body, the animalistic, as well as his lack of mental capacity or intelligence, thus likening him to the demented children born of incest, Billy and the chap.

Spencer appears to follow McCarthy's affix 'affable' in the passage quoted above: 'Toward the end of the novel the band materializes almost supernaturally before hanging the tinker, and *again* appear friendly.'<sup>499</sup> He asserts that McCarthy consistently portrays the unholy trinity as arbitrarily smiling. Harmon '*had a rifle and was smiling*' or '*smiled dreamily*' on several occasions, the leader is described as smiling upon his murder victim '*with bright teeth*' and his '*teeth appeared and went away again as if he had smiled*', and the demented mute smiles '*mindlessly*' or '*slaveringly*'.<sup>500</sup> Yet, even with those smiles, the trinity does not appear 'friendly' at any point, as Spencer claims. Rather, the smiles draw attention to the monstrous faces, or as Gilmore asserts, McCarthy, too, offers a 'continual visual emphasis on the colossal mouth as organ of predation and destruction'.<sup>501</sup>

The offensiveness of the trinity's faces and apertures peaks in the two scenes with Culla at the camp fire. During the first scene, the nameless and shapeless leader's 'face scowled redly out of a great black beard' while Culla himself

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<sup>497</sup> Ibid., p. 53 [italics in original].

<sup>498</sup> Ibid., p. 176.

<sup>499</sup> Ibid., p. 53.

<sup>500</sup> Ibid, pp. 238, 242, 133, 181, 53, 176 [italics in original].

<sup>501</sup> Gilmore, p. 176.

‘squatting before the fire and extended his palms over it like some stormy and ruinous prophet’.<sup>502</sup> Nearby, there is ‘a pan of black and mummified meat’ that the bearded one offers to Culla: ‘Help yourself to some meat there if you’re hungry.’ ‘Holme’s stomach turned coldly’ at the prospect of eating the meat.<sup>503</sup> The narrator follows Culla’s attempt at eating the meat over several pages. Even the undernourished Culla attempts to refuse the meat that ‘had the consistency of whang [a leather thong], was dusted with ash, and tasted of sulphur’.<sup>504</sup> McCarthy revels in this description and insists this sentence be read slowly and carefully by inserting rather more commas than usual. The leathery meat has Culla’s jaw ‘working in a hopeless circular motion’ and the meat, ‘[w]hatever it was had swollen in his mouth and taken on a pulpy feel warped and run with unassailable fibers’.<sup>505</sup> The first suspicions arise at the description of the meat as mummified, and while the text follows Culla’s helpless attempts at chewing what he could not refuse if he did not want to offend the bearded one, the suspicion that Culla is being made to participate in anthropophagy becomes more and more plausible.

Any doubts ‘that the strange meat which Culla was forced to eat in his earlier encounter with the trio was human flesh’<sup>506</sup> is removed during the last encounter during which the chap ‘dangled from his [the bearded one’s] hands like a dressed rabbit’.<sup>507</sup> Dressed, here, carrying the meaning of both clothed as well as of animals prepared for cooking. The scene ends with the death of the child and the demented mute’s vampiric drinking of the child’s blood: ‘The mute one knelt forward. He was drooling and making little whimpering noises in his throat. He knelt with his hands outstretched and his nostrils rippled delicately [...] and buried his moaning face in its throat.’<sup>508</sup> In the following scene, Rinthy finds in the ‘dust and ashes, circling the dead fire, the charred billets and chalk bones, the little calcinated ribcage’, at which point it becomes clear that the chap was eaten, certainly by the

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<sup>502</sup> *Outer Dark*, pp. 176–7.

<sup>503</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 177, 178.

<sup>504</sup> *Outer Dark*, p. 178.

<sup>505</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 178–9.

<sup>506</sup> James R. Giles, *Space of Violence*, p. 31.

<sup>507</sup> *Outer Dark*, p. 243.

<sup>508</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 244–5.

members of the trio, and also by Culla, who would likely not have survived a refusal.<sup>509</sup>

In addition to the various murders and acts of violence that bar any motivation or justification, the grim triune commits severe breaches of social taboos by engaging in anthropophagy and infanticide. Giles claims that the trio, ‘not fully human themselves [...] have dehumanized the child, transforming it into something monstrous’.<sup>510</sup> While, as argued above, the chap himself has become monstrous in appearance indeed, Giles claims that ‘however monstrous it has become in the hands of the three, [the chap] remains an innocent, and the mute’s act of drinking its blood is a parody of Christian community’.<sup>511</sup> While McCarthy likely wrote this scene as a parody of the holy communion, what is striking in Giles’s analysis is the language he himself employs in describing the child. By continuing to deny the child an identity and calling him ‘it’, Giles applies the same logic that allows Culla to refuse any responsibility for the unnamed infant, ‘*He ain’t nothing to me*’, and that leads to the bearded one murdering the unclaimed child.<sup>512</sup> Yet, the monstrosity of the scene comprises both the monstrosity of the incestuous child and the vampirism and anthropophagy of the triune. McCarthy’s language and the narratorial perspective remain detached, and the scene focusses on the demented mute and the lack of reaction by either the bearded one, or the father of the child, or the child himself.

#### ***4.7. Conclusion: What Monstrosity Now?***

Lester Ballard’s decline from a traumatised boy, via a spider-like home-owner and homeless burrowing animal to ‘something come against the end of a springloaded tether or some slapstick contrivance of the filmcutter’s art’ wearing ‘a wig [...] fashioned whole from a dried human scalp’ traces on his body the levels of rejection

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<sup>509</sup> Ibid., p. 246.

<sup>510</sup> James R. Giles, *Space of Violence*, p. 30.

<sup>511</sup> Ibid., p. 31.

<sup>512</sup> *Outer Dark*, p. 243 [emphasis added].

he experiences from the community.<sup>513</sup> McCarthy originally intended to imbibe Ballard with a sense of guilt or shame, as this deleted scene shows:

Squatting there he let his head drop between his knees and he began to cry.  
[...]  
He dreamt that night that he rode through woods on a low ridge [...] Each leaf that brushed his face deepened his sadness and dread.  
[...]  
That morning he sat in the sun outside the sinkhole and honed the blade of his pocketknife on a piece of slate he'd wet with his spittle.  
[...]  
He rose and walked into the woods a little way and found a broken limb and here he undid his belt buckle and lowered his trousers and stepped out of them and laid them in the leaves. Naked from the waist saving his shoes and socks he knelt astraddle the limb and laid his testicles on the soft wood and with one swift slice of the knife severed them from his body.  
They slid from the limb and fell into the leaves at his feet. They peeked from the shriveled sac like eyeballs, veined, hanging by tubes. He looked down at himself, a cleanlipped little cuntlet welling blood. His penis lay in the wound. Had his hand done it? Been told? He was still holding the pocketknife. Oh god, he said. Oh god almighty.<sup>514</sup>

Lester's self-castration, preceded by his breakdown and nightmare about his isolation from human contact, is surprising, as no insight into his psyche in the earlier draft or the published novel foreshadows a sense of guilt or need for self-punishment.

Erskine, McCarthy's editor, annotates a copy of this draft equally questioning Lester's motivation. Added in handwriting, the note states

Mac, it seems to me arbitrary; not set up. OK if you motivate it earlier, somehow; but as it comes it is unprepared for. He has haunting guilt for what he did? OK, but foreshadow it, or you'll lose the reader.<sup>515</sup>

Given Lester's enforced removal from the community, readable in his increasingly monstrous body, the self-castration scene would have forged a tenuous link to a moral environment to which Lester, throughout the narrative, loses all connection. However, Lester's moral emptiness is a mirror image of the moral vacuity of the

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<sup>513</sup> *Child of God*, p. 164.

<sup>514</sup> Cormac McCarthy, 'Photocopy Draft [Child of God]' (Alkek Library, Texas State University at San Marcos), pp. 135a, 136, 137, Cormac McCarthy Papers, The Wittliff Collections, box 16, folder 3.

<sup>515</sup> Cormac McCarthy, 'Photocopy Draft with Editorial Notes Addressed to "Mac."' [Child of God]' (Alkek Library, Texas State University at San Marcos, n.d.), p. 137, Cormac McCarthy Papers, The Wittliff Collections, box 16, folder 5.

community who abandons him at an early age and watches him, through the markings in his body, deteriorate into monstrosity. It is only when Lester is sectioned with others deemed criminally insane, that he establishes a sense of moral compass in opposition

to a demented gentleman who used to open folks' skulls and eat the brains inside with a spoon. Ballard saw him from time to time as they were taken out for airing but he had nothing to say to a crazy man and the crazy man had long since gone mute with the enormity of his crimes. The hasp of his metal door was secured with a bent spoon and Ballard once asked if it were the same spoon the crazy man had used to eat the brains with but he got no answer.<sup>516</sup>

It is when these men, or monstrous characters, are forced back into societal structures, such as a mental hospital, that they regain a tentative sense of morality, although Ballard remains unable to judge his own monstrosity – the killing of young women to have sex with their bodies – and uses his regained sense of morality only to judge others, like the old man who ‘had long since gone mute’. Not unlike the community who participated in Ballard’s ostracism and watched his decline without compassion, Ballard applies moral standards to others, not to examine his own behaviour.

The system of applying standards to others but not to oneself through which Ballard judges the brain-eater, is the same system through which society, and by implication the reader, judges the two incest children. Excluded through the circumstance of their birth from society and community, their innocence remains unacknowledged and the judgement against their parents, not unlike Lester, becomes a judgement of the children. The animalistic and monstrous description of their bodies evoke fear, loathing, and rejection from a community who uncritically think of themselves as ‘still christians here’ while simultaneously refusing assistance and kindness to the most vulnerable members of the community.<sup>517</sup> As with Lester’s visible decline, the bodies of the two incestuously conceived boys mirror the monstrosity of society’s double standards and moral failures.

The extent of society’s monstrosity becomes evident when the monstrous bodies lose all human resemblance and become agents of destruction, like the

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<sup>516</sup> *Child of God*, p. 183.

<sup>517</sup> *Outer Dark*, p. 26.

unholy trinity. While they could be embodiments of Culla's conscience, Culla's conscience is afflicted by the same double standard and moral failure that allows for a reading of his child as monstrous. If, then, the trinity emanates from Culla's conscience, they also emanate from society and from society's moral failings. Their violence becomes the logical extreme of the violence that is systemic and systematic in classifying and ostracising certain bodies, such as the Holmes; if their bodies are expendable and unworthy, so, the trinity's action seem to suggest, is everyone else's. The Appalachian monsters share their embodiment not of monstrosity itself, but of failed community contracts and flawed social morality standards. This failure, and its accompanying embodiment, becomes more pronounced and terrifying in the Southwestern novels, as the following chapter will demonstrate.

## Chapter 5: True and Living Prophets of Destruction: Southwestern Monsters

### *5.1. Introduction: Monsters Born*

The Appalachian monsters of the previous chapter foreshadow the violence, chaos, and destruction emanating from the later Southwestern monsters. Unlike the unholy trinity, Judge Holden and Anton Chigurh take centre stage in the narratives of *Blood Meridian* and *No Country for Old Men*, and unlike Lester Ballard or the two incestuous children, neither of the Southwestern monsters is imbued with redeeming features. Holden's and Chigurh's monstrosity is unambiguous, both bodily and morally. Like the Appalachian monsters, Holden's and Chigurh's monstrosity 'must be examined within the intricate matrix of relations (social, cultural, and literary-historical) that generate them'.<sup>518</sup> Their monstrosity originates in specific social, cultural, and historical moments, rendering their bodily monstrosity a visible and readable sign of an underlying social, moral, and cultural failure that generates monsters in its own image.

Whereas the historical contexts of the novels differ, *Blood Meridian* set during the Westward Expansion and *No Country for Old Men* during the first years of the war on drugs, both monsters share a variety of features. Significantly, both Holden and Chigurh are cultured, polite, speak without regional inflection, and are able to converse in several languages. Bourdieu asserts that

[t]he denial of lower, coarse, vulgar, venal, servile – in a word, natural – enjoyment, which constitutes the sacred sphere of culture, implies an affirmation of the superiority of those who can be satisfied with the sublimated, refined, disinterested, gratuitous, distinguished pleasures forever closed to the profane. That is why art and cultural consumption are predisposed, consciously and deliberately or not, to fulfil a social function of legitimating social differences.<sup>519</sup>

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<sup>518</sup> Cohen, p. 5.

<sup>519</sup> Bourdieu, p. 7.

While the Appalachian monsters are coarse and vulgar, members and emanations of the underclass, the Southwestern monsters have access to cultural and social capital and do not belong to the vulgar aesthetic of the unbeautiful lower classes. Their paradoxical nature allows their bodies to be monstrous and unbeautiful, while simultaneously holding significant power. The monstrosity of their bodies and their morally vacuous behaviour are the physical manifestations of the unequal and unjust power structures underlying society. As embodiments of society's failure to implement a just and benevolent system in which all are created equal, and are treated as such, the Southwestern monsters exist outside the realm of class and social hierarchy. The power Holden and Chigurh embody and exert is the logical trajectory of the power structures in hegemonic social hierarchies.

The paradox of Holden's and Chigurh's cultured monstrosity is the logical culmination of a system of aesthetic classification of the body. This aesthetic is described by Isobel Armstrong, when she borrows from Eagleton. It is an aesthetic that

plays havoc with the separate realms of the cognitive, ethical and political, making them permeable by aestheticizing them, so that they are commonly grounded in the aesthetic rather than in propositionality. It pretends to be itself while infiltrating the fiercely contested categories of bourgeois thought – freedom, legality, self-determination, necessity. It adopts the appearance of standing over and against power, while being the very essence of the mystified power by which hegemony maintains itself. The virtuosic feats of hegemony, that look-nohands trick by which hegemony makes people do what it wants by persuading them that they are doing it voluntarily, are performed through the aesthetic.<sup>520</sup>

In an environment in which the hegemonic classes dictate both standards of beauty and definitions of morality, the logic of the beautiful body becomes self-perpetuating and independent of propositionality, that is, of actual moral behaviours and positive impacts on the community and society as a whole. The dominant narrative suggests that physical beauty and moral integrity, and inversely, unbeauty

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<sup>520</sup> Isobel Armstrong, *The Radical Aesthetic* (Oxford; Malden, Mass: Blackwell Publishers, 2000), p. 31.

and immorality, are connected, thus disbanding the requirement to examine beyond the physical layer.

As Armstrong's 'look-nohands trick' suggests, hegemonic power structures concentrate power in the hands of the upper classes, and coerce those lower and lowest in the social hierarchy to participate in a system that systematically works against their interest. As Foucault suggests, '[p]ower relations are rooted in the whole network of the social', beyond overt means of discipline and social control.<sup>521</sup> Instilling aspirations and an illusion of social mobility into the population, through narratives such as 'from rags to riches', is part of the implicit control that permeates 'the whole network of the social' while it covertly works to concentrate and maintain power in society's upper echelons. The promise of possible future access to social, cultural, and economic capital constitutes a soft power version of other, more violent forms of coercion. Coercion and social control entail both overt and covert forms of violence and spawn its own monstrosities in the shape of Judge Holden and Anton Chirguh.

