HUCK FINN RIDES AGAIN: REVERBERATIONS OF MARK TWAIN'S

ADVENTURES OF HUCKLEBERRY FINN IN THE TWENTIETH-CENTURY

NOVELS OF CORMAC MCCARTHY

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Leslie Harper Worthington

Certificate of Approval:

_____	_____
James Emmett Ryan Associate Professor English	Bert Hitchcock, Chair Hargis Professor English
_____	_____
Miriam Marty Clark Associate Professor English	Joe F. Pitman Dean Graduate School

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Leslie Harper Worthington

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Signature of the Author

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Dissertation Abstract

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Leslie Harper Worthington

Doctor of Philosophy, December 17, 2007
(Ed.S., Troy University, 1997)
(M.A., Auburn University, 1988)
(B.A., Auburn University, 1984)

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This dissertation examines the intertextual significance of Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* to the works of a major contemporary American writer: Cormac McCarthy. As many scholars have noted, Twain's novel helped define the direction of modern American literature and created what Leland S. Person calls The Huck Finn Tradition. In an attempt to clarify Twain's legacy, this study utilizes, among other methods, Harold Bloom's theory of tessera, the practice of completion, from *The Anxiety of Influence*. Bloom believes American writers see their fathers as not having dared enough and attempt, often through the

language of the taboo, to revise or complete their predecessors. This study looks in detail at six of McCarthy's novels: *Suttree* (1979), *The Orchard Keeper* (1965), *Blood Meridian* (1985), *All the Pretty Horses* (1992), *The Crossing* (1994), and *Cities of the Plain* (1998). In these works, McCarthy transforms what he has absorbed from Twain and ventures beyond what his forefather dared. He particularly escalates Twain's presentation of violence in society and the human threat to the natural environment. Faulkner's *The Reivers* is considered as a link in the literary chain between Twain and McCarthy. These echoes in McCarthy are vehicles for enriching our understanding of both McCarthy's and Twain's works: particularly our understanding of character, setting, time period, and reoccurring motifs. Twain's reverberations in McCarthy are persistent and pervasive. However, although they have been noted by many scholars, usually they have not been pursued much beyond brief mention.

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CHAPTER ONE

TWAIN IN NEW TERRITORY

In a eulogy for his friend, William Dean Howells called Mark Twain "the Lincoln of our literature" (84). In addition to exalting Twain to hero status, Howells's statement also implies that Twain set American literature free. Twain was indeed a writer who brought about change, and his influence did not end with his death in 1910. This influence, especially on American writers, carried on through the twentieth century and continues into the twenty-first. Shelley Fisher Fishkin says, "Mark Twain indelibly shaped our view of who and what the United States is as a nation and who and what we might become. He helped to define the rhythms of our prose and the contours of our moral map" (*Lighting Out* 7). She hails Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1885) as his masterpiece and the chief force of his influence on twentieth-century writers:

> Twain wanted to do something that hadn't been tried before.... He wanted to write a book no Englishman could even conceive of at the time... Everything changed on the literary landscape after this book appeared: it made Hemingway, Faulkner, Ellison – twentieth-century American fiction – *possible.* (*Lighting Out* 184)

Leland S. Person uses the term the Huck Finn Tradition to describe this extraordinary influence (6

Nothing testifies to Twain's significance and the appeal of *Huck Finn* to later writers, and the consequent change to the American literary landscape which was brought about by this work, more than do the words of these writers themselves. The most often quoted statement is, of course, Ernest Hemingway's pronouncement that "all modern American literature comes from one book by Mark Twain called *Huckleberry Finn*.... There was nothing before and there has been nothing as good since" (22). Robert Penn Warren called Twain the "founder of our 'national literature'" ("Mark Twain" 105). H. L. Mencken said he was a "colossus" ("The Man Within" 489) and that *Huck Finn* "is perhaps the greatest novel ever written in English" (488). William Faulkner also dubbed Twain "the father of American literature" (qtd. in Jelliffe 88). Twain's impact shows up in the most unlikely of places: in many ways, he has become a pop culture icon. Jimmy Buffet in his autobiography *A Pirate Looks at Fifty* names *Following the Equator* and *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* as two of the "baker's dozen" of books he would have to take on a desert island (94). And in Buffet's chapter "A Visit With Mr. Twain," his parting words, as he begins one of his many adventures, are "we are going to light out into the territory and see what's left out there" (95).

Similarities, parallels, echoes, borrowings, parodies, allusions, persistent patterns, prototypes, recursive phenomena from Twain all are found in the works of a long list of twentieth-century writers. These children of Twain may be said to be remembering, recalling, inheriting, echoing, confronting, extending, engendering, adapting, reshaping, transposing, reincarnating, imitating, and storystealing. They are male and female, black

and white. They come from various geographical locations and social backgrounds. And they have created different products from this common source.

T. S. Eliot cleverly calls such influence or inspiration an author's "posthumous history" (*An American Literature and the American Language* 52). He asserts that Twain is one of the few authors "who have discovered a new way of writing, valid not only for themselves but for others" (54). According to Jonathan Arac, *Huckleberry Finn* is "not only a cultural treasure but a resource for power" (31), a powerful resource for later writers. These writers are now what Eliot would call Twain's "living generation" (*An American Literature and the American Language* 52), later writers who must balance tradition, the weight of Twain's accomplishments, and their own creativity and originality. Each writer has remembered, resurrected and reshaped what he/she found in Twain in his/her own way. As Eliot posits, when a mature writer borrows, he makes what he borrows into "something better, or at least different" (*An American Literature and the American Language* 53). Likewise, Julia Kristeva asserts that this borrowing involves not only absorption but transformation (66). The younger writers transform what they take from the older writers into something new. Jay Clayton and Eric Rothstein believe that the power of influence actually belongs to the younger writer rather than the older. "If one says that X influenced Y it does seem that one is saying that X did something to Y rather than that Y did something to X" (6). They view "Y rather than X as the agent" (6). Influence for the older writer is not an "intentional action," while for the younger, his/her "observation causes an action" (7). (See Appendix.)

In *Lighting Out for the Territory*, Fishkin provides a long list of American writers who she says "all acknowledge Twain as an important forebear": Arthur Miller,

Langston Hughes, William Faulkner, Willa Cather, Saul Bellow, Ernest Hemingway, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Richard Wright, Gertrude Stein, Ralph Ellison, Herman Wouk, Ben Hecht, Henry Miller, William Saroyan, Elizabeth Spencer, and Tillie Olsen. To this list of Twain's literary legatees, she adds the contemporary writers Alice Walker, Bobbie Ann Mason, David Bradley, Russell Banks, Toni Morrison, and Lee Smith (191). Other scholars have noted Twain's influences on Carson McCullers, Thomas Wolfe, Sherwood Anderson, James Joyce, J. D. Salinger, John Steinbeck, Robert Penn Warren, H. L. Mencken, James Thurber, Jack Kerouac, Garrison Keillor, Kaye Gibbons, and Cormac McCarthy.

Of the living writers connected to Twain, McCarthy is a clear frontrunner for future major American writer status. He is also a man who cannot seem to get *Huck Finn* out of his mind. Twain's novel is present, in different ways, in each and every one of McCarthy's books. For McCarthy, Twain's influence appears not just powerful but vital. It is pervasive, consistent, and possibly essential -- and the Huck Finn Tradition is at its core. McCarthy's work is manifestly not a superficial extending of Twain's: such as Lee Nelson's completion of Twain's *Huck and Tom among the Indians* or Jon Clinch's recent reshaping of Twain's story in *Finn*. Absorbing Twain's tradition, McCarthy has expansively transformed it, and the new artful consequences go far beyond the work of other Twain heirs. Books, says McCarthy, "are made out of books. The novel depends for its life on the novels that have been written" (qtd. in Woodward, "Mojave Rattlesnakes" 31).