## ***5.2. Judge Holden: The Coercive Monster***

Historically, *Blood Meridian* is located at a crossroads in American history and society, during the process of the Westward Expansion and immediately following the Mexican Wars and the Guadalupe-Hidalgo Treaty that saw large parts of formerly northern Mexican territory become American. The 'ideological underpinnings' of the myth of the Frontier, as Slotkin suggests, 'are those same "laws" of capitalist competition, of supply and demand, of Social Darwinism "survival of the fittest" as a rationale for social order, and of "Manifest Destiny" [...] the building blocks of [American] dominant historiographical tradition and

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<sup>521</sup> Foucault, 'Subject and Power', p. 345.

political ideology'.<sup>522</sup> This founding moment in American history and the formation of an 'American character' is based on the genocidal takeover of the spaces west of the Appalachian mountains and the clearing of the country from opposing forces, namely Native tribes and cultures. The Frontier project was to expand America as 'colonial offshoot of Europe, agrarian in economy, localistic in politics, tentative as to nationality, and relatively homogenous in ethnicity, language, and religion'.<sup>523</sup> The violence required to achieve the aims of the Westward Expansion stands in direct opposition to the founding ideals 'that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness'.<sup>524</sup> These founding ideals, the brainchild of a small group of privileged men, are an early example of the concentration of power and social, cultural, and economic capital at the top echelons of the emerging American society. Life, liberty, and happiness were not on offer for the Native American tribes on whose land the new nation emerged, nor were the enslaved Africans part of the founding fathers' consideration for the new nation and its universal rights. Access to young America's promises was granted to the beautiful upper demographic, those who wrote the Constitution (with themselves in mind) and their peers, creating the notions of racialised and deserving populations as we understand them today as demarcation and in- or exclusion lines. The discrepancy between the founding ideals and the realities of enslavement, racialisation, and genocidal violence creates fertile ground for the monster to emerge as a symptom of its time.

Cohen states that monsters are 'born only at this metaphoric crossroads, as an embodiment of a certain cultural moment – of a time, a feeling, and a place'.<sup>525</sup> Drawing from traditional readings of the monster, this monstrous birth at a crossroads allows for the monster to be read 'as *prodigium* ("wonder", "marvel", or

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<sup>522</sup> Richard Slotkin, *The Fatal Environment: The Myth of the Frontier in the Age of Industrialization, 1800-1890* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1998), p. 15.

<sup>523</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 15.

<sup>524</sup> Rakove, p. 77.

<sup>525</sup> Cohen, p. 4.

literally “prodigy”), the monstrous birth was an ‘omen’ or ‘portent’, like a comet: a theologically or morally grounded sign of something to come – a misfortune’.<sup>526</sup> The monster thus becomes a ‘fundamental figure around which bodies of power and domains of knowledge are disturbed and reorganized’.<sup>527</sup> Significantly, the monster can only be identified in the socio-political, geographical, and historical context within which it serves as reflection or projection of society and society’s trajectory. This location of the monster at a societal crossroads imbues it with the power to influence culture and society both as reaction against the monstrous and through coercion in the interest of the monster’s wider aims. The societal monster’s capacity to incite mob violence, like the unholy trinity does in *Outer Dark* discussed in the previous chapter, is one symptom of its power to coerce. The monster holds power that both generates resistance and functions as an agent of oppression and coercion. This monster is an *agent provocateur* for those in power, the coercive monster operating with the power of hegemonic systems.

One such *agent provocateur* in the Southwestern novels is the German Wirtz, in *The Crossing*. A marginal figure that shares in a similar physical and moral monstrosity as the leader of *Outer Dark*’s triune; the ‘German Huertista [a follower of the Mexican President José Huerta Marquéz] called Wirtz who was captain of the federal army’ during the Mexican Revolutionary Wars.<sup>528</sup> Wirtz’s monstrosity and access to power is evident in the short section dedicated to him. When his tactics of humiliation and intimidation, that is, his attempts at coercion, fail, he

did something very strange. He smiled and licked the man's spittle from about his mouth. He *was a very large man with enormous hands* and he reached and seized the young captive's head in both these hands and bent as if to kiss him. But it was no kiss. He seized him by the face and it may well have looked to others that he bent to kiss him on each cheek perhaps in the military manner of the French but what he did instead with a great caving of his cheeks was to

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<sup>526</sup> Charles T. Wolfe, ‘The Materialist Denial of Monsters’, in *Monsters and Philosophy*, ed. by Charles T. Wolfe, Texts in Philosophy, 3 (London: College Publications, 2005), pp. 187–204 (p. 89) [italics in original].

<sup>527</sup> Michel Foucault, *Abnormal: Lectures at the Collège de France 1974 - 1975*, ed. by Valerio Marchetti and Antonella Salomoni, trans. by Graham Burchell, Lectures at the Collège de France (London: Verso, 2003), p. 62.

<sup>528</sup> *The Crossing*, p. 284.

suck each in turn the man's eyes from his head and spit them out again and leave them dangling by their cords wet and strange and wobbling on his cheeks [...] The red holes in his skull glowed like lamps. As if there were a deeper fire there that *the demon* had sucked forth.<sup>529</sup>

While *The Crossing*, as all McCarthy novels, is littered with scenes of abject violence, this is perhaps the most graphic and intense moment in the text, perpetrated by one of the characters whose monstrosity is evident in his oversized appearance before it becomes evident in his actions. Wirtz, and by extension, his methods and actions, are sanctioned by the official government, as the adjunct 'Huertista' to his name asserts. Like the grim triune of *Outer Dark*, *Blood Meridian*'s Judge Holden earlier, and later *No Country for Old Men*'s Anton Chigurh, Wirtz is likened to an anti-god, a demonic force whose actions and appearance counter standards of morality and humanity alike.

McCarthy's perhaps most powerful monster, however, both in terms of resistance and coercion, is *Blood Meridian*'s Judge Holden. Like the unholy triune, Holden's physical monstrosity and social power vest him with the capacity to incite mob and lynch violence:

Ladies and gentlemen I feel it my duty to inform you that the man holding this revival is an imposter. He holds no paper of divinity from any institution recognized or improvised [...] In truth, the gentleman standing here before you posing as a minister of the Lord is not only totally illiterate but is also wanted by the law in the states of Tennessee, Kentucky, Mississippi, and Arkansas.

[...]

On a variety of charges the most recent of which involved a girl of eleven years – I said eleven – who had come to him in trust and whom he was surprised in the act of violating while actually clothed in the livery of his God.

A moan swept through the crowd [...] This is him, cried the reverend, sobbing. This is him. *The devil*. Here he stands.

Let's hang the turd, called an ugly thug from the gallery to the rear.

Not three weeks before this he was run out of Fort Smith Arkansas for having congress with a goat. Yes lady, that is what I said. Goat.

Why damn my eyes if I wont shoot the son of a bitch, said a man rising at the far end of the tent, and drawing a pistol from his boot he leveled it and fired.

[...]

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<sup>529</sup> Ibid., pp. 284–5 [emphasis added].

Already the gunfire was general within the tent and a dozen exits had been hacked through the canvas walls [...]

The baldheaded man was already at the bar when they entered.<sup>530</sup>

Holden's address escalates the accusations he levels at the minister from fraud 'to criminality, to pederasty and bestiality. Evidently, the judge is aware of moral codes and societal taboos, and accuses the minister of breaches of those in order of severity. The first tangible reaction from the crowd, a moan, follows the accusation of pederasty involving a trusting girl of eleven, and is quickly followed by the outbreak of general violence at the accusation of bestiality. Without questioning Holden's accusation, motivation, or source of information, or regarding the minister's assessment of Holden's inverted divinity, 'This is him. The devil. Here he stands', the peaceful congregation is coerced into mob violence and attack the minister.

The ease with which Holden incites violence and chaos is paralleled only by the mob violence incited by the bearded one in *Outer Dark*. Yet, while the bearded one may have had an interest in enraging and steering the mob into a certain direction (away from Culla), Judge Holden seems to have neither reason nor motivation, as becomes clear in the ensuing scene:

The bar was that tall not every man could even get his elbows up on it but it came just to the judge's waist and he stood with his hands placed flatwise on the wood, leaning slightly, as if about to give another address [...]

Judge, how did you come to have the goods on that nonaccount?

Goods? said the judge.

When was you in Fort Smith?

Fort Smith?

Where did you know him to know all that stuff on him?

You mean the Reverend Green?

Yessir. I reckon you was in Fort Smith fore ye come but here.

I was never in Fort Smith in my life. Doubt that he was.

They looked from one to the other.

Well where was it you run up on him?

I never laid eyes on the man before today. Never even heard of him.

He raised his glass and drank.

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<sup>530</sup> *Blood Meridian*, pp. 6–8 [emphasis added].

There was a strange silence in the room. The men looked like mud effigies. Finally someone began to laugh. Then another. Soon they were all laughing together. Someone bought the judge a drink.<sup>531</sup>

The judge seems to have no motivation for accusing the Reverend Green of acts that the judge himself will commit during the course of the novel. Nevertheless, his agenda of inciting violence is successful and the peaceful congregation transforms into a lynch mob.

Brent Cusher suggests this scene displays the judge's 'general good humor. Throughout the story Holden is frequently depicted as either smiling or laughing. The denouement of the Reverend Green episode centres on a crowded bar full of laughing men, the judge foremost among them.'<sup>532</sup> This assessment of the judge's character suffers the same shortcoming as Spencer's early interpretation of *Outer Dark's* unholy trinity as 'friendly'. Cusher continues that

smiling and laughter are not necessarily inconsistent with wickedness: evil men are often depicted as delighting in their deeds. Still, in the midst of his career as an agent of abhorrence, the judge goes about life with a disposition of levity, if not frankly amiability with those he encounters.<sup>533</sup>

The realisation of the judge's actions in the bar scene briefly causes the room to fall into 'a strange silence' that is only broken by laughter. The silence and then ensuing laughter do not signal, as Cusher assumes, good humour, but suggests that those present are aware of the implications and moral flaws of the judge's behaviour but rather than challenging him, the monstrously large stranger, relieve the tension of the room through laughter. The men's laughter detracts from the violence and its innocent victim, rendering them complicit in the judge's violence. To challenge the judge would be to assume responsibility.

The judge uses his imposing figure and monstrous mouth both to incite violence and to exert control. Wallach states that '*Blood Meridian* possesses a

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<sup>531</sup> Ibid., pp. 8–9.

<sup>532</sup> Brent Edwin Cusher, 'Cormac McCarthy's Definition of Evil: *Blood Meridian* and the Case of Judge Holden', *Perspectives on Political Science*, 43.4 (2014), 223–30 (p. 31).

<sup>533</sup> Cusher, p. 31.

precise moral compass whose poles are the postures of the narrative voice and the voice of the monstrous Judge Holden'.<sup>534</sup> Through his voice, Judge Holden incites or soothes those around him in his quest for chaos and power. In several instances, he manipulates Glanton with his actions, either to incite violence or to tame Glanton's temper. One such instance is the tarot scene with the family of jugglers:

El jefe, said the judge.

The juggler's eyes sought Glanton. He [Glanton] sat unmoved [...] He [the juggler] raised his fingers to his lips and he spread his arms in a gesture of uncertainty.

El jefe, hissed the judge.

The man turned and went along the group at the fire and brought himself before Glanton and couched and offered up the cards [...] Glanton smiled, his eyes were small against the stinging grit. He put one hand forth and paused, he looked at the juggler. Then he took a card.

The juggler folded shut the deck and tucked it among his clothes. He reached for the card in Glanton's hand. Perhaps he touched it, perhaps not. The card vanished [...] Perhaps Glanton had seen the card's face. What could it have meant to him? The juggler reached out to that naked bedlam beyond the fire's light but in the doing he overbalanced and fell forward against Glanton and created a moment of strange liaison with his old man's arms about the leader as if he would console him at his scrawny bosom.

Glanton swore and flung him away and at that moment the old woman began to chant.

Glanton rose.

She raised her jaw, gibbering at the night.

Shut her up, said Glanton.

La carroza, cried the beldam. Invertido. Carta de Guerra, de venganza. La ví sin ruedas sobre un río obscure [...]

Glanton called to her and she paused as if she'd heard him but it was not so. She seemed to catch some new drift in her divinings.

Perdida, perdida. La carta está perdida en la noche.

[...]

Un maleficio, cried the old woman. Qué viento tan maleante [...]

By god will you shut up, said Glanton, drawing his revolver.

Carroza de muertos, llena the huesos. El joven qué [...]

The judge like a great ponderous djinn stepped through the fire and the flames delivered him up as if he were in some way native to their element. He put his arms around Glanton [...]

In the morning when they rode out it was that pale day with the sun not risen and the wind had abated in the night and the things of the night were gone.

The juggler on his burro trotted out to the head of the column and fell in with

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<sup>534</sup> Rick Wallach, 'From Beowulf to Blood Meridian: Cormac McCarthy's Demystification of the Martial Code', *Southern Quarterly*, 36.4 (1998), 113–20 (p. 113).

Glanton and they rode together and they were so riding in the afternoon when the company entered the town of Janos.<sup>535</sup>

Holden, at this point, has been travelling and warring with Glanton for some time and is aware of Glanton's temper and weaknesses. Yet, he hisses at the malabarista to engage Glanton in a game of tarot. What ensues is one of Glanton's fits of rage, arguably predicted by Holden. In this state, Glanton loses his temper and grasp over his environment. This gives Holden the opportunity to assert his dominance over Glanton and show, without explicitly stating, who the real leader of the gang is: Holden, the man whose advice and actions the nominal leader Glanton values and to whom he is subordinate.

Holden, 'like a great ponderous djinn,' steps through the fire and encloses Glanton in his arms. This gesture of taking Glanton in his arms, like the motif of Holden's smile, emphasises the judge's use of his monstrous body. Indeed, his embrace of Glanton is an assertion of both physical and mental dominance. Holden stops Glanton by isolating him, encircling him, gathering 'him in his arms against his immense and terrible flesh', much like he later ends the kid's life in the jakes scene.<sup>536</sup> Holden uses his mouth, or words, to incite violence in Glanton, only to then control and dominate the situation, asserting his power and control over the marauding scalp hunters. This scene recalls a moment from *Outer Dark* in which Harmon 'rose with [the child] and circled the fire and held it out toward the man. The man [the bearded one] looked at it a moment and then took it with one hand by its upper arm and placed it between his feet.'<sup>537</sup> Like the judge, the bearded one receives the physically inferior child and keeps him with his body. This scene in *Outer Dark* is, of course, immediately followed by the killing and consumption of the child. These acts of gathering into the arms offer little by way of consolation or protection for the ones received onto or into the monstrous body.