Although a superficial recognition is commonplace, very little scholarship has explored these Twain-McCarthy connections in depth. Some scholars have made cursory

observations; some have discussed briefly various similarities. For example, Jerome Charyn in a 1979 review of *Suttree* says that McCarthy "gives us a sense of river life that reads like a doomed *Huckleberry Finn"* (14). Richard B. Woodward in "You Know about Mojave Rattlesnakes?" the first of only two published interviews with McCarthy, says that the two boys in *All the Pretty Horses* are "like Huck Finn and Tom Sawyer on horseback" (30). Edwin T. Arnold and Dianne C. Luce in the introduction to *Perspectives on Cormac McCarthy* mention the presence of Twainian "echoes" in McCarthy's fiction (10), but do not elaborate. In the same book, Leo Daugherty, in "Gravers False and True: *Blood Meridian* as Gnostic Tragedy," discusses parallels between Huck and McCarthy's protagonist, the kid (165), while Gail Moore Morrison, in *"All the Pretty Horses*: John Grady Cole's Expulsion from Paradise," briefly notes the similarities between Huck and yet another of McCarthy's protagonists, John Grady Cole (178, 180-181). But there is no sustained study, no in-depth consideration of what is a deep and sustained element of McCarthy's fiction – McCarthy's transformation of Twain.

This revisioning of *Huck Finn* in McCarthy's novels is possibly an example of what Harold Bloom calls tessera, when "a poet antithetically 'complete[s]' his precursor, by so reading the parent-poem as to retain its terms but to mean them in another sense, as though the precursor has failed to go far enough" (14). Bloom believes that American writers are prone to "complete their fathers" (*The Anxiety of Influence* 68) and "tend to see [their] fathers as not having dared enough" (68). "As poets swerve downward in time, they deceive themselves into believing they are tougher-minded than their precursors" (69). The younger writers insist that they are correcting the excessive idealism of their poetic fathers. According to Bloom, younger writers create "distincts" that represent

qualities new and distinct from the precursor, something influenced by the earlier work but at the same time original (79). McCarthy, concluding that Twain did not dare enough, may indeed be de-idealizing Twain with his ironic treatment of similar patterns and motifs. This reductive tendency may be in keeping with what Bloom describes as taking place when the later writer "finds all space filled with his precursor's visions [and] resorts to the language of taboos, so as to clear a mental space for himself. It is this language of taboo, this antithetical use of the precursor's primal words, that must serve as the basis for an antithetical criticism" (66). Tessera is at least one tool with which to understand Twain's legacy in relation to McCarthy's fiction. Regardless of the method, a detailed recognition of Twain's progenitive influence is important for McCarthy criticism.

This dissertation will focus on selected novels by Cormac McCarthy to investigate and elucidate how they fit into, and expand, the Huck Finn Tradition. Specifically, Chapter Two will address *Huckleberry Finn* and McCarthy's novel *Suttree* (1979), including a discussion of Faulkner's *The Reivers* (1962) as a connector in the literary chain of influence between Twain and McCarthy. Chapter Three will consider parallels, and transformations, between *Huckleberry Finn* and McCarthy's first novel, *The Orchard Keeper* (1965). Chapter Four will look at *Blood Meridian* (1985), and Chapter Five will discuss predominantly *All the Pretty Horses* (1992) while secondarily addressing the other two novels of the Border Trilogy, *The Crossing* (1994) and *Cities of the Plain* (1998). An Epilogue will provide brief summary of the dissertation's findings and deal briefly with McCarthy's two most recent novels, *No Country for Old Men*

(2005) and *The Road* (2006). An Appendix outlines the history of relevant critical theories of literary influence.

CHAPTER TWO

HUCK IN THE WASTE LAND

According to Jerome Charyn, Cormac McCarthy's *Suttree* gives us a sense of river life that reads like a doomed *Huckleberry Finn*. The river has lost its kind edge. It's now "the slow voice of ruin" (14). In vital ways, McCarthy's novel seems superimposed upon Twain's in order to highlight McCarthy's representation of vitiating postmodern existence. Robert L. Jarrett calls Suttree "a tour de force of psychological complexity, a modern Huck Finn" (viii). Huck has grown into Sut, and the homogenized rural and small town world along the Mississippi River in *Huckleberry Finn* has given way to the reality of McAnally Flats. Edwin T. Arnold declares "the river [Suttree] fishes runs out of Eliot's *Waste Land*" ("Naming, Knowing and Nothingness" 59). As with Huck's, Suttree's story is the story of a runaway. Huck runs from civilization to the wilderness. However, for Suttree, the situation no longer presents a simple choice between civilization and nature, but an ever decreasing opportunity for choice. Suttree's only choice may be a steadily deteriorating civilization. As Daniel S. Traber asserts, "McAnally Flats, this 'world within the world,' may be a haven from the decay and dross of the high modernity" (35). But it is not really much of a haven.

John M. Grammer, in "A Thing Against Which Time Will Not Prevail," says we must learn "to read McCarthy with an eye peeled for the buried literary allusion" (32) and provides a long list of examples. He asserts that these allusions contribute to our general

sense of McCarthy's novels as "hieroglyphics," "apparently meaningful but often inscrutable" (43). Grammer continues his analysis by discussing McCarthy's use of traditional Southern literary symbols, such as the abandoned house. Later in that same discussion, he mentions "another powerful symbolic register," "the opposition of river to shore with which McCarthy follows Twain's lead…" (47).

Charyn, Jarrett, and Grammer, then, as well as many other scholars, are aware of similarities between Sut and Huck and McCarthy and Twain. If we apply Bloom's theory of tessera, we could say that McCarthy's novel attempts to correct Twain's or, more precisely, to complete it. Specifically, according to Alfred Kazin,

Mark Twain is the ancestor of all that twentieth-century fiction of Southern poverty,

> meanness, and estrangement that was out of step with American moralism and pious abstractionism. The characters are generally low, and there is no attempt to make them less so. Southern characters just lived, and without ostensible purpose, sometimes in mud everlasting…. (189)

Ironically, while now we talk in terms of Twain's "failure of nerve" (Marx 19), when *Huckleberry Finn* was first published, it was called "vulgar, rough, inelegant, irreverent, coarse, semi-obscene, trashy, and vicious" (Bloom, *Modern Critical Interpretations* 7). Biographer Fred Kaplan says that Twain "would allow his satiric and deflationary tongue to go only so far" (76). Evidently, Livy Clemens acted as his moral censor and guide in what proper people would accept (319). If Twain did not dare enough, *Suttree* carries key aspects of the novel a step further. McCarthy propels

Twain's story a hundred years ahead. Despite Bloom's assertion that "Huck of course is never going to be an adult" (*Modern Critical Interpretations* 3), Huck becomes Sut. And Jim becomes Ab Jones, Tom becomes Gene Harrogate, the Widow Douglas and Miss Watson become Sut's father and family, the Grangerfords become the Reeses, the Duke and Earl become Joyce and Margie, and the Mississippi River becomes the Tennessee River. The world of the 1840s transitions to that of the 1950s, and a reader can consider American prototypes, the "Huck mythology" (Bloom, *Modern Critical Interpretations* 3), in this modern age.

While not necessarily needed, placing another link in the chain of direct influence can stabilize perception of this projection. Richard B. Woodward says McCarthy does not "dispute" his "debt" to William Faulkner. In fact, McCarthy's list of "good writers" includes only three: Melville, Dostoyevsky, and Faulkner ("Mojave Rattlesnakes" 31). Orville Prescott calls McCarthy a "disciple of Faulkner" (49), and Jonathan Yardley said, "McCarthy is perhaps the closest we have to a genuine heir to the Faulkner tradition" ("Alone" 286). Since these two early reviews, McCarthy studies have focused to a considerable extent on Faulkner's pervasive influence on McCarthy. Jay Parini, Dana Phillips, Duane Carr, Wade Hall, Rick Wallach, Edwin T. Arnold, Dianne C. Luce, and Robert Jarrett all discuss some aspect of Faulkner's influence on McCarthy. Mark Royden Winchell speculates specifically that McCarthy in *Suttree* was "trying his damnedest to write like Faulkner…" (305).

There can be no doubt about Faulkner's admiration of Twain. "In my opinion," he said "Mark Twain was the first truly American writer, and all of us since are his heirs,

we are descended from him" (qtd. in Jelliffe 88). He is "all our grandfather" (Faulkner, "William Faulkner" 137). Faulkner biographer Daniel Joseph Singal says that by the sixth grade Faulkner had begun "devouring" Twain's works (83). Faulkner includes Twain on a list of the five greatest American writers: the writers "that probably influenced me" ("Meeting with Nagano Citizens" 168). On another occasion when asked what he believed to be the greatest American novel, Faulkner replied *Moby Dick* or *Huckleberry Finn*; he said the first was "an attempt that didn't quite come off," and the other was "a complete controlled effort" ("Session Two: Press Conference" 15). He also named Huck Finn as one of his "favorite characters" ("William Faulkner" 137). Faulkner scholars have not failed to point out connections they find between the works of the two authors. Harold Bloom maintains that Twain affected Faulkner with "intensity" (*Modern Critical Interpretations* 1).