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<sup>535</sup> *Blood Meridian*, pp. 101–2.

<sup>536</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 351.

<sup>537</sup> *Outer Dark*, p. 243.

Judge Holden's hold over those around him, in the towns he visits or the gang of marauders he presides over, demonstrate his social power. The title of 'judge' align him with the judiciary, the legal powers of society, and his actions and ability to influence and coerce indicate his access to social capital and power. Where his supposed high standing in society would imply superior morality, his actions belie the notion of cultured upper class morality and 'goodness'. Holden's glorification of war and violence to advance the white settlement project on American soil are as devoid of morality as the project of Westward Expansion itself. Holden's vacuous morality is visible and readable on his body – not just unbeautiful but disturbing and monstrous.

### ***5.3. Judge Holden: Monstrous in Morality, Monstrous in Body***

Holden, 'the mysterious, monstrous Judge Holden', as Arnold calls him, displays, upon his first appearance, his tendency to incite violence and chaos at will and for his own amusement.<sup>538</sup> This behavioural pattern continues throughout the novel. Boudway suggests that the judge, '[i]f he isn't the devil, he is at least a personification of evil, endowed with supernatural qualities and possibly immortal – a figure of death and larger than life'.<sup>539</sup> Judge Holden is another of McCarthy's monsters whose enormousness is his most physically striking characteristic. He is '[a]n enormous man [...] bald as a stone and he had no trace of beard and he had no brows to his eyes nor lashes to them. He was close on to seven feet in height and he stood smoking a cigar.'<sup>540</sup> Overthun's treatise on the aesthetics of the monstrous confirms the importance of the monster's physical size: it is about the exceptional, abnormal and deviant, and the perverse and unnatural, the unimaginable, indescribable, and immeasurable, about the deformed, the ugly and disfigured,

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<sup>538</sup> Edwin T. Arnold, 'Naming, Knowing and Nothingness: McCarthy's Moral Parables', in *Perspectives on Cormac McCarthy*, ed. by Edwin T. Arnold and Dianne C. Luce, Southern Quarterly Series, Rev. ed (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1999), pp. 45–69 (p. 62).

<sup>539</sup> Boudway, p. 20.

<sup>540</sup> *Blood Meridian*, p. 6.

about the hostile, criminally evil and wild, and finally about that which occupies affects such as fear (Angst) and disgust.<sup>541</sup>

The judge is '[f]oremost among them, outsized and childlike with his naked face [...] His cheeks were ruddy and he was smiling.'<sup>542</sup> 'His face was serene and strangely childlike. His hands were small. He held them out.'<sup>543</sup> This physical hybridity between monstrous enormousness and child-like-ness coheres with Gilmore's analysis of monster (hi)stories in North America: 'the American monsters are usually described as being timeless and eternal, as having an anomalous relationship to human chronology.'<sup>544</sup> The latter statement supports the reason for Holden's child-like face and his later claim to immortality. The judge is without age, his face young and his body old as stone, 'huge and pale and hairless [...] He says he will never die.'<sup>545</sup> Holden's immortality becomes evident when McCarthy revisits his monstrous trope in *No Country for Old Men*'s Anton Chigurh.

Before a discussion of Chigurh is possible, Holden's monstrosities demand further examination.

The official leader [of the marauding scalphunters] is John Joel Glanton, but the real heart of the gang's dark enterprise is Judge Holden, a mysterious character who combines the qualities of Melville's Ahab, Conrad's Kurtz, and Milton's Satan. None of the other members of the gang is quite sure where the judge comes from; he speaks many languages and appears to know much about history, science, and the law. He is tall, pale, totally hairless, and, even by the standards of his fellow killers, immensely cruel. Children mysteriously disappear when he's around. When their bodies are discovered, there are signs they've been sexually violated.<sup>546</sup>

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<sup>541</sup> Overthun, p. 47.

My translation from the German. Because of the effect of Overthun's convoluted writing, I have kept the English grammar as similar to the original as possible. The original reads: '„Die Rede ist hier vom Ausnahmehaften, Anormal-Abartigen und Widernatürlichen, vom Unvorstellbaren, Unbeschreiblichen und Unermesslichen, vom Deformierten, Hässlich-Entstellten und Unmäßigen, vom Feindlichen, Verbrecherisch-Boshaften und Wilden, und schließlich von demjenigen, das mit extremen Affekten wie Angst oder Ekel besetzt ist'.

<sup>542</sup> *Blood Meridian*, p. 84.

<sup>543</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.

<sup>544</sup> Gilmore, p. 113.

<sup>545</sup> *Blood Meridian*, p. 352.

<sup>546</sup> Boudway, pp. 18–9.

Michael Crews's recent monograph *Books are made out of books: Cormac McCarthy's Literary Influences* lends credence to Boudway's list of literary influences. Crews shows, as McCarthy said in an interview, that McCarthy's books also are made out of books and depend on novels that have been written before.<sup>547</sup> As John Sepich demonstrates, the character of Holden is based on a real character from Samuel E. Chamberlain's *My Confessions: Recollections of a Rogue*. Yet, Holden has become an iconic literary figure of his own right and with his own combination of monstrosities that continue to occupy critics several decades after the publication of the novel. Much of Holden's monstrosity hinges on the instinctive horror induced by his body.

For Cusher, to encounter the Judge is 'to confront the spectacle of size and abnormality, perhaps approaching physical inhumanity'.<sup>548</sup> Hillier asserts that 'the Judge's actions exorcise the mystery [of the world] and reassert his suzerainty over existence' and that 'McCarthy's artistry [in *Blood Meridian*] effectively requires that his readers judge the Judge and, in passing judgment, gauge their own moral compass'.<sup>549</sup> Dana Phillips also asserts that '[n]o calculus, moral or otherwise, will explain the judge',<sup>550</sup> whereas Bent Sørensen claims that 'McCarthy's representation of the frontier shows a story world where the conventional distinctions between heroes and villains are meaningless, since all human actors in the drama of the West are motivated by greed and selfishness'.<sup>551</sup> Sørensen's conflation of the project of Westward Expansion the white settlers' land appropriation with the Natives' resistance and defence of their land, culture, and lives, is in itself problematic. Yet, his assessment of Judge Holden as 'larger-than-

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<sup>547</sup> McCarthy says this in an interview in 1992. The interview was conducted by Thomas B. Woodward and appeared in *New York Time Magazine* on 19 April 1992, under the title 'Cormac McCarthy's Venomous Fiction'.

<sup>548</sup> Cusher, p. 224.

<sup>549</sup> Russell M. Hillier, 'The Judge's Molar: Infanticide and the Meteorite in Cormac McCarthy's *Blood Meridian, or the Evening Redness in the West*', *ANQ: A Quarterly Journal of Short Articles, Notes and Reviews*, 26.2 (2013), 76–81 (pp. 76–7).

<sup>550</sup> Dana Phillips, 'History and the Ugly Facts of Cormac McCarthy's *Blood Meridian*', *American Literature*, 68.2 (1996), 433–60 (p. 442).

<sup>551</sup> Bent Sørensen, 'Katabasis in Cormac McCarthy's *Blood Meridian*', *Orbis Literarum*, 2005, 16–25 (p. 16).

life character, and in effect he is also larger than death' appropriately refers to Holden's monstrously over-sized body.<sup>552</sup> The judge's monstrosity is singular even in a world as un-redemptive as *Blood Meridian's* disastrous and violent hyperreal landscapes. To Cooper, the voice of a 'distant narrator [...] controls the interpretive possibilities in the text, sometimes warding off ethical interpretations in order to present a visceral world of chaos stripped of any civilizing veneer of analysis or sense-giving interpretation'.<sup>553</sup> The judge delivers 'a speech in which he attributes to the preacher [the Reverend Green] the very faults that the Judge himself displays in the course of the novel', namely fraud, criminality, and pederasty.<sup>554</sup>

Cohen states that the 'monster's body is both corporeal and incorporeal; its threat is its propensity to shift'.<sup>555</sup> Tobin describes the groups' first contact with Holden:

Every man in the company claims to have encountered that sootysouled rascal in some other place [...] He saved us all, I have to give him that [...] There he set on a rock in the middle of the greatest desert you'd ever want to see. Just perched on this rock like a man waitin for a coach. Brown thought him a mirage [...] We were thirty-eight men when we left Chihuahua City and we were fourteen *when the judge found us*.<sup>556</sup>

Brown's mistaking Holden for a mirage could be read as confirmation for the judge's monstrous immateriality. His ability to vanish and reappear, 'the propensity to shift,' does not only place him 'already at the bar when they [the kid and Toadvine] entered',<sup>557</sup> just after he had still been in the tent when the kid and Toadvine left it, but it also enables Holden to appear 'in the middle of the greatest desert you'd ever want to see' without any trace of how he arrived there, nor any means of survival within a vast desert space:

Then about the meridian of that day we come upon the judge on his rock there in that wilderness by his single self. Aye, and there was no rock, just the one [...] I said that it was a merestone for *to mark him out of nothing at all* [...]

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<sup>552</sup> Sørensen, p. 23.

<sup>553</sup> Cooper, *Heroes*, pp. 66–7.

<sup>554</sup> Hillier, *Morality*, p. 19.

<sup>555</sup> Cohen, p. 5.

<sup>556</sup> *Blood Meridian*, pp. 131–2 [emphasis added].

<sup>557</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.

And there he set. No horse. Just him and his legs crossed, smilin as we rode up. Like he'd been expectin us [...] *He didn't even have a canteen*. It was like [...] You couldn't tell where he'd come from.<sup>558</sup>

Not only does the judge seem to find the marauding gang, as Tobin implies, but he seems to have 'been expectin them'. The gang at this intersection is '[m]ortally whipped, on the run' from 'the savages [...] the bloody niggers [...] out there' who they had fired their last ammunition at, and only some form of divine intervention, it seems, could save them in their desperate situation.<sup>559</sup> At this intersection, this crossroads in the Europeans driving the Westward Expansion, the monstrous anti-god Judge Holden appears like a mirage, a reflection, the embodiment of the need for the power balance to shift in favour of the marauding and colonising Anglos.

Both counts of first encounters with the Judge, his appearance in the bar after inciting mob violence in the Reverend Green's tent in Nacogdoches when the kid first encounters him, and Tobin's memory of Holden appearing in the middle of the desert, reinforce Judge Holden's ability to vanish and reappear outside of any laws of physics or time and thus support the impression of the judge as monstrous, raising concerns about the judge's body and his ability to vanish and reappear outside of comprehensible frameworks of time and material realities.

Hillier summarises the judge as 'the novel's outstanding instance of conscious evil, the seemingly indomitable, hairless, rhapsodizing, twenty-four-stone albino giant Judge Holden, a living paradox of Enlightenment sophistication and vicious barbarism'.<sup>560</sup> Upon finding the kid again as a prisoner in Chihuahua, the judge 'took the cigar from between his teeth and smiled. Or he seemed to smile.'<sup>561</sup> Like the bearded one in *Outer Dark*, the judge's facial equivalent of a smile cannot be identified as positive or generous. Hillier counts 'thirty-eight instances of the motif of the Judge's broad smile, which often expresses pleasure at the corruption or suffering of others, or, like an ape's smile, is a grimace of hate

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<sup>558</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 132–3 [emphasis added].

<sup>559</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 132.

<sup>560</sup> Hillier, *Morality*, p. 16.

<sup>561</sup> *Blood Meridian*, p. 84.

displaying aggression'.<sup>562</sup> The emphasis on Holden's mouth again reinforces his monstrous appearance, as Gilmore states: 'Closely related to physical immensity is an organic synecdoche: the continual visual emphasis on the colossal mouth as organ of predation and destruction.'<sup>563</sup> The judge's body, its size, colour, proportions, skin, and expression, are both recognisably human-like and unreadably and incomprehensibly monstrous. He is the physical emanation of unchecked power and social control, a truly terrifying embodiment of societal hierarchy and power structures.

#### ***5.4. The Judge's Dead Children: Rejuvenation***

The scene of the unholy trinity and the death and consumption of the chap in *Outer Dark* foreshadows scenes involving the judge and children across *Blood Meridian*. What is explicit in *Outer Dark*, and alluded to in *Blood Meridian*, are instances of the child-eating monster. In *Outer Dark*, the mute one 'knelt with his hands outstretched and his nostrils rippled delicately. The man handed him the child and he seized it up, looked once at Holme with witless eyes, and buried his moaning face in its throat.'<sup>564</sup> While this depiction is subtler than the scene in an earlier draft where the bearded man 'handed the child upt [sic] to him, still not looking. Here, he said. Dress this meat and put it on the fire', it is evident that the mute one drinks the child's blood in an act of vampirism, even if he is not explicitly eating the child's flesh.<sup>565</sup> Unlike the unholy triune, Holden is not explicitly seen consuming children, yet dead bodies of children frequently appear in the judge's vicinity.

The first suspicion of the judge's violations consisting of more than the sexual abuse of children is when he is described as wearing 'a pair of good kidskin

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<sup>562</sup> Hillier, *Morality*, p. 43.

<sup>563</sup> Gilmore, p. 176.

<sup>564</sup> *Outer Dark*, p. 245.

<sup>565</sup> Cormac McCarthy, 'Photocopy of Earlier Version of Corrected Typescript [Outer Dark]' (Alkek Library, Texas State University at San Marcos), p. 196, Cormac McCarthy Papers, The Wittliff Collections, box 9, folder 2.

boots'.<sup>566</sup> Kidskin, under normal circumstances, is synonymous with goat leather. Yet, in connection to the monstrous judge, the implication of both the skin of a dead kid, or child, or, in fact, the skin of the kid, the silent protagonist of the novel, is unmistakable. In the course of the narrative, the gang comes across a group of squatters in whose company is a young boy when the following scene ensues:

The men who had been on watch entered the room and stood steaming before the fire. The black stood at the door neither in nor out. Someone had *reported the judge naked atop the walls, immense and pale in the revelations of lightning*, striding the perimeter up there and declaiming in the old epic mode [...]

In the morning the rain had ceased [...] The peaks to the north were white with snow in the new risen sun and when Toadvine stepped out into the day the sun was just touching the upper walls of the compound and *the judge was standing in the gently streaming quiet picking his teeth with a thorn as if he had just eaten*.

[...]

The squatters emerged and stood about the cantonment blinking like birds. They had elected among themselves to join the company and when Glanton came across the yard leading his horse the spokesman for their group stepped forward to inform him of their decision. Glanton didnt even look at him. He entered he cuartel and got his saddle and gear. *In the meantime someone had found the boy*.

He was *lying face down naked* in one of the cubicles. Scattered about on the clay were *great numbers of old bones*. As if he like others before him had stumbled upon *a place where something inimical lived* [...]