Because Twain influenced Faulkner and Faulkner influenced McCarthy, Faulkner, to use his own words, is Twain's "heir" just as McCarthy is Faulkner's.[1] Evidence of such literary lineage is frequently focused on textual pairings. According to Strout in *Making Literary History*, a goal is "to see how what Melville called 'the shock of recognition' can illuminate by comparison the particular nature of the two texts, each throwing light on the other" (5). Strout asserts further that works can often "march in

[1] According to Jan Reid, among many other critics, McCarthy himself has now influenced a new group of younger writers. Reid, in her article "Ladies and Gentlemen, The Next Cormac McCarthy," talks specifically about James Carlos Blake and other writers connected to El Paso, Texas. She calls McCarthy "the papa lion of all this," not just Blake but Rick DeMarinis, Dagoberto Gilb, Abraham Verghese, and Benjamin Alire Saenz as well (131).

pairs, two by two, into the ark of the American covenant" and "by doing so they make visible the historically dynamic and creative nature of the tradition" (8).

Scholars have established many literary pairings between Twain novels and Faulkner ones as well as between Faulkner novels and McCarthy ones, but most Twain-Faulkner pairings include *Huckleberry Finn*. Of those, for Faulkner *The Reivers* is most appropriate for this study. During his twenty-year discussion with editors and publishers, Faulkner referred to this project as "the Huck Finn novel" ("To Bennett Cerf" 135). He described his work in progress as being about

> a normal boy of about 12 or 13, a big, warmhearted, courageous, honest, utterly unreliable white man with the mentality of a child, an old negro family servant, … and a stolen race horse which none of them actually intended to steal. The story is how they travel for a thousand miles from hand to mouth trying to get away from the police long enough to return the horse. ("To Robert K Haas" 123)

Faulkner has practically invited readers to make the connection between the two works, and many have, some in print, most notably William Rossky in "*The Reivers* and *Huckleberry Finn*: Faulkner and Twain." Rossky says even "a rather casual examination reveals a number of specific, and perhaps at first sight specious yet ultimately significant, parallels between *Huckleberry Finn* and *The Reivers*" (374). For Bloom, *The Reivers* "explicitly presents itself as a revision of Twain's masterpiece" (*Mark Twain's* Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*: Bloom Notes* 6).

Although McCarthy scholars have made many Faulkner-McCarthy pairings, few have even mentioned *The Reivers* and *Suttree* together. Many parallels between *Huck Finn* and *Suttree* are obvious, but these are made more interesting and coherent with *The Reiver*s as the evolutionary missing link.

General similarities between the books, biographical and textual, abound. All three novels were obviously difficult for their authors to write. Twain's writing of *Huck Finn* which began in 1876 and continued "by fits and starts" (Twain qtd. in Elliot xii) until 1883 has been repeatedly chronicled and is referred to by Emory Elliott as Twain's "seven-year struggle" (xii). Faulkner's struggle with *The Reivers* lasted twenty years. He first mentioned the book in 1942, but it was not published until shortly before his death in 1962. Likewise, most McCarthy critics agree that *Suttree* was the first book McCarthy began writing and was written "over about 20 years" (Woodward, "Mojave Rattlesnake" 36), although not completed until 1979. It was published as his fourth novel, rather than his first, fourteen years after *The Orchard Keeper*.

Similarities between the novels and their authors' lives are also abundant. All three works have been called autobiographical. In his notebook, Twain wrote

> if you attempt to create a wholly imaginary incident, adventure or situation, you will go astray and the artificiality of the thing will be detectable, but if you found on fact in your personal experience it is as an acorn, a root, and every created adornment that grows out of it, and spreads its foliage and blossom to the sun will seem reality, not inventions. (*Mark Twain's Notebook* 192-193)

Specifically, Twain admitted to the correspondence between characters in *Huckleberry Finn* and people from his own life, most notably Huck Finn's correlation to Twain's childhood friend Tom Blankenship. Huck's act of civil disobedience may have come from an incident in the summer of 1847 involving Benson Blankenship, Tom Blankenship's older brother, who aided a runaway slave by secretly taking food to him on an island across the river from Hannabal (Guerin, et al. 62). Tom Sawyer, Twain had suggested, was a reflection of his own boyhood self, an "autobiographical construction" whose mind and feelings were especially shaped by his "fascination with stories" (Kaplan 371). Huck and Tom are not the only characters from the novel with real-life counterparts. Jim was framed primarily from Uncle Dan'l, a servant on John Quarles's farm near Florida, Missouri, where Twain had spent summers since childhood (Kaplan 24), as well as other slaves Twain had known (Hearn 63). Likewise, Pap was fashioned from Jimmy Finn, the town drunk (33); the Widow Douglas from Mrs. Holliday, a former neighbor from Hannibal (80); Miss Watson from Mary Anne Newcomb, a spinster schoolteacher (Walker 75); Aunt Polly from Twain's own mother, Jane Clemens ("from *Mark Twain's Autobiography*" 165); Emmeline Grangerford was modeled after Julia A. Moore, a sentimental poet (Walker 82); the Grangerfords and Sheperdsons were from the Watson and Darnell families; and the shooting of Boggs by Sherburn is based on the shooting of Sam Smarr by William Owsley in Hannibal in 1845 (Kaplan 371). Kaplan rightly concluded, "The novel narrated by Huckleberry Finn that [Twain] had put on hold was a reflection of the irony and the advantage of his southern origins. It took on the

challenge of dramatizing the world of his childhood in a way that made literature out of both personal and national tensions" (355).

In much the same manner, *The Reivers* has been labeled one of Faulkner's most autobiographical fictions. James B. Carothers in "The Road to *The Reivers*" says:

> Anyone who has paused over the photograph of J. W. T. Falkner's Buick mired in the Tallahatchie River bottom, or, for that matter, anyone who has noticed that William Faulkner, like Lucius Priest, had three younger brothers, a father who ran a livery stable, and a family servant called Aunt Callie will have already made a good beginning at discovering how Faulkner, in this particular instance, went about sublimating the actual into the apocryphal. (95)

Jay Parini's explication of the novel in *One Matchless Time: A Life of William Faulkner* also comments on its autobiographical nature. While drawing parallels between fictional and biographical individuals, Parini asserts that Lucuis "quite vividly stands in for Faulkner" (23). The novel also begins with the now famous "GRANDFATHER SAID:" and was dedicated to Faulkner's own grandchildren.

Likewise, *Suttree* seems to be drawn from McCarthy's alcoholic days in the 1950s in Knoxville. In Mike Gibson's article that recounts his interviews with several residents of Knoxville who knew McCarthy then, one such acquaintance says, "I think Suttree was totally autobiographical, more so than anyone will ever know" (sec. 2), and yet another says that the story is "essentially an autobiography" (sec. 2). Wes Morgan in "McCarthy's High School Years" points out that in *Suttree* McCarthy mentions St. Mary's School, the Church of the Immaculate Conception, and Knoxville Catholic High

School, all institutions from McCarthy's childhood that were significant to his early religious instruction. Morgan also attributes the novel's focus on fishing to McCarthy's youthful pastime (1). Woodward calls the novel "a celebration of the crazies and ne'er-do-wells [McCarthy] knew in Knoxville's dirty bars and poolrooms" ("Mojave Rattlesnake" 36). McCarthy himself has said "most of my friends from those days are dead" (qtd. in Woodward, "Mojave Rattlesnake" 36), indicating "those days" from his life that the novel recounts. Suttree, much like McCarthy, is an educated, lapsed Catholic who shuns his home and family in favor of living hand-to-mouth and drinking with the "low lifes" of Knoxville. Also much like McCarthy, Suttree at the end of the novel is presumably moving on to a new phase in his life. McCarthy stopped drinking, moved to Texas, and likewise changed the setting of his fictional works from the South to the West.

Another general literary-historical similarity between the three books is their connections to various traditions. The three books share several literary classifications. They are all discussed in terms of their connections with Old Southwest humor. For example, Jarrett says, "other than Twain, few writers have displayed [more of] a mastery of the [old and new] Southwestern idiom" than McCarthy (117). Suttree or Sut, at the very least, reveals this connection in a name that scholars trace back to George Washington Harris's Sut Lovingood. Faulkner has been connected with the southwest humorists as well. Irving Howe says many comic episodes from *The Reivers* "will remind at least some readers of the humor of 'the old Southwest' in nineteenth-century America" (297).

Jarrett extends his comparisons of McCarthy and Twain to include "Western dead-pan humor" (117). Jarrett refers to the opening two and half pages of *Suttree* which have been called the prolegomenon and which begin "*Dear Friend*" (3). According to Jarrett, "identifying his interlocutors as 'Dear Friends,' this narrator affiliates himself with the American folk tradition extending from the Southern oral tale to Faulknerian fiction and with the Western tall tale incorporated within Twain's narratives" (127). Jarrett connects this introductory technique specifically with *Huckleberry Finn*. "We recall that Huck's narration, though written, mimics the form of a direct oral address to his interlocutors, while the implied Twainian author directly addresses readers in the famous preliminary author's note" (127): "Persons attempting to find a motive in this narrative will be prosecuted; persons attempting to find a moral in it will be banished; persons attempting to find a plot in it will be shot. BY ORDER OF THE AUTHOR" (Twain, *Huckleberry Finn* 2). Twain begins his novel proper with Huck Finn's voice: You don't know about me, without you have read a book by the name of *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* but that ain't no matter" (3). Twain's and Faulkner's books are first-person narratives, as boys tell their own tales, while McCarthy's is third-person, but as Dianne Cox (Luce) explains, the third-person narration "often takes on the diction and perspective of its subject to merge almost without seam into a first-person point of view" (230). The authorial voice and personal address that begin *Huckleberry Finn* are characteristics of the Western tall tale and similar to the technique with which McCarthy begins *Suttree*. Twain's "you don't know about me," Faulkner's "GRANDFATHER

SAID:" and McCarthy's "Dear Friend" all directly address readers/listeners and are all examples of the same oral tradition.

Another connection between *Suttree* and Twain's authorial note relates to theme. Grammer's belief (shared by other McCarthy scholars) that McCarthy avoids themes (30) is reminiscent of these authorial comments, especially the warning not to look for "motive" and "moral." *Suttree* has been accused of the same literary practice that Twain hails for his novel, writing without theme or meaning. Many critics, Vereen Bell in particular, have claimed that McCarthy's novels, and *Suttree* especially, are without plot, narrative structure, symbolism or theme. Bell refers to his work as anti-thematic and his symbolism as "anti-symbolism," an echo of McCarthy's "Antisuttree." Madison Smartt Bell says, "The only answer we will receive [from McCarthy's fiction] is the sort of answer Job got from the Whirlwind – the world itself flung back in our faces" (10).

Vereen Bell's assertion that McCarthy's novels are without plot or narrative structure may bring to mind Twain's threat that "persons attempting to find a plot in it will be shot" (*Huckleberry Finn* 2). Frank W. Shelton counters Bell's more negative statement by describing the structure of *Suttree* as mirroring "a universe which lacks coherent structure and meaning" (79). Shelton's comment is more viable than Bell's and adds a symbolic significance to McCarthy's narrative method. However, Twain probably explains it best with his description:

> narrative should flow as flows the brook down through the hills and leafy woodlands, its course changed by every boulder it comes across … a brook that never goes straight for a minute, but goes, and goes briskly, sometimes

> ungrammatically, and sometimes fetching a horseshoe three-quarters of a mile around, and at the end of the circuit flowing within a yard of the path it traversed an hour before; but, always going and always following at least one law, always loyal to that law, the law of narrative, which has no law. (*Autobiography* Vol. 1 237)

McCarthy also adheres to this one law of narrative. As Twain says, narrative has no law, not no purpose.

In addition to their Old Southwest humor and the Western tale commonalities, all three novels are just as likely to be discussed as epic odysseys or to be labeled Southern Grotesque or Gothic. However, Jarrett's comments continue to strengthen the connection between the authors' narrative styles by aligning them with yet another literary tradition, the picaresque. He says McCarthy's structure is "less problematic" when "juxtaposed to the picaresque" of writers like Twain (140). The structure is "highly episodic and anecdotal as to appear to be composed of narrative fragments," and "his plots are linear, primarily shaped by his protagonists' movements across the landscapes of his fiction" (140). *Huckleberry Finn* and *The Reivers* have been discussed often and at length in terms of the picaresque. The three works share many characteristics of this tradition: notably, attempts to escape from the restrictions of conventional society and heroes who survive by guile and adaptability, who are both tricksters and victims. Huck, Lucius, and Suttree try to survive without compromising their natural tendencies toward truth and goodness, a common trait of the picaresque protagonist.

More specific correspondences can be found in Rossky's discussion of direct parallels between *Huck Finn* and *The Reivers*. Many of these characteristics can be extended to include McCarthy's *Suttree*, especially the traits of the tramp experience and Rossky's "examination of the particulars of that revolt" (376). As McCarthy himself has said, "I felt early on I wasn't going to be a respectable citizen" (qtd. in Woodward, "Mojave Rattlesnake" 31). Huck Finn certainly could not be considered a respectable citizen either. He is a boy who is famous for his cussing, smoking, lying, borrowing, and drifting. Lucius, on the other hand, takes only a four-day walk on the wild side. On this trip, he finds himself living the life that Huck has always known. Rossky asserts that "both of these books share the unfettered and vital vagabond spirit of the open road (or open river) – the sense of free flowing life" (380). These statements seem even truer of *Suttree*. Suttree stays in Knoxville, Tennessee, for most of the time of the novel, experiencing an "interior odyssey" (Spenser 92) rather than a physical one as Huck and Lucius do, but his life is very much adrift. The narrator tells us "Suttree passed by, in these days moving through the streets like a dog at large" (McCarthy 246). He lives in a dilapidated houseboat and acquires his living by fishing from the Tennessee River. He is more than once offered a respectable job, but politely declines without explanation. His friend Joe advises him, "You could get on up at Miller's. Brother said they needed somebody in men's shoes. Suttree looked at the ground and smiled and wiped his mouth with the back of his wrist and looked up again. Well, he said. I guess I'll just stick to the river for a while yet" (10). His days are filled with the pursuit of his next meal while his

nights are occupied with the pursuit of his next drink and at times, it seems, his next bar fight.

With the exception of his visiting Aunt Martha and Uncle Clayton and going to his son's funeral, where he is definitely not welcome, Suttree tries to avoid the company of decent folks. He strongly rejects the lifestyle and principles of his prominent family, especially his overbearing father. Suttree struggles with his father's view of the world:

> In my father's last letter he said that the world is run by those willing to take the responsibility for the running of it. If it is life that you feel you are missing I can tell you where to find it. In the law courts, in business, in government. There is nothing occurring in the streets. Nothing but a dumbshow composed of the helpless and the impotent. (14)

According to Frank W. Shelton, "the city manifests to Suttree reality, and he is unwilling to hide behind conventional social forms and structures as his family does" (74). Suttree tells Uncle John, his mother's brother, "You can laugh at their pretensions, but you never question their right to the way of life they maintain" (McCarthy, *Suttree* 15). Like Huck's, Suttree's rejection of society and his father is a form of escape.

In *The Escape Motif in the American Novel: Mark Twain to Richard Wright*, Sam Blufarb asserts that *Huckleberry Finn* is the "prototypical novel of escape" (13) which engendered many escape novels that followed. This escape motif is the reflection of disillusionment with the American Dream, an awakening to the fact that it may not be viable, at least not for everyone (Hassan 318). As Ihab Hassan asserts, "Faith in progress and human perfectibility was found incommensurate with modern experience" (317). As

a result of this disillusionment, characters attempt to escape society and its controls mainly because that conformity no longer promises the same reward. These characters reject their former values and lives in pursuit of a new reality, a new life and new identity (Blufarb 155). Daniel S. Traber maintains that "the modern, industrialized, bourgeois society -- lauding itself as 'civilization'" is despicable because it represents nothing more than a structure of comfortable lies used to maintain control over others. Therefore, Suttree wants to disassociate himself from that system" (36). He wants to reject his father's view of life, but he has nothing with which to replace it. "Suttree's personal dilemma revolves around his project of constructing a sense of self that is of his own design" (Traber 34); like Huck's, Suttree's quest is "how to live authentically with the absurdist world in which he finds himself" (Jarrett 50). He would like to hide from his thoughts and his conscience by conducting his life in a manner that addresses only the most basic needs. Therefore, he places himself in a situation where he must deal with fulfilling the physiological needs of survival, food and shelter, like ancient man. His self-imposed exile to McAnally Flats is an attempt to simplify life to its most basic level and avoid the issues of responsibility and purpose. Traber believes "it is by repositioning himself in this social space that he hopes to find an answer to the problem of the modern world: 'a gift of simplicity'" (35). As the narrator says, "*Here from the bridge the world seems a gift of simplicity*" (McCarthy 5) – but, unfortunately, only "seems."