In the compound the scalphunters mounted up and turned their horses toward the gates that now stood open to the east to welcome the light and to invite their journey. As they rode out the doomed men hosteled in that place came dragging the boy out and laid him in the mud. *His neck had been broken and his head hung straight down and it flopped over strangely when they let him onto the ground*. The hills beyond the minepit were reflected grayly in the pools of rainwater [...] the man who'd been shot sang church hymns and cursed God alternately.<sup>567</sup>

During the night before the boy's body is found, the judge is seen 'striding the perimeter' while naked. Whenever the judge is depicted as wearing few or no clothes, it seems that a dead body is found soon after, another example being the jakes scene in which he 'was seated upon the closet. He was naked and he rose up' to kill the boy-become-man.<sup>568</sup> In the morning after the judge soliloquises atop the

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<sup>566</sup> *Blood Meridian*, p. 84 [emphasis added].

<sup>567</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 125–6 [emphases added].

<sup>568</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 351.

wall, Toadvine finds him picking his teeth ‘as if he had just eaten’. McCarthy, here, does not use the usual contraction of the personal pronoun and the modal verb to form ‘he’d’, but rather uses the full modal which emphasizes both ‘he’ and ‘had’. Holden, it seems, *had* indeed just eaten. As the gang prepares to leave, the boy’s body is found ‘in the cubicles’ in yet another foreshadowing of the jakes scene. The boy’s position, naked and face down, clearly implies the sexual abuse the boy suffered before his neck was broken. The detailed description of the lifeless body evokes horror both of what happened to him and of the atrocities the judge may have committed, conceivably the sexual abuse and potential consumption of parts of his body. The tragedy of this scene is increased by the fact that both the gang and the world continue without paying deference to this death of innocence.

It is precisely the innocence of children that render monstrous the perpetrator of pederasty, the consumption of child flesh, and child murder. ‘Historically, there has been an innocence ascribed to children in most Western societies where prevention of any form of sexual behaviour for young people is the norm.’<sup>569</sup> McCarthy may have been aware of the public perception of paedophilia and pederasty while writing *Blood Meridian*. Peakman states that, before the 1980s, paedophilia was not part of the forefront of public awareness. She claims that

it took the sordid case of the Vatican’s cover-up of mass paedophilia within its ranks to outrage both those in the Catholic faith and those on the outside, and bring paedophilia to the centre of public concern. In 1984, the case of Father Gilbert Gauthier in Lafayette, Louisiana, led to numerous revelations of similar cases of abuse all over America [...] By 1985, the victims had begun to take up the matter in civil courts.<sup>570</sup>

In 1984, McCarthy was still working on *Blood Meridian*, to which the judge is a late arrival, as the early drafts held at the Wittliff Collections show. ‘A further flurry of concern about paedophilia,’ Peakman continues, ‘hit the newspaper headlines around the 1980s with reports of paedophile sex rings operating in Amsterdam.

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<sup>569</sup> Peakman, p. 321.

<sup>570</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 322.

Child murder was now beginning to be more closely associated with the sexual abuse of children, and the term “paedophilia” was becoming more widespread.<sup>571</sup>

The impact and moral condemnation of child murder and paedophilia was at an early peak during the writing of *Blood Meridian* and McCarthy included this matter both to emphasise the judge’s monstrosity and to highlight the hypocrisy of societal moral standards. The boy in the squatter scene, much like the chap in *Outer Dark*, is unclaimed and uncared-for:

Into these ruinous works the morning sun now slanted and Glanton could see crouched in a corner a Mexican or halfbreed boy maybe twelve years old. He was naked save for a pair of old calzons and makeshift sandals of uncured hide. He glared back at Glanton with a sort of terrified insolence.

Who’s this child? said the judge.

They shrugged, they looked away.<sup>572</sup>

McCarthy describes how Glanton sees the child, yet it is the judge who asks about him. None of the men, however, claim responsibility for the boy. Instead, their looking away implies embarrassment and rejection. Only after the boy’s body is found do the men begin ‘conversing senselessly about the merits and virtues of the dead boy’, senselessly, of course, because their rejection and indifference left the judge to claim the boy his own and use him for his own purposes.<sup>573</sup> The men, in refusing responsibility, betray the boy and act as immorally as the judge by leaving a child to survive on his own, much like the Sevier County community betrays Lester Ballard by rejecting him when he most needs their support after finding his father grotesquely dangling from the barn ceiling.

Holden, of course, thrives in such moments of failed moral standards. Like his ignition of mob violence or his controlling of Glanton’s moods, the judge uses every opportunity of societal neglect or flawed morality for his own purposes, thereby comparing his actions against the underlying flaws and hypocrisies of America’s Puritan society’s moral codes. Picart and Browning clarify that

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<sup>571</sup> Ibid.

<sup>572</sup> *Blood Meridian*, p. 123.

<sup>573</sup> Ibid., p. 126.

“monstrosity” is always already global, constructed from within a culture against the backdrop of a broader historical sketch, a product of an organized society’s attempt to classify what it deems “normal” or “monstrous”.<sup>574</sup> Within the culture of the New America, the Western Frontier, the Christian view of children is defined by what Hillier terms ‘Jesus’s moral admonition against infanticide’:

At the same time came the disciples unto Jesus, saying, Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven? And Jesus called a little child unto him, and set him in the midst of them. And said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven. And whoso shall receive one such little child in my name receiveth me. *But whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea. Woe unto the world because of offences!* For it must needs be that offences come; but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh!<sup>575</sup>

Hillier aligns this Bible passage with two passages in *Blood Meridian*, the instance of Holden throwing a molar-shaped meteorite, which Hillier identifies as ‘rock as large as a millstone’,<sup>576</sup> and the murder of the ‘young Mexican girl’ whose ‘clothes were found torn and bloodied under the north wall’.<sup>577</sup> While Hillier is correct in pointing out that the judge’s hurling the stone away ‘scoffs at any prospect of divine reckoning’, he reserves his moral judgment for the judge, ignoring broader moral and ethical failings in the majority of the novel’s characters.<sup>578</sup> To leave a young child, like the boy, to survive on their own in an environment where grown men survive only by excessive violence or by being under the protection of others’ excessive violence, is truly an offence against ‘one of these little ones’. The judge, it seems, brings this lack of moral behaviour to its logical extreme, but by no means is he the only offender against children. Holden’s victimising and violation of children occurs within a larger social context that, implicitly or explicitly, sanctions the judge’s behaviour, nor does it any better by their young. Using the image of

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<sup>574</sup> Picart and Browning, p. 2.

<sup>575</sup> Matt. 18:1-7, qtd. in: Hillier, *Morality*, p. 27 [emphasis added].

<sup>576</sup> Hillier, *Morality*, p. 27.

<sup>577</sup> *Blood Meridian*, p. 252.

<sup>578</sup> Hillier, *Morality*, p. 28.

children's dead bodies, *Blood Meridian*, investigates whether large-scale societal neglect is morally less reprehensible than direct physical abuse of the weakest members of society.

### ***5.5. The Horror! The Horror!***

Holden's uncanniness and monstrosity is intensified when considering that his violation of children may have another purpose. Throughout the novel, from when the kid first meets him up until the moment the judge murders the kid-become-man, Holden never changes in appearance. 'He says he'll never die [...] He never sleeps. He says that he will never die [...] He never sleeps, the judge. He is dancing, dancing. He says that he will never die.'<sup>579</sup> Gilmore describes the monster as 'timeless and eternal, as having an anomalous relationship to human chronology'.<sup>580</sup> The judge's claim to eternal life, together with his unchanging monstrous physique, fall outside of and contrast with the chronology of human life. It seems that, to maintain his youthfulness, if such indeed it is, the judge feeds off the young and the innocent, those who 'alone reserved in [their] soul some corner of clemency for the heathen'.<sup>581</sup> By violating and ingesting children, and later the kid-become-man whose heart's fabric is flawed, the judge regenerates.<sup>582</sup> Like the corrupted morals of American society and the logical extreme of European Enlightenment and industrialisation, the weak and the voiceless become collateral damage of the logic of progress and white supremacy embedded in the very core of the Frontier and the white settling myth of Manifest Destiny. As was said later about the Russian Revolution, the monster of American Expansion really does eat its children and devours all in its way. This, of course, also sheds light on Holden's claim to the kid that he would have loved him like a son.<sup>583</sup> To be loved as a son by

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<sup>579</sup> *Blood Meridian*, p. 352.

<sup>580</sup> Gilmore, p. 113.

<sup>581</sup> *Blood Meridian*, p. 316.

<sup>582</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>583</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 323.

the monstrous Judge Holden is to perish, as the kid-become-man does in the jakes, where Holden ‘gathered him in his arms against his immense and terrible flesh’,<sup>584</sup> a scene so terrible that the author himself has no clear image of what happens.<sup>585</sup>

The claim that the judge embodies the logical extreme of Enlightenment philosophy is not, in fact, a new one. In 1988, Bell states that ‘*Blood Meridian* presses the psychology of the frontier theory to its logical, appalling extreme’ and that ‘[w]hat the judge says and he and his confederates act out eventually seems like only a slightly demented revival of Enlightenment philosophy’.<sup>586</sup> Monk seconds Bell, stating that ‘McCarthy’s protagonists blindly feel for the means to displace cause and effect, constantly pursuing an escape route from the privileged and rational certainties of modernity, certainties that owe their debt of incarnation in the European Enlightenment – the supreme avatar of which is Holden’.<sup>587</sup> For Monk, ‘Holden may be read as the embodiment of the normative criteria of the European Enlightenment [...] the representation of a rational, teleological process forced to its ultimate conclusion.’<sup>588</sup> Both Bell and Monk suggest that the judge embodies the logical extreme of the philosophy of his time, of European Enlightenment in its heyday. The judge’s molesting, defiling, and butchering of the innocent and guilty alike both epitomises the violent, racist, and white supremacist logic of progress and expansion within European Enlightenment philosophy, and ultimately supersedes, quite literally, the moral flaws within a society operating upon this logic.<sup>589</sup>

‘In the United States, Native Americans were presented as unredeemable savages so that the powerful political machine of Manifest Destiny could push

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<sup>584</sup> Ibid., p. 351.

<sup>585</sup> Peter Josyph tells the story of a letter sent to McCarthy asking what happened in the jakes scene, to which McCarthy reportedly replied ‘Don’t know’.

<sup>586</sup> Bell, pp. 119, 124.

<sup>587</sup> Nicholas Monk, “‘An Impulse to Action, an Undefined Want’: Modernity, Flight, and Crisis in the Border Trilogy and *Blood Meridian*”, in *Cormac McCarthy’s Western Novels*, ed. by Wade H Hall and Rick Wallach, Sacred Violence, 2nd edn, II vols (El Paso: Texas Western Press/University of Texas at El Paso, 2002), II, 83–103 (p. 83).

<sup>588</sup> Monk, ‘Impulse’, II, p. 84.

<sup>589</sup> Hillier, *Morality*, p. 28.

westward with disregard.<sup>590</sup> Superficially, *Blood Meridian* appears to, at least in part, subscribe to this narrative through descriptions such as in the oft-quoted legion of horribles scene:

from the offside of those ponies there rose a *fabled horde* of mounted lancers and archers bearing shields bedight with bits of broken mirrorglass that cast a thousand unpieced suns against the eyes of their enemies. A legion of horribles, hundreds in number, half naked or clad in costumes attic or biblical or wardrobed out of a fevered dream with the skins of animals and silk finery and pieces of uniform still tracked with the blood of prior owners, coats of slain dragoons, frogged and braided cavalry jackets, one in a stovepipe hat and one with an umbrella and one in white stockings and a bloodstained weddingveil and some in headgear of cranefeathers or rawhide helmets that bore the horns of bull or buffalo and one in a pigeontailed coat worn backwards and otherwise naked and one in the armor of a Spanish conquistador, the breastplate and pauldrons deeply dented with old blows of mace and sabre done in another country by men whose very bones were dust and many with their braids spliced up with *hair of other beasts* until they trailed upon the ground and their horse's ears and tails worked with bits of brightly colored cloth and one whose horse's whole head was painted crimson red and all the horsemen's faces gaudy and grotesque with daubings like a company of mounted clowns, death hilarious, all howling in a barbarous tongue and riding down upon them *like a horde from hell more horrible yet than the brimstone land of Christian reckoning, screeching and yammering* and clothed in smoke like those vaporous beings in regions beyond right knowing where the eye wanders and the lip jerks and drools.<sup>591</sup>

The Comanches' use of artefacts of European cultures, the 'weddingveil', the pigeontailed coat, the coat of armour, distances them from what the European settlers regard as culture and civilisation. The term 'horde,' as used twice in this scene, aligns the Native Americans, the Comanche tribesmen, with an animalistic nature, as it is usually used to describe a body of animals, often animals in motion, rather than a group of human beings. This impression is strengthened by describing the Comanches' hair as braided in with 'hair of *other* beasts,' implying that they themselves are beasts, with their 'screeching and yammering' as sounds not generally attributed to humans.

This mixture of human and animal is a direct consequence of a profound ambivalence shared by all people: simultaneous terror and fascination with the beast within, the impulsive need to both deny and acknowledge that, no matter

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<sup>590</sup> Cohen, p. 8.

<sup>591</sup> *Blood Meridian*, p. 55 [emphases added].

how exalted, we humans are members of the animal kingdom and heir to violent instincts. Like other animals, humans retain an atavistic side as a result of retention of a primitive cerebellum.<sup>592</sup>

This ambivalence, then, is scaled out of proportion in such descriptions of the Native Americans that populate the frontier spaces:

They [Captain White's troop] rode through the plaza thronged with wagons and stools. With immigrants and Texans and Mexicans and with slaves and Lipan Indians and deputations of Karankawas tall and austere, their faces dyed blue and their hands locked about the shafts of their sixfoot spears, all but naked savages who with their painted skins and their whispered taste for human flesh seemed outrageous presences even in that fabled company.<sup>593</sup>

The close description of the Karankawas here is suggestive of Cohen's monstrous other, whereas their weaponry and 'whispered taste for human flesh' creates terror in the Europeans. There is, of course, an irony in pointing to the 'naked savages' as cannibals when the spearhead of European philosophy, Judge Holden, later defiles and consumes racially-other children with his body largely unclothed and exposed. The presence of the Native Peoples is, of course, not an outrage in their own land, the Europeans are the outrageous presence that causes the disequilibrium and genocide in a country that the settlers perceived to be empty but that had been home to centuries of Native American culture, tradition, and life.