This escape is not simple, carefree, or successful for Suttree; he often wakes from a night of drinking, whoring, and fighting with no money and no idea where he is or what happened in the last half of the night before. One such morning, "Tottering to his feet he

stood reeling in that apocalyptic waste like some biblical relict in a world no one would have" (81). He is driven to these nights of debauchery by what Rossky calls "a surge of the life force against life's frustrations" (376). Huck feels a need for escape as well even though his time with Pap "was kind of lazy and jolly, laying off comfortable all day, smoking and fishing, and no books nor study" (Twain, *Huckleberry Finn* 23). The impulse is likewise present in *The Reivers*. Irving Howe tells us, "The adventures of Lucius, Boon, and Ned bring into play one of Faulkner's most cherished themes: the relaxation of the sense of social duty, the need every once in a while to play hooky, so that men can bear going back to the tedium and trouble of life" (296). Lucius's Grandfather calls it "A Nigger Saturday night" (Faulkner, *The Reivers* 290). Ned tells Colonel Linscomb, "You're the wrong color. If you could just be a nigger one Saturday night, you wouldn't never want to be a white man again as long as you live" (291). Even young Lucius seems to second what Rossky calls "the desire for vital living" (376), "the zest for the illicit" (381), and "the revolt against 'sivilizing' virtue" (376) when he says conformity offers "in reward only cold and odorless and tasteless virtue" as compared to "the bright rewards of sin and pleasure" (Faulkner, *The Reivers* 53). McCarthy's descriptions of the impulse are far less peaceful than Huck's and less jovial than Ned's or Lucius's, but signify the same need. The characters in McCarthy's novel find less fulfillment and release through these escapes: "in this tall room, this barrenness, this fellowship of the doomed. Where life pulsed obscenely fecund. In the drift of voices and the laughter and the reek of stale beer the Sunday loneliness seeped away" (23); "Suttree among others, sad children of the fates whose home is the world, all gathered here a little

while to forestall the going there" (386). Suttree and his friends do indeed play hooky, but McCarthy shows the sad consequence of a life in which escape is the norm rather than the diversion.

Part of what the characters wish to escape is the dread of retribution, the fear that someone or something is after them. As Rossky relates, both Huck and Lucius constantly live with the fear of being caught (374): Huck caught by Pap or more civilizing forces, caught by criminals or for his own criminal activity or, most importantly, caught with a runaway slave; and Lucius caught with the stolen car or the race horse, caught by Boss and his parents or caught in his many lies. At one point, Huck says, "I thought I was a goner, for whenever anybody was after anybody I judged it was *me* – or maybe Jim" (Twain 110). Suttree's fear of being caught is far less tangible. As an ex-con and frequent vagrant, Suttree has a fear of the authorities that never leaves him, even when he has not committed any particular crime. For example on a routine day, "he walked along Gay Street, pausing by storewindows, fine goods kept in glass. A police cruiser passed slowly. He moved on, from out of his eyecorner watching them watch" (McCarthy, *Suttree* 29). He is not sure for what he could be caught, but the fear still persists. Even less tangible is Suttree's constant feeling that death is also after him. Suttree thinks "Death is what the living carry with them. A state of dread, like some uncanny pretaste of a bitter memory" (153). In Suttree's world, this dread or fear of being caught has less concreteness, although far from less intensity. Often for Suttree, that which pursues him is nameless and haunting for, like his dead twin, it resides only in his own mind. Vereen Bell believes rational intelligence "frees us from dread" but "being 'freed' by rationality

in Suttree is dangerously smug and naïve" (72). Suttree's inability to look at his situation rationally leads to his fears, especially an exaggerated, irrational fear of death. Suttree's decision to abandon his economic class and live beneath it has "displaced him in time": "he is therefore in the presence of death daily in the way citizens of an earlier century would be" (Bell 92). Woodward quotes McCarthy as saying writers who "don't address the issue of death" are "not serious" writers ("Cormac Country" 104). According to McCarthy, "most people don't ever see anyone die. It used to be if you grew up in a family you saw everybody die…. Death is the major issue in the world…. To not be able to talk about it is very odd" (qtd. in Woodward, "Cormac Country" 104).

Suttree's dread and his fascination with death are concretely embodied in the drowned man at the beginning of the novel. Jarrett believes "Suttree is the analogue of this symbolic figure, the drowned man" (48). The description of the suicide presents the indignity of death, from "the grappling hook" in the side of his face to his "lemoncolored socks" (McCarthy, *Suttree* 9). In a mock funeral, "the crowd had come to press about like mourners and the fisherman [Suttree] and his friend found themselves going past the dead man as if they'd pay respects" (10). As he passes, Suttree notices the dead man's watch is still running, the first of many references to watches, clocks, and the passage of time, as if to say this man is dead but life goes on. Later standing on the bridge where the man jumped, Suttree envisions what it must have been like "to fall through dark to darkness" (29). But the call of death is again interrupted by the call of life, the carpe diem sentiment to live while one still can, represented by the toll of the courthouse clock. The clock is "suspended above the town with not even a shadow to mark the tower. A

Cheshire clock hung in the void like a strange hieroglyphic moon" (29). The suspended clock, or time, is as intangible and inescapable as death. Disconnected from any real source, it mocks man, with its "Cheshire" grin, as he attempts to decipher its meaning presented only in long forgotten hieroglyphics.

According to Thomas Young, Suttree has a "preoccupation with time and mortality" (75). Vereen Bell and other scholars believe that Suttree's problems stem from his fear of death and that "*Suttree* is a novel about transcending death" (Bell 69). Suttree can possibly transcend death by finding the meaning of life. Jarrett concurs that in this pursuit Suttree "must verge on a physical death and experience forms of psychological death" (56), that he in fact experiences "a series of metaphorical deaths" (57), some, no doubt, due to his own suicidal behavior. The narrator in the prologue seems to be cautioning the reader against suicidal thoughts when he says that the only appeasement for those who dwell in this world is death, but quickly warns in the prolegomenon, "*dear friend he* [Death] *is not to be dwelt upon for it is by just suchwise that he is invited in*" (5). If we begin to think that death is preferable to this life, then we are in danger of following thought with action. Suttree indeed seems to be "courting" death (57). The narrator tells us, "for there were days this man so wanted for some end to things that he'd have taken up his membership among the dead" (McCarthy 405). However, Shelton concludes, "the act of suicide, paradoxically, involves commitment, and Suttree is not capable of any kind of commitment" (76). His most realistic brushes with death come when he nearly starves in the wilderness, is hit on the head with a floor buffer in a bar fight, and suffers through a life-threatening case of

typhoid fever. He also wrestles himself up from near death after each of several drinking binges, not to mention altered psychic states such as the trance he experiences from the witch's potion.

These rebirths of Suttree echo Huck Finn's well-documented "deaths" and renewals, beginning with his faked death to escape Pap and followed by many metaphorical deaths throughout the novel. According to Michael Patrick Hearn, Huck has five such resurrections in *Huckleberry Finn* (98, 150, 183, 293, and 371). Huck is, likewise, not free of suicidal thoughts. He says on more than one occasion that "I knowned for certain I wished I was dead" (197). Fittingly, death makes an early appearance in *Huckleberry Finn* as well, beginning with its own drowned corpse, the first of thirteen corpses to appear in the novel. Early in the novel, Huck is told that a body found in the Mississippi River is Pap's, but positive identification is impossible (Twain 13). Twain has Huck relate a story told to him by someone else who may have seen the actual body fished out of the river, at least a secondhand account, whereas McCarthy carries the image several steps closer to reality by placing the reader at the gruesome scene. Unlike in *Huckleberry Finn*, human death actually smells in *Suttree*. Unlike Twain, McCarthy does not spare his readers the details. Although the body in *Huckleberry Finn* presents a softened picture of death, mentioning it introduces Huck's fascination with death. Bloom says even Huck's need for freedom, one of if not the central subject of the book, "by common consent, has something to do with postponing death, with deferring the fear of dying" (*Modern Critical Interpretations* 3). This deferment appears in *The Reivers* as well. Robert W. Hamblin in "'Saying No to Death'"

declares that Faulkner's interest in memory is "a means of opposing time and death" and that *The Reivers* is his crowning work of memory (19).