McCarthy is not unaware of this discrepancy between European perception of the New World and the actual history of the space and its peoples. While his descriptions of Native Americans appear unkind at best, he has no patience or sympathy for the white settlers, either. During the *Blood Meridian* workshop at the University of Warwick, David Holloway pointed out the inadequacy of the sergeant's response to the attack of the legion of horrors: 'Oh my god.'<sup>594</sup> Given the onslaught and the sight it would surely be to see this 'fabled horde' ride an attack, the sergeant's utterance highlights his inability to respond to the situation and his complete lack of preparation for what to expect in this land the white

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<sup>592</sup> Gilmore, pp. 191–92.

<sup>593</sup> *Blood Meridian*, p. 40.

<sup>594</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 55.

narrative fashioned as ‘empty’. This three-word utterance summarises the settlers’ ignorance, naivety, and arrogance in believing that there would be no force opposing their appropriation of the land. Yet, the author not only portrays this inadequacy, he also fashions the white marauders at the forefront of the Westward Expansion as alien and monstrous. From their prison cell in Chihuahua Toadvine and the kid

saw patched Argonauts from the states driving mules through the streets on their way south through the mountains to the coast. Goldseekers. Itinerant degenerates bleeding west-ward like some heliotropic plague [...]

They saw blackeyed young girls with painted faces smoking little cigars [...] They saw the governor himself erect and formal within his silkmullion sulky clatter forth from the double doors [...] and they saw a pack of vicious looking humans mounted on unshod indian ponies riding half drunk through the streets, bearded, clad in the skins of animals stitched up with thews and armed with weapons of every description [...] and the trappings of their horses fashioned out of human skin and their bridles woven up from human hair and decorated with human teeth and the riders wearing scapulars or necklaces of dried and blackened human ears [...] the whole like some visitation from some heathen land where they and others like them fed on human flesh.<sup>595</sup>

McCarthy’s portrays the bodies not only of the Natives, but also of the European settlers as monstrous and thus accentuates the underlying flaws of the process of the Westward Expansion and advancement of ‘civilisation’ toward the West, as the agents of this progress neither embody nor advance the moral ideals and standards at the heart of this inherently flawed philosophy and belief system. Holden, as the monster supreme, is also the most cultured, the epitome of civilisation who ‘has evolved to a condition of complete hairlessness, his skin pink; his feet are small, his hands dainty and manicured’, as opposed to the dark-skinned and dark-haired, ‘uncultured’ tribesmen in *Blood Meridian* that Monk likens to the Swiftian Yahoos of *Gulliver’s Travels*.<sup>596</sup> Yet, while violence is abundant throughout the novel and every man a perpetrator, the ferry owner’s reaction to the judge concentrates the horror Holden inspires into only two words. Approaching Glanton, the doctor had ‘not seen to his person in weeks and he was filthy and dishevelled and he tugged at Glanton’s trouserleg and pointed toward the fortifications on the hill. That man, he

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<sup>595</sup> Ibid., pp. 83–4.

<sup>596</sup> Monk, ‘Impulse’, II, p. 86.

said. That man',<sup>597</sup> echoing Joseph Conrad's narrative of colonialism in the Congo: 'The horror, the horror.'<sup>598</sup>

### 5.6. *Anton Chigurh: The New Horror*

The horror of Judge Holden does not end with the final page of the novel. Indeed, as Holden promises, 'he will never die',<sup>599</sup> and so his reincarnation becomes the 'true and living prophet of destruction' of McCarthy's 2005 novel *No Country for Old Men*.<sup>600</sup> Benjamin Mangrum suggests that it 'is the perhaps most overtly political of McCarthy's novels, but it also offers in the person of Anton Chigurh one of the most vivid challenges to conventional morality and modern social structures'.<sup>601</sup> While this thesis demonstrates the political dimensions of McCarthy's work beyond *No Country for Old Men*, the polarity between Anton Chigurh and the Sheriff establishes the novel as one of the more overt narratives about the meaning of morality and the human condition. Where Chigurh stands for chaos and destruction, Ed Tom Bell is the representative and advocate of conventional morality. He stands for the rules and laws that are based on a shared belief system of how society should operate, an idealised version of universal liberty and justice. Within this system, deriving from its Puritan origins, narratives tend to exist in binaries: good and evil, American and Mexican, old and new, young and old.

It is within this binary system that Chigurh is disturbing. As Linda Woodson points out, Chigurh

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<sup>597</sup> *Blood Meridian*, p. 287.

<sup>598</sup> Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*, Penguin Popular Classics (London: Penguin Books, 1994), p. 100.

<sup>599</sup> *Blood Meridian*, p. 353.

<sup>600</sup> Cormac McCarthy, *No Country for Old Men* (London: Picador, 2007), p. 4.

<sup>601</sup> Benjamin Mangrum, 'Democracy, Justice, and Tragedy in Cormac McCarthy's *No Country for Old Men*', *Religion & Literature*, 43.3 (2011), 107–33 (p. 112).

exists outside of society and is of indeterminate origin and purpose. It is never clear why he involves himself in the hunt for Llewelyn Moss. Even his name is indeterminate in origin [...] As indeterminate as his origin is [...] he lives in a precise existence, though one seemingly outside of the text itself, as he moves in and out to execute with terrible purpose the end of its characters.<sup>602</sup>

The indeterminacy and inexplicability epitomises Chigurh's problematic hybridity. 'Something about him,' it strikes Moss when he encounters Chigurh, is 'vaguely exotic', reinforcing the sense of unpleasability.<sup>603</sup> This faint exoticism, moreover, signifies a breakdown of the binaries established within the dominant cultural understanding of the border regions in the Southwest. Chigurh's physical monstrosity lies in the fact that he is neither white, nor non-white, not American nor Mexican. This resistance to boundaries and binaries, in place to define the self by virtue of defining the 'other', undermines the sense of relation established through the recognition of those who are like or unlike ourselves.

Chigurh's name, equally, is not a coincidence or a flurry of the author's fancy, but rather the result of careful consideration, as a test sheet in the McCarthy Papers shows. McCarthy hand-annotated a leftover page with alternative names, including 'Chiugo', 'Chigerat', 'Chigorate', and 'Chigron'.<sup>604</sup> It appears that the author was experimenting with a variety of possible names, all of which start with 'Chi' or 'Chig' and have an unfamiliar sound to them, at least for native speakers of English. Further, Chigurh is a late arrival to the narrative, as the original screenplay draft from 1987 shows, in which the character of Chigurh is not included and which reads much like a common crime thriller.<sup>605</sup> In this early version of the text, which was rejected by several production companies as a screen play,

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<sup>602</sup> Linda Woodson, "'You Are the Battleground': Materiality, Moral Responsibility, and Determinism in *No Country for Old Men*", in *No Country for Old Men: From Novel to Film*, ed. by Lynnea Chapman King, Rick Wallach, and James M. Welsh (Lanham, Md: Scarecrow Press, 2009), pp. 1–12 (p. 6).

<sup>603</sup> *No Country for Old Men*, p. 112.

<sup>604</sup> Cormac McCarthy, 'Typescript Pages with Holograph Corrections [No Country for Old Men]' (Alkek Library, Texas State University at San Marcos, 1987), p. no pagination, Cormac McCarthy Papers, The Wittliff Collections, box 84, folder 2.

<sup>605</sup> Cormac McCarthy, 'Typescript [No Country for Old Men]' (Alkek Library, Texas State University at San Marcos, 1987), Cormac McCarthy Papers, The Wittliff Collections, box 79, folder 2.

Llewelyn Moss survives the narrative and Sheriff Bell has a surviving granddaughter. The addition of the character Anton Chigurh leaves the narrative more powerful and has secured it popular and commercial success both as a novel and as adaptation into movie form by Ethan and Joel Cohen, whose version won four Academy Awards, including ‘Best Motion Picture’ and ‘Best Writing’.

Woodson argues that ‘Chigurh is a psychopath, but of a truly terrifying kind [...] he is not morally responsible, but rather exists outside of moral responsibility all together’.<sup>606</sup> Lydia Cooper states that

Chigurh [...] is not much of an individual. Instead, he seems to be a blue-eyed, vaguely ethnic version of *Blood Meridian*’s Judge Holden, who himself is more caricature of evil than complex individual. Not only is Chigurh a typed character, but he is also depicted with strongly supernatural overtones.<sup>607</sup>

Hillier asserts that ‘[f]ew would dispute that McCarthy’s moral in both works [*No Country for Old Men* and *The Counselor*] is a terrible one and the world gone wrong that he pictures is so unflinchingly grim as to elicit frequent expressions of disgust from readers and viewers’.<sup>608</sup> Mangrum concurs with Hillier and affirms that McCarthy ‘offers in the person of Anton Chigurh one of the most vivid challenges to conventional morality and modern social structures’.<sup>609</sup> Chigurh’s terrible morality is embodied in the ‘vaguely ethnic’ body, the updated return of the horror of Judge Holden. The connection between Holden and Chigurh lies in the claim that they ‘will never die’.<sup>610</sup> What Holden communicates in language is legible in Chigurh’s body, specifically in his eyes: ‘The man looked at Chigurh’s eyes for the first time. Blue as *lapis*. At once glistening and totally opaque. Like wet stones.’<sup>611</sup> As I have argued elsewhere, ‘lapis’ carries two meanings. The primary meaning is an intensely blue stone, mostly found in Afghanistan, that is often used for

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<sup>606</sup> Woodson, pp. 7–8.

<sup>607</sup> Lydia R. Cooper, “‘He’s a Psychological Killer, but So What?’: Folklore and Morality in Cormac McCarthy’s *No Country for Old Men*”, *Papers on Language and Literature*, 45.1 (2009), 37–59 (p. 43).

<sup>608</sup> Hillier, *Morality*, p. 163.

<sup>609</sup> Mangrum, p. 112.

<sup>610</sup> *Blood Meridian*, p. 353.

<sup>611</sup> *No Country for Old Men*, p. 56 [emphasis added].

decorative purposes or jewellery. The origin of this stone further highlights the mysterious origin of Chigurh, in addition to his name and vague ethnicity. Yet, the second implication of ‘lapis’ is the *lapis philosophorum*, the Latin term for the Philosopher’s Stone that promises not only riches, but ‘eternal life, and so the judge’s boast is continued in his successor’s eyes’: Chigurh, too, will never die.<sup>612</sup>

The impression of Chigurh’s monstrous immortality increases throughout the novel, as neither a shotgun nor a car crash seem to stop him from continuing on his path of destruction. In the shootout scene involving Moss, Chigurh, and a delegation of Mexican narcotraffickers, Moss’s shotgun leaves Chigurh with an injured leg. He drives to a pharmacy and

opened the door and eased himself down, lifting his injured leg out with both hands under his knee. He stood there, holding on to the door. Then he bent over with his head to his chest and stood that way for the better part of a minute. Then he raised up and shut the door and started down the street [...]

His leg was black and blue and swollen badly [...] He turned his head in the water and studied the exit wound [...] The hole was big enough to put your thumb in.

When he climbed out of the tub the water was a pale pink and the holes in his leg were still leaking a pale blood dilute with serum. He dropped his boots in the water [...] and sat on the toilet and took the bottle of Betadine and the packet of swabs [...] Then he sat the bottle down and bent to work, picking out bits of cloth using the swabs and forceps [...]

When he was done he disinfected the wound a final time and tore open packets of four by fours and laid them over the holes in his leg and bound them with gauze off of a roll packaged for sheep and *goats* [...] Other than a light beading of sweat on his forehead there was little evidence that his labors had cost him anything at all.<sup>613</sup>

The reference of the gauze originally being for goats is, similar to the Holden’s kidskin boots, a reminder that Chigurh may well be the devil, who is frequently portrayed with goat-like features. The cool and calculated self-surgery Chigurh performs emphasises the inhumanity of his body. McCarthy again enlists the help of Barry King, an experienced surgeon, to ensure the plausibility of the surgery and heeds most of the changes from an earlier draft that King suggests. In his letter, King points out that the effort of getting out of the truck after sitting for a while

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<sup>612</sup> Rebmann, p. 112.

<sup>613</sup> *No Country for Old Men*, pp. 162–4 [emphasis added].

‘would be [...] very painful [...] when he would initially move his injured leg and straighten it out in preparation to lower him from the truck cab he would experience excruciating pain. The throbbing would be replaced with severe muscle spasm [...] After finally positioning himself he would pause to recovers [sic] from his efforts.’<sup>614</sup> The first part of above quotation clearly shows McCarthy’s engagement with King’s advice, compared to an earlier draft of the scene in Box 80, Folder 7 in the McCarthy Papers, which is likely the draft King had read. Yet Chigurh’s ‘excruciating pain’ translates into his pausing for the better part of a minute only, he neither utters a sound nor does he collapse under the agony the gunshot wound should cause, but takes a moment to compose himself and then sets a car ablaze and robs a pharmacy.

His uncanny ability to ignore, or, indeed, his inability to experience, pain renders his body monstrous and beyond the explicable. As Niehaus states, the monster constitutes a limit to our ability to empathise as we are unable to feel empathy for a being that is unable to empathise with us.<sup>615</sup> Our inability to understand or empathise with Chigurh’s wounded body, to grasp the concept of not experiencing or not heeding such pain, increases the impression of Chigurh’s monstrosity. This alienation is exacerbated by the operation Chigurh undertakes on himself. The probing of the sore wound which has already bruised and swollen, costs Chigurh little effort and ‘[o]ther than a light beading of sweat on his forehead there was little evidence that his labors had cost him anything at all’.<sup>616</sup> This pattern is repeated after the car crash following Chigurh’s killing of Carla-Jean, when there is ‘a bone stickin out under the skin on his arm and he didnt pay no more attention

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<sup>614</sup> Barry G. King Jr. M.D., ‘Barry [King] to McCarthy [No Country for Old Men]’, undated, p. no pagination, Cormac McCarthy Papers, The Wittliff Collection, Alkek Library, Texas State University at San Marcos, box 80, folder 3.

<sup>615</sup> Niehaus, p. 85.

My translation from the German. ‘deshalb statuiert auch unser Vermögen zur Empathie hier eine notwendige Grenze: Wir können uns nicht in ein Wesen einfühlen, das sich in uns nicht einfühlen kann. Darin also gleichen wir dem Monster.’

<sup>616</sup> *No Country for Old Men*, p. 164.

to it than nothin'.<sup>617</sup> Pain and wounds on his own body leave Chigurh as dispassionate as inflicting pain and wounds on other bodies.

### **5.7. Anton Chigurh: Violence and Power**

The manner of inflicting violence on other bodies is where Chigurh and Judge Holden differ most. Where Holden's violence is monstrous in scale, Chigurh's is in proximity. On first encountering Chigurh, he is in custody of a deputy, a situation Chigurh deliberately enters: 'I was pulled over by a sheriff's deputy outside of Sonora Texas and I let him take me into town in handcuffs,' he tells Wells.<sup>618</sup> 'I'm not sure why I did this but I think I wanted to see if I could extricate myself by an act of will [...] But it was a foolish thing to do. A vain thing to do.'<sup>619</sup> Chigurh's vanity leads to the death of the sheriff's deputy. In this introductory scene, McCarthy first plants the suspicion that Chigurh's body has powers and abilities beyond the expected:

Chigurh squatted and scooted his manacled hands beneath him to the back of his knees. In the same motion he sat and rocked backward and passed the chain under his feet and then stood instantly and effortlessly. If it looked like a thing he'd practiced many times it was. He dropped his cuffed hands over the deputy's head and leaped into the air and slammed both knees against the back of the deputy's neck and hauled back in the chain.<sup>620</sup>

The dispassionate comment that Chigurh has indeed practiced this movement many times insinuates that he knows he may be arrested and may have to free himself. Foucault states that

The frame of reference of the human monster is, of course, law. The notion of the monster is essentially a legal notion, in a broad sense, of course, since what defines the monster is the fact that its existence and form is not only a violation of the laws of society but also a violation of the laws of nature.<sup>621</sup>

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<sup>617</sup> Ibid., p. 292.

<sup>618</sup> Ibid., p. 174.

<sup>619</sup> Ibid., pp. 174–5.

<sup>620</sup> Ibid., p. 5.

<sup>621</sup> Foucault, *Abnormal*, pp. 55–56.

In this scene, Chigurh is already presented as a legal monster. He has killed someone and, under suspicion, is arrested. Yet, rather than embarking on a path of penance, the monster continues his violations and morality by murdering a police officer within a police station. Policemen, within US social and legal structures, should be figures of authority, embodying the power, control, and morality of the state's legal system. Yet, Chigurh murders the deputy and extricates himself from lawful detention as a vain side project, a test of his powers.

Chigurh violates the laws of nature as well as the state laws in this scene. He propels his body forward and utilises it as a weapon against the deputy, crossing the boundary between the body and machine and adding another layer to his hybridity – indistinguishable ethnicity, human and machine. The proximity of Chigurh's violence is a logical consequence of the machinic use of his body – he has to be in close contact to use his body as killing machine. Chigurh's killing mechanisms are effective and emotionless and fully developed by the time he enters the narration. His own injuries caused by the handcuffs do not deter him and he exits the building only to commit the third confirmed murder within as many pages.

Chigurh's disregard for and overriding of law-enforcement and legal parameters indicate his degree of monstrosity and access to power. As stated above, McCarthy's marginalised characters are frequently subject to police brutality specifically targeting those of low societal status (see p. 26 above). Characters like Ab Jones or Red Callahan, while resisting oppressive law enforcement practices, ultimately do not have the power to defend themselves and are jailed or die at the hands of the police. Where McCarthy, in an earlier draft of *Outer Dark* included a scene in which Culla shoots the high sheriff of Sevier County, the author deletes the scene and maintains the unequal power balance between law enforcement and the lower classes.<sup>622</sup> Conversely, Chigurh's ability to overpower the deputy sheriff and evade capture imbues him with powers beyond the petty criminals and marginalised of the underclass. Like Holden, Chigurh 'is born' at a 'metaphoric

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<sup>622</sup> McCarthy, 'Photocopy of Earlier Version of Corrected Typescript [*Outer Dark*]', p. 199.

crossroads, as an embodiment of a certain cultural moment – of a time, a feeling, and a place'.<sup>623</sup> Chigurh is born out of America's first defeat against an inferior military power in an international war, the Vietnam War, where he worked with hit man Carson Wells in the special forces.<sup>624</sup> Defeated abroad, haunted by the spectre of communism and the Cold War, and at war with drugs and crime at home, American society finds itself struggling to reinforce and affirm its identity. At this crossroads, the monstrous Chigurh emerges and embodies the logical extreme of the violence and immorality that is becoming ever more visible in American society and culture.

Much like Holden, Chigurh rationalises his violence in convoluted soliloquies. While Chigurh speaks less, albeit also in at least two languages, he, too, uses his power of persuasion to confuse and ensnare his victims, like the Faustian Mephistopheles who has, as evidence in the Cormac McCarthy Papers shows, captured and fascinated McCarthy.<sup>625</sup> Cooper argues that 'Chigurh just might be a walking, breathing personification of the Prince of Darkness. More than most of McCarthy's novels, this narrative does not settle for mere symbolism. Chigurh is not "like" Satan; at some level of the story, he just might *be* Satan.'<sup>626</sup> Where the devilish Holden is an avatar for European Enlightenment, Chigurh has moved beyond Enlightenment and has become an embodiment of chance, an avatar for the post-WWII break down of meaning and the realisation that anyone could die at any time through random acts of violence that followed the nuclear attack on Japan.

A scene in which the omnipresence and randomness of violence and death becomes evident is Chigurh's encounter with the proprietor of a gas station. The man's attempt at small talk, a comment about the weather, leads Chigurh to

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<sup>623</sup> Cohen, p. 4.

<sup>624</sup> Erika B. Spoden, 'Let There Be Blood: The Vein of Vietnam in No Country for Old Men', *The Cormac McCarthy Journal; Miami*, 10.1 (2012), 76–92 (p. 78).

<sup>625</sup> McCarthy, 'Holograph Notes on Language and Vocabulary [Blood Meridian]' & McCarthy, Cormac, 'Typescript Vocabulary Notes with Holograph Corrections [Blood Meridian]' (The Wittliff Collection, Alkek Library, Texas State University at San Marcos, n.d.), Cormac McCarthy Papers, box 35, folder 6.

<sup>626</sup> Cooper, 'Psychopathic Killer', p. 46 [italics in original].

coercing the man to participate in a coin toss for his life: ‘What is the most you ever saw lost in a coin toss?’.<sup>627</sup> It is the proprietor who notices Chigurh’s lapis blue eyes. The coin has ‘been traveling twenty-two years to get here. And now it’s here. And I’m here. And I’ve got my hand over it. And it’s either heads or tails. And you have to say. Call it [...] You stand to win everything.’<sup>628</sup> The man’s life is in Chigurh’s hands and, as chance has led the coin, Chigurh, and the proprietor to this place at this time, it will be chance that decides the proprietor’s life or death. When chance has it that the man will live, Chigurh explains

Anything can be an instrument [...] Small things. Things you wouldn’t even notice. They pass from hand to hand. People don’t pay attention. And then one day there is an accounting. And after that nothing is the same. Well, you say. It’s just a coin. For instance. Nothing special there. What could that be an instrument of? You see the problem. To separate the act from the thing. As if the parts of some moment in history might be interchangeable with the parts of some other moment. How could that be?<sup>629</sup>

Chigurh reiterates this point in his conversation with Carla-Jean just before he shoots her:

For things at a common destination there is a common path. Not always easy to see [...] 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 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 [...] You’re asking that I make myself vulnerable and that I can never do. I have only one way to live. It doesn’t allow for special cases.<sup>630</sup>

Compared to other direct speech in *No Country for Old Men*, Chigurh’s language is unmarked by local colour, he speaks without dialect or accent, another aspect of his unplaceability. More importantly, however, he is persuaded that his actions follow a logic of inevitability based on choices that have led each player to these moments in the game of life. Chigurh arrives as the accountant for lives that are

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<sup>627</sup> *No Country for Old Men*, p. 55.

<sup>628</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 56.

<sup>629</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 57.

<sup>630</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 259.

already forfeit, he is the logical conclusion to each of his future victims' past choices. To Chigurh, once all instruments are accounted for, there follows a final reckoning of which he is the harbinger, sent by the mechanics of this fatalistic game of chance.

Chigurh's games of chance, the coin tosses, are only matters of chance superficially. In his conversation with Carla-Jean it becomes clear that his philosophy is based on a belief in fate, in a path predetermined for every individual. After Holden, Chigurh becomes the embodiment of the essence and logic of postmodern thought and the end of meaning of individual life. Combe and Boyle argue that

[m]onsters made are beasts emerging out of nurture, that is, from *within* the current sphere of human knowledge and endeavour. Whether fabricated as a result of ignorance, our oversight, or our overreach, these monsters that we manage to cook up for ourselves do far worse than menace our status quo. They *alter* our status quo.<sup>631</sup>

Chigurh stands as a symptom of human overreach, not as a menace, but as a harbinger of what the postmodern experience signifies when pushed to its logical extreme.

### ***5.8. A Last Moral Stance?***

The extremity of Chigurh's philosophy becomes legible and amplified in his opposition to Sheriff Ed Tom Bell.

These two characters [...] are juxtaposed like the twin faces of Janus, each envisioning a different possible world. Chigurh, the "prophet of destruction," follows an archaic code of destruction and annihilation, while Bell, haunted by prophetic visions of hope, looks into the future and the past in order to construct a sense, however elusive, of transcendence.<sup>632</sup>

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<sup>631</sup> Combe and Boyle, p. 2 [italics in original].

<sup>632</sup> Cooper, 'Psychopathic Killer', p. 49.

However, the world the sheriff is desperate to protect is the same world that generated Holden 130 years earlier. ‘The frequency of criminality represents a disease, but a disease of the collectivity, of the social body.’<sup>633</sup> At the time Chigurh enters Bell’s field of recognition, the social body is already diseased, as the monsters and society’s failures in the preceding novels show. Society has already arrived at the crossroads that engenders the monstrous Chigurh.

Bell’s reflective narratives demonstrate society’s failings, as the introductory introspections shows. Bell ‘*sent one boy to the gas chamber at Huntsville*’ who had killed a 14-year old girl after ‘*he had been planning to kill somebody for about as long as he could remember*’.<sup>634</sup> Bell regularly lists experiences of crimes that appear to be a sign of a new time to him. In his second introspection he states that he does not ‘*know if law enforcement work is more dangerous now than what it used to be or not,*’ but he did have ‘*a man pull a gun*’ on him before.<sup>635</sup> Bell proceeds to narrate incidents from the last few years in which his life was threatened, and muses that these things did not happen before. ‘*Some of the old sheriffs wouldnt even carry a firearm. A lot of folks find that hard to belief but it’s a fact*’, Bell reflects.<sup>636</sup> Yet, situating *No Country for Old Men* within the larger context of McCarthy’s oeuvre subverts Bell’s understanding of the history of crime in his country. Not only does Bell himself mention Bonnie and Clyde,<sup>637</sup> but the White Caps are mentioned in *Child of God*,<sup>638</sup> mob violence and lynching weave through *Outer Dark*, and there is the violence of the Westward Expansion in *Blood Meridian*, at the very inception of the US.

Bell represents, on the one hand, the democratic state and its sense of civic justice. Yet, on the other hand, he also becomes disillusioned with this order, conceding that the nature of power relations obviate the efficacy of the civic justice he tries to institute. This subversion of democratic ideals begins for Bell when he encounters Anton Chigurh.<sup>639</sup>

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<sup>633</sup> Foucault, *Abnormal*, p. 91.

<sup>634</sup> *No Country for Old Men*, p. 3.

<sup>635</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 38 [italics in original].

<sup>636</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 63 [italics in original].

<sup>637</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 40.

<sup>638</sup> *Child of God*, p. 155.

<sup>639</sup> Mangrum, p. 112.

Bell's perception of an increasingly violent country is based in a nostalgia for a state of things that never was, a state that Bell appears to begin to come to terms with during the introspective sections. Uncle Ellis's recollection of Bell's great-uncle Mac who 'was shot down on his own porch' many years ago, he himself a law official, confirm the impression that violence and chaos are not new to American culture and society.<sup>640</sup> Violence, Ellis seems to say, has always been there and always been insidious: 'This country will kill you and people still love it', because what those people love is the idea, rather than the reality, of the US, just like Ed Tom Bell.<sup>641</sup>

In his final reflections on Chigurh, Bell states that Chigurh is '*pretty much a ghost*,' and although Bell wishes he was not, Chigurh is '*out there*'.<sup>642</sup> Chigurh's fading out of the novel to continue along his path of chaos, destruction, and death leaves a trace of uncertainty and a sense of impending doom. Yet, Hillier argues that Bell's interpretation of Chigurh as ghost may well be motivated by Bell's repeated failure to fulfil his promise to serve and protect. His 'imputation of ghostliness to Chigurh allows Bell to avoid admitting that, by not confronting Chigurh [in the Van Horn motel parking lot], Bell has permitted Chigurh to go free so that he can kill again'.<sup>643</sup> Accrediting this failure to Bell's flawed courage and morality and his repeated betrayal of his duties to his people, aligns Bell with the other flawed figures of authority, such as Fate the High Sheriff in *Child of God*, Gifford in *The Orchard Keeper*, or the police force in *Suttree*. Following Hillier's trajectory, Bell becomes yet another police officer whose sole motivation for entering a position not only of authority but of responsibility is because he '*wanted to be in charge [...] Wanted people to listen to what [he] had to say*'.<sup>644</sup> Towards the end of the novel, it seems, Bell is forced to confront his hunger for power and authority as well as his failure to fulfil his duty.

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<sup>640</sup> *No Country for Old Men*, p. 269.

<sup>641</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 271.

<sup>642</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 299 [italics in original].

<sup>643</sup> Hillier, *Morality*, p. 217.

<sup>644</sup> *No Country for Old Men*, p. 295 [italics in original].

The Cormac McCarthy Papers at the Wittliff Collections show that the uncertainty in which the novel ends is intended and the result of ample consideration. McCarthy has evidently worked through several versions of the novel's end, and in the previous versions Chigurh is caught and sentenced to death. One scene suggests that Chigurh committed suicide, as Carla-Jean says 'There is many a thing that I thought might happen. But not this.'<sup>645</sup> This utterance is followed by McCarthy's bracketed insertion of '(suicide)'. Another scene shows Chigurh gazing at each witness to his execution as he is put to death by needle. Another page in the same folder shows Chigurh's autopsy, in which Bell appears to the mortician to check that Chigurh really is dead:

You checkin [in pencil above: lookin] to make sure he's dead?  
Bell ~~closed~~ [in pencil: pushed] the eye [inserted in pencil: shut] and opened  
the other one. I dont know what I'm looking for, he said. I wish I did.  
Just check his pulse there.  
I know he's dead, Doc. I think my problem is I dont know what's ~~dead~~ [in  
pencil: it is that died.].<sup>646</sup>

McCarthy's engagement with the final chapters of this novel is evident in the multitude of scenes he prepared, edited, and deleted and reinforces the sense of monstrosity that looms over Chigurh's body throughout the published novel as well as earlier drafts.

The manner in which Chigurh fades out of the narrative determines our overall understanding of the character. His disappearance in the published novel does not spell out his end, but foreshadows the possibility of his return at any time and in any space, as 'the monster itself turns immaterial and vanishes, to reappear someplace else'.<sup>647</sup> Several more leftover pages from the drafts deal with Chigurh's death or dead body. One draft describes Chigurh's death unexplained,<sup>648</sup> while

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<sup>645</sup> Cormac McCarthy, 'Typescript Pages in Section Titled "Prison" [No Country for Old Men]' (Alkek Library, Texas State University at San Marcos, 1987), p. No Country/Prison, Cormac McCarthy Papers, The Wittliff Collections, box 84, folder 4.