Huck's fear of death's pursuit is mainly revealed through his obsession with superstition. Early in the novel when Huck is alone in his room at the Widow Douglas's house, he perceives everything he hears as a sign of death. Hearn in *The Annotated* Huckleberry Finn says this early scene is "the first indication of the boy's great preoccupation with death" (61). An owl is "who-whooing about somebody who was dead," and a dog and a whippoorwill are "crying about somebody that is going to die" (Twain, *Huckleberry Finn* 5). The owl's hoot and the dog's howl have traditionally been standard signs in folklore of impending death (Hearn 61). Listening to the sounds of the night made him "so down-hearted and scared" (Twain, *Huckleberry Finn* 5) that Huck performs several rituals to keep from inviting Death in. After accidentally killing a spider, a serious offense and a cause of bad luck, Huck "turned around in my tracks three times and crossed my breast every time" (5). Crossing his breast, symbolic of the sign of the cross, invokes the protection of Christ, and doing something three times, likewise, a call for protection from the Holy Trinity (Hearn 61). However, these actions are greatly distanced from their ancient origins, and their religious significance is lost on Huck. His superstitions are the cause of and hardly the cure for his fears.

Superstition plays a major role in Huck's and Jim's adventures, with Jim as the primary interpreter of the signs. Huck tells the reader, "I had heard about some of these things before, but not all of them. Jim knowed all kinds of signs" (Twain, *Huckleberry Finn* 42). Cleo McNelly Kearns in "The Limits of Semiotics" says that Jim's "ability to

'read' these signs gives him a sense of control over his own fate which helps him survive the multiple indignities of life as a slave. Jim reads signs "to ward off the despair of his and Huck's situation" (110). They both rely on signs to provide them with relief from their marginalized positions in society. The ability to read the bad signs helps them feel they have some control over the forces working against them. However, the audience, according to Kearns, knows that although Huck and Jim view the signs very seriously, readers should not be taken in:

> The ability to read "signs" appears less as a skill than as an illusion, a pretension produced by events and motives that a more liberal, more sophisticated, and perhaps more cynical audience can understand better than either character. After all, we know, because we have followed Huck and Jim through the story, the rational causes of the events they experience, and we can imagine, all too easily, the psychological needs and defenses which gave rise to these grand and reductive semiotic equations. (117)

Rather than pull us into the seriousness of their dangers, the reading of signs confirms our superiority. Superstition in the novel is another example of Twain's humor which Kaplan says is "based increasingly on the cosmic insecurity behind the human absurd" (76).

This insecurity appears in *Suttree* as the reading of birds' movements. Like Huck's owl and whippoorwill, birds appear continuously in McCarthy's novel. Vereen Bell says Suttree is "a compulsive reader of signs," that he suffers from "the tyranny of signification" (87). Suttree notices an array of birds throughout his wanderings: a bittern (125), crows (120), pigeons (7, 89, 109, 118, 256, 385, 415), grackles (344), a woodcock

(291), owls (287, 385), ravens (284, 285), starlings (80), a falcon (89), a nighthawk (89), bats (89, 215, 352, 355), herons (225), redwings (120) and various other unnamed birds (134, 136, 150, 227, 228, 238, 261, 286, 327, 356, 400, 403, 405). However, the birds in Suttree do not reveal their significance, and Suttree does not have anyone like Jim who can help him read the signs. The abundance of McCarthy's attention to them through Suttree's observations is clearly an attempt to see some meaning in their movements. For example, the bittern Suttree watches as he rests on his way to his aunt and uncle's house is especially important in Irish superstition; its cries are meant to be a spirit-warning and can be recognized as the origin of the mournful cries of the wailing Banshee ("Irish Bird Superstitions" 37). Particularly, his sightings of pigeons appear to hold more meaning than mere observation. At the start of the novel, the pigeons under the bridge had applauded as Suttree floated by in his skiff: "Under the high cool arches and dark keeps of the span's undercarriage where pigeons babble and the hollow flap of their wings echoes in stark applause" (McCarthy 7). Much later in the novel, the pigeons' applause has turned to "inane and sporadic clapping" (256), less meaningful and far less approving. Later while in the wilderness and almost dead from exposure and starvation, Suttree sees a white woodcock: "A curling bit of down cradled in this green light for the sake of my sanity. Unreal and silent bird albified between the sun and my broken mind godspeed" (291). The word "albified" seems to mean to be dressed in the long white robe priests wear to mass, and bestows religious significance on the bird. After this encounter with the white bird, Suttree wakes and "his head was curiously clear" (291); the bird marks his exodus from the wilderness. However, the birds in *Suttree* are no help in deciphering the

world or the meaning of life that Suttree seeks. They merely hint, or tease, at an unattainable significance or supernatural message.

In addition to the superstition of bird signs, Suttree also collects good luck-tokens. The Indian Michael who wears a pair of doll's eyes on his shirt for good luck gives Suttree a good-luck tooth to carry with him. Suttree asks, "Do I have to wear it or can I just carry it in my pocket?" (239). Obviously, he is aware of its purpose and plans to take it seriously. He keeps this along with his other "amulets" (468). On a trip with Joyce, he collects a mussel shell, an arrowhead, and a stone that resembles an eye (408); earlier, he had made a necklace of a "dark stone disk" carved with "two rampant gods," "an uncanny token of a vanished race" (327). At this point in the novel, he still feels the need for protection from the unknown and a sense of control over his world, however insignificant that control might be.

Contrary to the superstition in *Huckleberry Finn*, supernatural phenomena in *Suttree* are meant to be taken seriously. Mother-She, the witch in *Suttree*, is earnestly believed in by not only Ab but the much more educated and logical Suttree as well. She is reminiscent of the briefly mentioned and more benign Mother Hopkins in *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* who "witches" Pap, causing him to roll off "a shed wher' he was a layin drunk" and break his arm (57). Unlike Mother Hopkins and the witches that "rode [Jim] all over the State," Mother-She is meant by the author to be real. Ab seeks the assistance of the witch to eliminate Quinn, the Knoxville policeman who is pursuing him: "I just don't want him here and me gone" (McCarthy, *Suttree* 280). Once again superstition is a means or illusion of control. Suttree is at first unsure of her powers, but

trusts in Ab's belief in her assistance. He later becomes convinced that these powers are real. Her leather pouch of bird bones and stones is reminiscent of Jim's hairball, but unlike the silly and ambiguous predictions Jim provides for Huck, Suttree's reading is filled with foreboding. The witch tells him, "You should of come alone" (282). After this encounter, Suttree avoids her in fear. When he sees her on the street, "he ran among the crowds dodging and veering" (282). However, after the ragpicker's death, Suttree again seeks out the witch. She gives him a potion that induces a trance, a near-death experience, which is meant to foretell the future. Suttree asks, "What do I do?" and she replies, "You don't do nothing. You will be told" (425). Seeking the future, Suttree sees the past, visions of the childhood demons that haunt him. Superstitious rituals in *Suttree* are portrayed by the author as frightening rather than comical; they function as a vehicle for exploration of one's subconscious as well as protection against outside forces.

Superstition is a more satisfying force for Suttree, as well as for Huck, than actual traditional religion. Religious faith is a force that haunts Suttree. The protagonists of *Huckleberry Finn*, *The Reivers*, and *Suttree* all struggle to escape the pressures of religion. Rossky says that Twain and Faulkner both criticize "narrowly restrictive or superficial religiosity" (379). According to Kaplan, Twain "had no belief in Christian theological claims and abhorred clerical intrusion in secular life" (145). After Miss Watson tells Huck about heaven, he decides "I made up my mind I wouldn't try for it" (Twain, *Huckleberry Finn* 4). He does not think much better of church-going. When he returns to the church to retrieve Sophia's hymnal and finds it full of hogs, he thinks "If you notice, most folks don't go to church only when they've got to; but a hog is different"

(101), implying that animals are less hypocritical than people. When he decides that Tom's magic lamp does not contain a genie, that it is just "one of Tom Sawyer's lies," he says "it had all the marks of a Sunday school" (15). To Huck, Sunday school is not any more real than a genie in a magic lamp, and prayer is not going to bring him any fish hooks (12). Like empty wishes to a make-believe genie, religion is not going to supply him with what he wants or needs. Huck believes that there is a God, but his definitions of righteousness and wickedness have been reversed by society. He turns away from the God who deems freeing a slave wicked or who accepts killing a neighbor in a family feud. By deciding that he will live a life of wickedness, Huck is actually deciding to live a life contrary to the normal views of society's righteousness. Organized religion fares even worse when Twain shows us a tent meeting through the eyes of Huckleberry Finn (120-121), mirrored late in *Suttree* by the "red reverend" (McCarthy 382). Van Wyck Brooks asserts that for Twain, "the flaming priest had long since given away to the hysterical evangelist" (184). The preaching in *Huckleberry Finn* is motivated by greed, but for McCarthy it is motivated by insanity, also represented by "the viperous evangelist" (106) who hangs from his upstairs window screaming damnation to everyone who passes.