<sup>646</sup> McCarthy, 'Typescript Pages in Section Titled "Prison" [No Country for Old Men]', p. Bell Prison 3) X.

<sup>647</sup> Cohen, p. 4.

<sup>648</sup> McCarthy, 'Typescript Pages in Section Titled "Prison" [No Country for Old Men]', p. Prison A, B.

another has Chigurh's body eerily weightless.<sup>649</sup> These scenes and endings reinforce Chigurh's monstrous body in its inexplicability. Bell is looking for evidence in Chigurh's body of what or who he really is, supporting Cooper's analysis that Chigurh 'just might *be* Satan'.<sup>650</sup> These scenes emphasise Chigurh's ability to die at his own will and behest, eliminating any satisfaction Bell or any other representative of the law and mainstream society may receive from seeing Chigurh justly punished by death, a mechanism of punishment in and of itself morally questionable. McCarthy's deliberations have Chigurh survive and Bell resign in light of his recognition that the justice and morality he stands for are insufficient to address or combat the insidious and omnipresent violence embodied in and epitomised by Chigurh, the avatar of chaos and violence who, like Judge Holden, embodies the failures and hypocrisies of an unjust and individualistic society concerned more with maintaining power structures than caring for those most vulnerable.

### ***5.9. Conclusion: Self-fulfilling Prophecy***

Judge Holden and Anton Chigurh are monsters without redeeming features. Their monstrosity is not the consequence of society's judgement, it is the consequence of society's failure to reconcile its moral standards with its immoral actions, its Puritan and Christian maxims with the neglect and abuse of the unwanted, the vulnerable, the unbeautiful. This irreconcilable cleaving engenders forms of violence that peak in chaos and murder, enacted by the monsters summoned to embody the violence of the Westward Expansion, the Drug Wars and internal unrests, and the hybridity of the border spaces. Where Lester Ballard is a victim of society's failures, Holden and Chigurh emanate through the same logic to embody and perpetrate the same

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<sup>649</sup> Ibid., p. Prison BELL.

<sup>650</sup> Cooper, 'Psychopathic Killer', p. 49 [italics in original].

violence that led to Lester's decline, to the genocide of the native peoples, to the Border Wars, and to America's culture of violence, guns, and murder.

Holden, the irredeemable monster of *Blood Meridian*, is an indicator of 'a foreboding of the dreadful dangers inherent in authorizing the law to intervene against individuals because of what they are; a horrifying society could emerge from that', and Chigurh is the embodiment of the horrifying society that has emerged from the class and power structures that originate in the original clearing of the land.<sup>651</sup> These monsters are not 'exiled or destroyed', but summoned into existence to inhabit the chasm that constitutes the crossroads between ideal and reality, a chasm that never closes, rendering history circular rather than chronological. Holden prophesies this aspect of the human condition when 'he says that he will never die' and eventually returns in the shape of Anton Chigurh.<sup>652</sup>

To the judge, mankind is intricately connected both to the continuity and circularity of history, and to each other.

The judge smiled. Whether in a book or in the men's memories, every man is tabernacled in every other and he in exchange and so on in an endless complexity of being and witness without boundary to it in this world.<sup>653</sup>

The connectedness between 'every man' that Holden diagnoses, realised in society, fails to create a broader community of kindness, but rather stratifies according to who is recognisably similar or different. In Holden's time, these lines of stratification are explicitly racial, as society is defined by the colonisers and the colonised, the masters and the slaves, the dominant and the dominated. In 1980, the demarcations are less clear, allowing for the ethnically vague Chigurh to take Holden's place as ultimate agent provocateur. The dominant in *No Country for Old Men* are no longer the colonisers, but those with access to weapons, money, and manpower. Throughout, however, those with expendable bodies are those with

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<sup>651</sup> Foucault, 'Dangerous Individual', p. 18.

<sup>652</sup> *Blood Meridian*, p. 353.

<sup>653</sup> Cormac McCarthy, 'Typescript [Blood Meridian]' (Alkek Library, Texas State University at San Marcos), p. no pagination, Cormac McCarthy Papers, The Wittliff Collections, box 35, folder 9.

limited access to social, cultural, and economic capital – native peoples, children, women, the lower and working classes, unbeautiful bodies.

## Chapter 6: Postscript on *The Road*

### 6.1. Introduction: *The End of the World as We Know It*

The preceding chapters demonstrate the socio-political investment of the body in McCarthy's work. Through a theory and practice of reading the body, the extent of McCarthy's engagement with society and politics becomes visible and readable. However, the parameters with which to read the body in McCarthy's novels no longer apply to *The Road*. In its post-apocalyptic landscape, morality, community, kindness, and humanity have become vacant concepts as the few remaining people struggle to survive on a dead planet. The novel, Ashley Kunsa suggests, 'gives us a vision of *after*: after the world has come to disaster, after any tangible social order has been destroyed by fire or hunger or despair'.<sup>654</sup> In an environment in which the only politics is that of survival, the political investment of the body transforms into the nutritious potential of the flesh. 'In the early days people tried to help each other but as food became scarce all that went away.'<sup>655</sup> Capacity for community and morality, the novel suggests, is contingent on the relative comfort of the majority of people. Without the resources to sustain life, the 'thin veneer' of civilisation disappears and humankind reverts to atavistic forms of violence and governance by the strongest.

Yet, McCarthy inserts reminders of the past throughout the narrative, themes discussed throughout this project. The (im)possibility of community and kindness weave through the conversations between the father and son, conversations ruptured by the father's illness and the cannibal gangs' monstrosity. These themes echo the themes of this thesis and allow for a comparative reading of the body in McCarthy's earlier texts and his, to date, most recent novel. This chapter

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<sup>654</sup> Ashley Kunsa, 'Maps of the World in Its Becoming: Post-Apocalyptic Naming in Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*', *Journal of Modern Literature*, 33.1 (2009), 57–74 (p. 57) [italics in original].

<sup>655</sup> Cormac McCarthy, 'Photocopy of Corrected Pages [*The Road*]' (Alkek Library, Texas State University at San Marcos), p. 41X, Cormac McCarthy Papers, The Wittliff Collections, box 87, folder 3.

centres on these themes of illness and monstrosity, as well as the potential and limitations of community and kindness, addressing the similarities and differences in McCarthy's pre- and post-apocalyptic societies.

## **6.2. *The Final Illness***

One of the parallels between *The Road* and McCarthy's earlier work is the trope of illness. Amongst the broken bodies in *The Road*, the father is recognisably and conclusively ill. His symptoms, the incessant coughing until he breathes blood, resemble the symptoms of tuberculosis, or TB. As Susan Sontag explains, '[t]he spasmodic course of the disease is illustrated by what is thought of as the prototypical TB symptom, coughing. The sufferer is wracked by coughs, then sinks back, recovers breath, breathes normally; then coughs again.'<sup>656</sup> The father's coughing becomes increasingly severe throughout the novel. Where, early on, 'he crouched coughing and he coughed for a long time', he later stands 'bent with his hands on his knees, coughing [...] On the gray snow a fine mist of blood' and then he is 'coughing and it got worse and he woke the child'.<sup>657</sup> 'TB is disintegration, febrilization, dematerialisation; it is a disease of liquids – the body turning to phlegm and mucus and sputum and finally, blood – and of air, of the need for better air.'<sup>658</sup> Like the landscape, the father slowly disintegrates and his condition is exacerbated by the ashy air: 'Their masks were already gray at the mouth and their eyes darkly cupped' and no better air is to be had in the post-apocalyptic landscape.<sup>659</sup>

Father and son move through an ashen country, a land that has burned and no longer sustains life. Like the land that mirrors Rinthy's illness in *Outer Dark*,

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<sup>656</sup> Susan Sontag, *Illness as Metaphor and AIDS and Its Metaphors* (London: Penguin, 1991), p. 12.

<sup>657</sup> Cormac McCarthy, *The Road* (New York: Vintage International, 2006), pp. 11, 31, 125.

<sup>658</sup> Sontag, p. 14.

<sup>659</sup> *The Road*, p. 159.

the country mirrors the father's condition. The man, himself an artefact of a time before '[t]he frailty of everything [was] revealed at last', navigates a landscape of '[c]harred and senseless artifacts'.<sup>660</sup> Sontag's discussion of TB highlights the resemblance between the TB sufferer and the land in *The Road*: Both the land and the man are "'consumed," burned up' and their bodies 'will start "consuming" [themselves...] will "waste away"'.<sup>661</sup> The disintegration of the land is mirrored in the father's body, wasting away both through both starvation and illness. Where illness in the previous novels occurs largely in a social and economic environment of the lower classes, the man's illness is an allegory for the dying land, and vice versa. Not the social and economic conditions, but the absence of societal structures conducive to health and healing eventually cause the father's death.

Tuberculosis is a disease of many years and many names. An alternative term for the condition is *consumption*, echoing the idea that the body is consumed by the illness until death leaves only a wasted shell.<sup>662</sup> Consumption is, of course, a prominent topic in McCarthy's *The Road*. Like the illness, marauding gangs of cannibals roam the space and consume bodies, leaving behind only what cannot be used for sustenance. While the father's death is a direct consequence of his illness, other sick characters throughout the novels die from external forces. Magdalena, in *Cities of the Plain*, is murdered by her pimp. Sproule, in *Blood Meridian*, also suffers from TB:

He was coughing again. He held his chest with his good hand and sat as if he'd get his breath.  
What have you got, a cold?  
I got consumption.  
Consumption?  
He nodded. I come out here for my health.<sup>663</sup>

Yet, while Sproule suffers from short breath and chest pains like the father, his death is ultimately the result of the 'legion of horrors' attack. Sproule succumbs

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<sup>660</sup> Ibid, pp. 28, 220.

<sup>661</sup> Sontag, pp. 14, 63.

<sup>662</sup> Thomas Dormandy, *The White Death: A History of Tuberculosis* (London; Rio Grande: The Hambledon Press, 1999), p. 2.

<sup>663</sup> *Blood Meridian*, p. 62.

to the injury sustained during the Indian Wars in the process of asserting white dominance over the continent. A clash of powers, rather than injury, causes Sproule's death. *The Road* ends the project of white-dominated civilisation in the US as it ends all endeavours of human cohabitation. Power no longer lies with those with access to social, cultural, or economic capital, but with those willing to utilise brute force and anthropophagy as means of survival. Lacking medical means to cure his illness, the father's only two options of death are to be consumed by his own body, or to be consumed by the cannibal gangs.

The final disaster that ended the world as we know it and that the father only recalls in painful memories and dreams, is an acceleration of the trajectory that began with consumer culture and the rise of capitalism with its consequential exploitation and devastation of nature and natural resources. As Kollin points out, 'the devastated landscape [...] is also littered with the accumulated debris of twenty-first-century consumer culture, a reminder of the excesses and waste that marks daily life of many Americans.'<sup>664</sup> McCarthy's sinister wordplay around consumption offers a trinity of the infected and wasted: the sick body of the father, a polluted societal order through the consuming cannibals, and the consumed and devastated landscape. The inevitability and incurability of each of these, in turn, are arguably the result of human failings – the devastation of the planet leads to the end of a society based on morals, which leads to a return to a 'survival of the fittest' mentality and therefore to cannibalism, or more accurately, anthropophagy. The trinity of consumption accelerates not only the death of the father, but the end of the natural world and human kind in it. There is no future in *The Road*, only the continuation of a quest for a life that has become impossible.

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<sup>664</sup> Susan Kollin, "'Barren, Silent, Godless": Ecodisaster and the Post-Abundant Landscape in *The Road*', in *Cormac McCarthy: All the Pretty Horses, No Country for Old Men, The Road*, ed. by Sara L. Spurgeon, *Continuum Studies in Contemporary North American Fiction* (London; New York: Continuum, 2011), pp. 157–71 (p. 160).

### 6.3. *Monsters without Basis: Cannibal Gangs*

The motif of starvation weaves throughout *The Road* as the final shared aspect of humanity. McCarthy presents two options for survival, the foraging for food in abandoned places, and the consumption of human flesh. Superficially, this divides the survivors into ‘the good guys’ and ‘the bad guys’.<sup>665</sup> The good guys, the father and son, live in fear, constantly hiding and starving. The bad guys have become monstrous, eat human flesh, and have formed cannibal gangs that hunt and capture other humans, breed babies for food, and keep slaves and catamites, ‘fitted in dogcollars and yoked each to each’.<sup>666</sup> ‘Just as the father likens himself and his son to hunted animals, so others are likened to the animals that hunt, bestial in their savagery as is necessitated by their environment.’<sup>667</sup>

The cannibal monsters, ‘marching with a swaying gait like wind-up toys. Bearded, their breath smoking through their masks’ embody the monstrosity of the anthropophagous practice.<sup>668</sup> *The Road* features ‘many of McCarthy’s characteristic themes: the brutality of human nature, the crisis of meaning in the postmodern world, and the destructive trajectory of human history’.<sup>669</sup> The imagery McCarthy offers in the descriptions of the monsters echoes images of pre-apocalypse bodies, the drunk in *The Orchard Keeper*, *Suttree*, or the Border Trilogy also sway in their gait. The leader of the unholy trinity is also bearded. The catamites, a term also used to describe Leonard in *Suttree*, yoked together like the chain gangs of the enslaved prior to abolition. The detail of ‘[t]he gray and rotting teeth’ draw attention to the monsters’ mouths similar to the descriptions of Holden and the unholy trinity, ‘[t]he reptilian calculation in those cold and shifting eyes’ describe the cannibals as animals, echoing descriptions of the incestuous children and Lester Ballard.<sup>670</sup>

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<sup>665</sup> *The Road*, pp. 77, 79.

<sup>666</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 92.

<sup>667</sup> Euan Gallivan, ‘Compassionate McCarthy?: *The Road* and Schopenhauerian Ethics’, *The Cormac McCarthy Journal*, 6 (2008), 98–106 (p. 99).

<sup>668</sup> *The Road*, p. 91.

<sup>669</sup> Casey Jergenson, “‘In What Direction Did Lost Men Veer?’: Late Capitalism and Utopia in *The Road*”, *Cormac McCarthy Journal*, 14.1 (2016), 117–32 (p. 117).

<sup>670</sup> *The Road*, p. 75.

These echoes from the past are reminders that there is continuity of human actions and interactions after the apocalypse, a truth Holden speaks, Chigurh embodies, and the cannibals carry forward. Given the change of parameters, the disbanding of society, the end of the legal system, the impossibility of moral action, the question is if the cannibals can still be read as monsters.