McCarthy paints a less-than-pretty picture of religion. His prose is filled with accusatory religious imagery and metaphor. Specifically, Suttree visits his abandoned Catholic school "where he'd been taught a sort of christian witchcraft" (304), where an old priest lingered in the abandoned building, "a catatonic shaman," "like a paper priest in a pulpit or a prophet sealed in glass" (305). Visiting more ghosts of his childhood, a drunken Suttree enters the Church of the Immaculate Conception which he attended as a

child: "This kingdom of fear and ashes. Like the child that sat in these selfsame bones so many black Fridays in terror of his sins. Viceridden child, heart rotten with fear" (252). Like Huck, as a child Suttree took the threat of damnation to his heart and struggled with his sins. But now he sees "the stained-glass saints lay broken in their panes of light" (253), no longer intimidating. To the priest who tells him "God's house is not exactly a place to take a nap," he responds, "it's not God's house" (255). Suttree does not necessarily mean God has no house, "only that this one, of death and oppression, is not it" (Vereen Bell 106). The grown Suttree has let go, or is trying to, of God and the idea of Hell.

Suttree had rather spend Sunday mornings enjoying the sensual pleasures life offers: "cold mornings in the Market Lunch after serving early Mass with J-Bone. Coffee at the counter. Rich smell of brains and eggs frying" (McCarthy, *Suttree* 254). He compares the old men in the diner to the priests from his childhood who were "grim and tireless in their orthopedic moralizing. Filled with tales of sin and unrepentant deaths and visions of hell and stories of levitation and possession and dogmas of semitic damnation …" (254). These tales do not answer his questions. Suttree seems resentful that religion cannot provide the purpose that he seeks. He maintains this same sarcastic distance as he inquires after the goatman's and the ragpicker's beliefs – one devout and one doubtful. He is openly flippant with the men at the river baptism, and when told he had "better get in that river," McCarthy says, "but Suttree knew the river well already and he turned his back to these malingerers and went on" (125). Suttree, like Huck, would like to find God, but in religion finds only hypocrisy, corruption, and insanity. Huck's

attitude of questioning confusion has escalated in *Suttree* to sarcastic anger. When he finds the ragpicker's body, Suttree angrily asks, "Did you ask? About the crapgame?" (422). The old man had told Suttree that when he dies he wants to ask God, "What did you have me in that crapgame down there for anyway?" (258). The old man had wanted to ask God the purpose of life, and at his death, Suttree concludes, "There's no one to ask is there? There's no …" (422). McCarthy could have finished Suttree's statement with "God." There is no God. But despite Suttree's disbelief, he cannot bring himself to say it.

This attempted abandonment of God and religion is a major component of yet another attempted escape: escape from conscience. As Rossky says, in both *Huckleberry Finn* and *The Reivers* "the desire for release from the hamstringing of conscience is treated both humorously and seriously" (382). Huck tells his readers, "A person's conscience ain't got no sense, and just goes for him anyway. If I had a yaller dog that didn't know no more than a person's conscience does, I would pison him" (Twain, *Huckleberry Finn* 208). As Andrew Solomon says in "Jim and Huck: Magnificent Misfits," "Huck is almost always at peace with himself except when he listens to his conscience. His perverted ideas of right and wrong make his best acts seem evil and his potentially evil acts seem commendable" (19). Under this attack of conscience, all three Twain-Faulkner-McCarthy protagonists experience self-contempt. Huck is haunted by guilt over his assistance to Jim, but also over his overall failure to conform to society's conventions. He has a very low opinion of himself: "I was so ignorant and so kind of low-down and ornery" (Twain, *Huckleberry Finn* 12). Lucius's conscience, likewise, haunts him for his transgressions, most often for his lying; as he says, lying has "bartered

– nay, damned – my soul" (Faulkner, *The Reivers* 58). At the end of the novel, Boss tells Lucius he must live with what he has done, and Lucius replies, "Live with it? You mean, forever? For the rest of my life? Not ever to get rid of it? Never? I can't." His grandfather tells him, "a gentleman always does" (302).

Suttree also is haunted by conscience, self-contempt, and things he must live with for the rest of his life. At one point he asks himself, "Am I a monster, are there monsters in me?" (McCarthy, *Suttree* 366). His guilt over abandoning his wife and child is obvious at his son's funeral. He shovels the dirt into his son's grave himself to appease his guilt (154-155). This final service of the living for the dead is the only offering he has left to make his son. Suttree wasted all opportunities and ignored all responsibility while his son was alive. On seeing his "abandoned wife," Suttree was "consumed in shame like a torch" (150). This shame leads to fears of damnation. During his typhoid delusions, he dreams he is being judged by God, "who ledgers up our deeds in a leatherbound daybook" (457) and calls out his sins in open court. To these accusations, Suttree's only defense is the pitiful cry, "I was drunk" (457). He is then "seized in a vision of the archetypal patriarch himself unlocking with enormous keys the gates to Hades" (457). Suttree's subconscious sees himself judged for his many sins and sentenced to Hell.

Huck and Suttree share this "hamstringing" of conscience, which often leads both characters to despair. Their despair also comes from an overwhelming loneliness. Bloom calls Huck's "a primal loneliness" (*Modern Critical Interpretations* 1), and Huck refers to it often: "I felt so lonesome I most wished I was dead" (Twain 5). McCarthy

says of Suttree "the loneliness rode in his stomach like an egg" (*Suttree* 178). According to Shelton,

> Suttree, even though he is in despair and attempts to isolate himself from all human contact, is frequently seen interacting with and showing concern for others…. While attempting to live out the idea that in an absurd universe conventional moral codes are meaningless, he yet feels a common humanity with others. (78)

Huck's and Suttree's overwhelming loneliness motivates them to seek out others, especially Jim and Ab. J. Hillis Miller's observation concerning Huck can explain Suttree's motivation as well; "Isolation from other people is like death" (30). Jim is vital to Huck because he relieves these feelings of emptiness and isolation from others. When Huck finds Jim on

Jackson Island, he says "I was ever so glad to see Jim. I warn't lonesome now" (Twain, *Huckleberry Finn* 39).

An obvious similarity between the three novels is the major African-American characters' relationships with the protagonists. Suttree and Ab are as unlikely companions as Huck and Jim and Lucius and Ned, but share a similar bond. Jim, Ned, and Ab each represents a masked intellect, a smothered humanity, and the struggle to survive in a white man's world. According to Rossky, both Twain and Faulkner "express the same sympathy and admiration for the insulted and the same commitment to a direct, intuitive apprehension … of life through Negro and partly Negro characters" (379). A. Nicholas Fargnoli and Michael Golay in *William Faulkner A to Z* believe Ned McCaslin

is "Faulkner's Jim, the runaway slave in Mark Twain's great novel who teaches Huck imperishable lessons about their common humanity. In a similar way, Ned helps young Lucius to adulthood and to his estate as a good man" (150). Faulkner may have actually taken the character's name from Twain's own history. Jim was a composite of not only Uncle Dan'l but also two other men in Twain's life, including Uncle *Ned*, a slave owned by the Clemens family (Hearn 64). Rossky agrees that in Ned we find "some of the dignity and natural wisdom of Jim" (374). Huck eventually comes to a realization of Jim's intelligence, superior morality, and humanity. Early in the novel, Huck says of Jim, "Well, he was right; he was most always right; he had an uncommon level head, for a nigger" (Twain, *Huckleberry Finn* 71). However, in the conclusion of the novel, after Jim sacrifices himself to save Tom, Huck gives Jim the highest compliment he can imagine: "I knowed he was white inside" (247). Conversely, from the start of Faulkner's novel, Lucius is aware of Ned's abilities, which are not lessened by his black skin, but he is also aware that Ned must keep them undercover, must refer to Boon, obviously Ned's inferior, as Mr. Boon. Howe says Ned possesses "a sharpness of observation testifying to those powers of humanity he has preserved beneath the mask of the pliant Negro" (298).