There appears to be a consensus among critics such as Hillier, Cooper, Gallivan, and others, that the morality and amorality in *The Road* should be judged on the basis of laws and morals of pre-apocalyptic societal structures. Hillier contends that '[t]he man's contemplation of a distinct fable from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* moves him to yield to the boy's request that they feed and host Ely. The text carefully and gradually works through the process by which the man's hard-heartedness is mollified' until it is eventually 'stirring the man to settle upon a positive moral choice'.<sup>671</sup> While the father's choice to share food with Ely is the result of the son's pleading, the father's initial hesitation does not derive from greed or unkindness, but from the awareness that parting with food places both the father and the son at risk of starvation in the future. By sharing the food with Ely, the father endangers his son's life. How to judge the impossibility of the father's options through the lens of pre-apocalypse morality?

In his consideration of Schopenhauerian Ethics in *The Road*, Gallivan suggests that '[t]he world of *The Road* is a lawless one, through which stalk bands of thieves, murderers and cannibals, all intent on maintaining their own essentially futile existences at the expense of the weak and vulnerable'. He also argues that it is 'the boy [who] demonstrates the condition Schopenhauer deems necessary for an action to be considered right'.<sup>672</sup> The standards of morality that both Hillier and Gallivan apply barely hold in McCarthy's pre-apocalyptic societies. Applying the pre-apocalyptic standards that, in the preceding novels, McCarthy uncovers to be fraught with failure and corruption, to an environment in which all social and moral structures are charred and burned, creates an absurd moral stance that the death of

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<sup>671</sup> Hillier, *Morality*, pp. 269, 273.

<sup>672</sup> Gallivan, pp. 101, 99.

the father conclusively proves to be unsustainable. Cooper may be correct in aligning the father with the fisher king of the original grail narrative, who seeks healing in the grail Percival must help him find, yet, like the fisher king, the father will not find the grail, will not heal his wounds, and will not achieve salvation.<sup>673</sup> Instead he finds a death without ceremony, leaving the boy to wander the landscape with strangers who may be ‘good guys’, yet they also lack the power to heal the world and sustain and regenerate life.

‘The boy really has no choice, however, but to blindly place his trust in the family, and even if they are’, Gallivan argues, “‘the good guys,” there is nothing in the novel’s narrative trajectory to suggest that their continued journey will be any easier than that which occupies the pages of the text.’<sup>674</sup> Eventually, even the monstrous cannibals will run out of humans to consume. Gallivan states that ‘the most horrifying and disturbing scenes in *The Road* are those which feature cannibalism, implicit or otherwise’,<sup>675</sup> while for Cooper ‘the excesses of carnage and apocalyptic horror in its pages may stretch the limits of credulity’.<sup>676</sup> McCarthy’s use of cannibalism, especially cannibalism of children, of a ‘charred human infant headless and gutted and blackening on the spit’, accesses two of civilisation’s greatest taboos. The taboo of infanticide, violence directed toward those most helpless and worthy of protection by virtue of their innocence, and the taboo of anthropophagy, the consumption of human flesh.<sup>677</sup> Those taboos, however, originate in structures already inherently fraught with ambiguous moral codes. The difference between the earlier novels and *The Road* is that moral and societal standards have lost their reference points. To measure the morality of the father and son becomes redundant, as morality has lost its referents and therefore its significance. All that is legible on their bodies is the struggle to survive in a

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<sup>673</sup> Lydia R. Cooper, ‘Cormac McCarthy’s *The Road* as Apocalyptic Grail Narrative’, *Studies in the Novel*, 43.2 (2011), 218–36 (p. 219).

<sup>674</sup> Gallivan, p. 104.

<sup>675</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 101.

<sup>676</sup> Cooper, ‘Grail Narrative’, p. 218.

<sup>677</sup> *The Road*, p. 198.

charred and dying land. If a politics still exists in *The Road*, it is of survival, not an aesthetics.

#### **6.4. Conclusion: New Communities**

Questioning the applicability of moral codes to the cannibal gangs does not imply that they are not terrifying and monstrous, especially not as we experience the novel through the lens of the father and son, potential food sources for the anthropophagi. The coding through which we understand the cannibals as monstrous, however, belongs in the current world, not McCarthy's future disasterscape. It is easy to believe that we would act like the father, or have the moral fortitude of the son, from the comfort of our reading space. Everyday realities, however, show that such fortitude is rare, and those who possess it are hailed as heroes and heroines – they stand out from the masses of human beings who would have acted to preserve and protect their own lives, and who can judge them?

*The Road* questions and reverses assumptions about humanity's future, about morality, about life and love, and about directions. Seeking a better life in the south is only one example of such reversal, away from the traditional West, or even the northward trajectory of the great diaspora. Significantly, the novel challenges the meaning of community and its connection to an understanding of kindness. Jergensen suggests that '[t]he social practices of the apocalypse's disoriented survivors indicate that they tend to veer into one of two directions: some toward cannibalism, and some toward community'.<sup>678</sup> Arguably, however, it is the cannibal gangs who have formed communities for support, protection, and survival, while those who subsist without human flesh fend for themselves and are suspicious of those they meet on the road. Only the shared meal with Ely resembles the

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<sup>678</sup> Jergenson, p. 125.

communities of *Outer Dark* or the Border Trilogy, an instance brought forth by the boy's insistence, not the father's moral compass or sense of compassion.

When the man and boy meet Ely, he travels alone, '[a] small figure distant on the road, bent and shuffling'.<sup>679</sup> The ensuing interaction is fraught with fear and mistrust both on Ely's and the father's side. After sharing a meal, a ceremonious act of community, the father tells Ely that he cannot go with them, a fact that Ely silently accepts.<sup>680</sup> 'In the morning they stood in the road and he and the boy argued about what to give the old man. In the end he didnt get much [...] You should thank him you know, the man said. I wouldnt have given you anything [...] Ely:] I wouldnt have given him mine.'<sup>681</sup> The land's inability to regenerate and sustain life causes an end to adequate and sufficient nutrition. As sharing food is one of the essential aspects of community, Suttree's and Michael's sharing of turtle soup, for example, or Rinthy's meal with the poor family, the foundation of community has vanished and kindness comes second to survival. The boy is the only character explicitly acting against the drive for individual survival, bar the family who adopt him at the end of the novel, although McCarthy does not conclusively depict them as 'good guys' and the fate of the family and boy remains unknowable.

The communities, or collectives, that do exist in *The Road* are the cannibal gangs, 'the bloodcults' who have reverted to hunter-gatherers, specialising in hunting and farming humans, the last viable food source available.<sup>682</sup> Like the communities in *Suttree* or the Border Trilogy, the cannibal gangs find themselves in a precarious situation and come together for protection and support. They share food and offer each other protection. Unlike the communities in McCarthy's previous work, however, community exists not in resistance to, but among those with access to power. 'The praxis of the father and son disrupts the social organization of this imagined future as an image of its dialectical opposite,

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<sup>679</sup> *The Road*, p. 161.

<sup>680</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 168.

<sup>681</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 173.

<sup>682</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 16.

confronting the dominant rationalities of the pre- and post-apocalyptic worlds with their seemingly unrealizable utopian negation.<sup>683</sup> The practices that are outlawed and immoral by pre-apocalyptic standards now define the workings of the loose society of survivors. Under these circumstances, the father and son are the ones breaking with the dominant standards. The small number of those who do not practise anthropophagy, the vast empty spaces of the land, and the mistrust in strangers are prerequisites for survival prevent the formation of communities in opposition to the domineering forces.

*The Road* is the novel that sees the trajectory of hierarchical power structures of the previous novels to its logical conclusion and eradicates the requirement of a reading of the body's aesthetic politics. All bodies in the novel have hardship, starvation, and struggle inscribed on them. The politics that replace the aesthetics of the body of the previous novels, is a politics of nutrition and survival. The fiercely individualistic and self-interested power holders who work to maintain their power and feed their greed from *The Orchard Keeper* to *No Country for Old Men*, literally feed off the powerless, the minority, the vulnerable in McCarthy's most recent novel to date. The analogy Oswald de Andrade uses to describe the hegemonic colonial powers in 'The Cannibal Manifesto' has become the reality in McCarthy's post-apocalyptic disasterscape. McCarthy does not offer a vision of the future. Instead, the narrative breaks down the politics of the body and the logic of class and power hierarchies and lays bare the inherent logic that governs society. *The Road* is McCarthy's extreme metaphor for the flaws inherent in human society, a devastating analogy that offers no alternative visions.

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<sup>683</sup> Jergenson, p. 118.

## Chapter 7: Conclusion: Aesthetic Politics

My interest in the body in McCarthy's work was not initially drawn by the living, but by the dead. Rereading *Blood Meridian* early in 2014, I was struck by two instances in particular. Why would McCarthy include '[s]ome man's heart, dried and blackened'?<sup>684</sup> And why does the earless Toadvine wear a 'necklace of human ears [...] like a string of dried black figs'.<sup>685</sup> What do these mementoes of the broken body mean and how do they fit within McCarthy's work as a whole? When I started this project in October 2015, I did not foresee my engagement with the sociology and politics of the body, nor did I know that a political reading of McCarthy was possible to the extent that I have in this thesis. What I knew was that McCarthy represents predominantly unwholesome bodies and that I needed to find out why. Just over three years later, I have found some answers and many more questions.

'Aesthetic intolerance can be terribly violent', and this violence of aesthetics weaves through McCarthy's work, connecting each body to the other and creating an aesthetic politics overlooked in McCarthy scholarship to date.<sup>686</sup> The established discourse on the lack of psychological insight into McCarthy's characters has distracted scholarship away from political and sociological approaches to the author's work. Reading the body, this project shows, provides insights into the characters that McCarthy does not offer through psychology or introspection. Memory and remembrance are legible on the body and allow us to trace the path of characters such as John Grady or Ab Jones. Through the memories inscribed on their bodies we can understand the history of these characters and therefore gain insights into their motivations and interior life. Scars and wounds, visible manifestations of past experiences, form the basis of a recognition of shared or differing pasts, allowing the characters to recognise and identify in each other peers or foils, aesthetic similarities or differences. Similarly, illness and the consumption

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<sup>684</sup> *Blood Meridian*, p. 19.

<sup>685</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 92.

<sup>686</sup> Bourdieu, p. 56.

of alcohol leave traces on the body and render the body readable and recognisable and traces lifestyle and socio-location on the body for others to read and interpret.

McCarthy's focus on the body offers insights into the workings of society's stratifications of class and power. Concentrating on bodies marked by alcohol and illness, wounds and scars, at the margins of society, the author traces the organisation of class and space in his landscapes and on the bodies of his marginalised and ostracised characters. The aesthetic politics in McCarthy's narratives establish influences, control the organisation of social hierarchies, and determine access to social, cultural, and economic capital. Those most affected by this body politics are also those excluded from traditional understandings of three-tiered class hierarchies, those below the working class who do not participate in the perceived normality of labour exchange.

Excluded from mainstream society, McCarthy offers the potential for alternative communities amongst unbeautiful bodies who share in a history of ostracism, suffering, and rejection from dominant social structures. These communities, of the McAnally underclass or the Mexican campesinos, for example, resist the dominant narrative of the anti-social outsider and reaffirm the humanity and dignity of the poor and marginalised. The bonds of community also offer a platform of other forms of resistance, such as direct and violent encounters with law enforcement or the disengagement from capital markets, such as the production and illegal sale of alcohol. Although I acknowledge that not all forms of resistance are conscious or meant as acts of resistance, McCarthy's work does offer alternatives to hegemonic narratives of human worth and dignity. The alternative communities of unbeautiful bodies are reminders that the underclass are part of human society, despite their invisibility in mainstream discourse and narratives.

Moments of community, kindness, and resistance create forms of beauty unexpected in McCarthy's work. However, the systems of power and hierarchical structures that McCarthy lays bare through his aesthetic politics also have the potential for brutality and violence. This violence engenders two types of monstrous

character. One type is the monster made, such as Lester Ballard, whose deterioration is legible on the body and a result of social isolation and rejection. Whereas the monster made carries responsibility for his acts of violence and murder, his violence is rooted in the social structures that fail to offer support and kindness to its most vulnerable members, a fact epitomised by the monstrous yet innocent incestuous children. The second type of monster, the monster born, is equally a result of the systems of power at play in McCarthy's novels. However, where the monster made is engendered by ostracism, isolation, and powerlessness, the monster born is a product of rampant power and the logic of violence and dominance inherent in McCarthy's depiction of social stratifications. McCarthy's monsters press to its logical conclusion the nature of social hierarchy. The author creates monsters whose bodies betray both their own violence and the violence of systems of classification.

I do not propose to provide an exhaustive insight into the workings of humanity and society in McCarthy's novels. The author seems to balance each positive aspect with negative counter-examples. The beauty and kindness portrayed in marginalised communities also has the potential for exclusionary practices, as evident in *The Orchard Keeper's* Kenneth Rattner, or *Child of God's* Lester Ballard. Each moment of beauty and kindness, it seems, generates a moment of violence and monstrosity. This thesis has not solved the question of McCarthy's violence, for which I can offer no redemption, nor do I suggest there could be redemption given a broader scope or longer project. McCarthy's deep-seated distrust in humanity, his rejection of such categories as 'good' and 'bad', will continue to fascinate readers and generate scholarship for generations.

Focusing on a reading of the body, however, offers new approaches to McCarthy's work that have the potential to expand existing discourses and generate new insights through future scholarship. Due to the limited scope of this thesis, many aspects and common themes of the body in McCarthy do not feature in this thesis, such as age and blindness, or the corpses and body parts that litter McCarthy's landscapes. More research is also required into McCarthy's

problematic treatment of race, manifest both in his evident awareness of liberation movements and his often blasé use of racial slurs and derogatory terms. Another important focus for future research that would benefit from this approach of reading the body is McCarthy's treatment of gender and sexuality; specifically, there is an urgency to address McCarthy's misogyny more thoroughly. Reading the bodies not only of McCarthy's mothers and prostitutes, but gaining a more detailed and thorough understanding of characters such as *Suttree's* Mother She or *All the Pretty Horse's* Dueña Alfonsa, it seems to me, would greatly add to existing McCarthy scholarship and possibly assist in the reading of the anticipated forthcoming novel *The Passenger*, which is rumoured to feature a female protagonist.

Beyond McCarthy, the approach I have begun to develop here may be expanded, adapted, corrected, and widely applied to a variety of literatures and cultural outputs. My aim has been, and continues to be, to understand how the social is organised and how we come to see, read, categorise, and classify bodies and what the effects on our social life and organisation are. Perhaps McCarthy is correct in his pessimistic outlook on the human condition, yet perhaps a better understanding of the underlying workings of ourselves and our environment provides the potential not just to comprehend, but to change some of the fundamental flaws of our systems. As White says, 'It is personal. That's what an education does. It makes the world personal.'<sup>687</sup>

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<sup>687</sup> Cormac McCarthy, *The Sunset Limited: A Novel in Dramatic Form* (London: Picador, 2011), p. 26.

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