Suttree takes a step further, treating Ab with reverence, not as merely an equal but as a man of greater experience, superior knowledge, and truer wisdom. Jarrett's claim that Ab is a surrogate father to Suttree (61) is reminiscent of the many discussions of Jim as a superior replacement for Pap. Thomas D. Young in "The Imprisonment of Sensibility: *Suttree*" says, "Some of [Suttree's] finest moments occur as a result of his friendship with the black tavern-owner, Ab Jones" (111). As in the friendships between

Huck and Jim and Lucius and Ned, Suttree seems drawn to Ab. Young says Suttree's sympathies for Ab are "deeply felt" (111). Suttree watches for the light in Ab's tavern and wanders in seeking out Ab for no apparent reason. Suttree sits at Ab's bedside like a child, hanging on Ab's every word and talking with him in a way he rarely does with other characters. He asks expectantly, "Have you ever killed anybody? and Ab replies, "Not on purpose" (205). Suttree is always asking Ab questions and watching him: "Suttree could see the huge veined hands in the gloom …. They were moving as if to shape the dark into some purpose" (203-204). Suttree admires Ab's sense of purpose and believes the wisdom Ab would impart could shape his own "dark" into "some purpose." According to Traber in "Ruder Forms Survive, or Slumming for Subjectivity: Self-Marginalization in *Suttree*," "What some may interpret as a headstrong death-wish, Suttree comes to see as an honorable refusal to surrender" (38).

Despite the similarities in these three interracial relationships**,** as Strout says, "What is required for fruitful comparison is a connection showing [as Jacques Barzun asserts] 'many points of congruence up to the sought-for point of disparity'" (5-6). The disparity between these three characters is more in degree than in kind. They all represent the black man's struggle, but as time progresses and society slowly changes its attitudes, the characters change. Jim is a slave and has few options, but his defiance is monumental considering his situation. Ab's resistance is outright defiance. The comparison makes more sense with Ned in between. Jim's act of defiance is to run away, remove himself from the situation he cannot control, being sold down South by Miss Watson, and live on Jackson Island or the river, away from a caste society that offers few

other options. Ned is not a slave but still a servant who belongs to the Priest family in a sense because his ancestors were slaves owned by the family and he now lives on their property and works for them. However, as Joel Williamson observes, "One of the great ironies of American history" is that "when the nation freed the slave, it also freed racism" (109). Despite emancipation for African Americans, Ned must work under the radar of white society in order to achieve his goals and assert himself as an individual. His defiance comes in the form of cunning. Lucius tells us that Ned "spoke, quiet and succinct. He was not Uncle Remus now. But then, he never was when it was just me and members of his own race around" (Faulkner, *The Reivers* 182). As Cleanth Brooks says, "To maintain dignity, Ned McCaslin depends primarily upon wit and a certain coolness of address" (357). According to John Roberts, African-American folklore presents a particular type of trickster, one who is always in control of his situation, manipulates people at will, and uses creativity and inventiveness to deal with situations peculiar to slavery. "Tricksterism was thus a justifiable response to oppression, a mode of survival. Trickster tales assert the right of the individual to contest the irrational authority" (111). Ned is obviously a trickster similar to those found in the tales of his ancestors.

Ab, by contrast, physically fights. He carries the symbols of this fight on his body: "…Suttree saw such galaxies of scars and old rendings mended and slick and livid suture marks as made him gasp" (230). Ab turns to violence when he cannot live as a free man. Even though civil liberties have progressed to the point that he can own his own tavern and presumably live a life that is separate but equal, he is still expected to wear one of the "black masks" (Gray 364), in other words, to choose between the acceptable black

stereotypes that he must conform to while in the presence of whites. Ab tells Suttree, "They don't like no nigger walkin around like a man" (McCarthy, *Suttree* 203). As Suttree tells Blind Richard, Ab "doesn't have a license." When asked a license for what, Sut replies, "For anything. For living" (370). Ab lacks a license for living much as Jim lacks his freedom papers. Both characters possess the thing itself, freedom; society just does not acknowledge it. Without that acknowledgment, without the proper credentials or paperwork, they might as well be slaves again. They are free only in the limited space that society allows. Ab, unlike Jim and Ned, will not run away or swallow his dignity in order to protect himself from the ignorant and hateful; he will not live in that small, allotted space. When Suttree finds Ab, drunk, beaten, and half-conscious, in an alley, he tries to carry him home, but they are stopped by two Knoxville policeman. Ab suddenly transforms and meets them "with a strength and grace contrived of nothingness" (440). According to Shelton in "Suttree and Suicide," Ab's "violence has purpose and meaning. Determined to assert his manhood and dignity as a human being equal to any other, he is constantly harassed by the law because he refuses to back down and humble himself. Finally he is arrested and beaten to death while in jail" (77). Suttree not only admires Ab's willingness to die for his cause, but also envies his possession of a cause he feels is worth dying for.

In order for the African American to survive the struggles of life, it helps to be as lucky as Jim, as smart as Ned, or as strong as Ab. Jim is fortunate to be freed at the conclusion of Twain's novel and left with endless possibilities. He owns himself and believes he will one day free his wife and children. Ned ends the novel much like he

began -- if not any wiser, just a little richer; he is free but must still play Uncle Remus. Colonel Linscomb even jokingly offers to buy him from Boss. Ab is killed. No matter how strong he is, society still wore him down. Strength alone was not enough to save him; however, as Ab fought against the hopelessness and tyranny of society, he showed admirable courage. Traber observes,

> Underneath Ab's cool exterior there must be a reason for him to openly sustain this doomed struggle. Ab must be fatalistic about his position, but he also displays a kernel of optimism in his persistent acts of transgression that amounts to a belief in personal agency and the very ability to act.... During most of the novel, Suttree is a passive observer and remains comfortably restrained from taking any action by his nihilistic attitude. But he is eventually influenced by Ab to commit his one outright politically subversive act. (38)

Suttree's act of civil disobedience, running the police car into the river, represents much the same sentiment as Huck's famous line, "All right then, I'll go to hell" (Twain 193). Huck's entire quest to save Jim has been an act of civil disobedience. He decides he will face all that comes in his struggle to save Jim, even if that includes the loss of his soul. Lucius makes a very similar statement when he decides to throw "virtue" aside and commit fully to the adventure: "I said *All right then. Here I come*" (Faulkner, *The Reivers* 68). However, Faulkner's line is much less climactic. Unlike Huck's and Suttree's, Lucius's testament comes early in the novel and is, as he believes at this point,

merely in pursuit of a good time, not civil disobedience; Huck's and Suttree's come much

later and after much agonizing, and represent enormous self-sacrifice.

In addition to the Jim/Ned/Ab correspondence, other character matches appear between the three works as well. Raymond Todd says**,** "Like Tom Sawyer in Twain's *Huckleberry Finn* (another classic novel against which McCarthy's tale may well be read), Harrogate, the 'city rat,' is an absurd antagonist, folly in search of an identity." The similarities between Tom and Gene are clear, especially in terms of their attitudes, schemes, and relationships with the novels' protagonists. McCarthy's jump from Twain's victim of the Sir Walter disease to his own melon-felon is much the same as the journey from Jim to Ab. As with Ned, the connection makes more sense with Boon Hogganbeck of Faulkner's *The Reivers* in between and even more sense when the two characters of Boon and Otis are combined. Rossky sees Jim as a combination of Boon and Ned (374), but Tom is a much more likely candidate for Boon's progenitor. The first obstacle in making the Tom-Boon connection is their ages. Tom is a 13 or 14-year-old boy, like Huck, whereas Boon is a 41 year-old man. However, even Lucius sees that anyone who "dealt with Boon dealt with a child and had not merely to cope with but even anticipate its unpredictable vagaries" and "lack of the simplest rudiments of common sense" (Faulkner, *The Reivers* 57). Cleanth Brooks, as well as other critics, has commented on Boon's child-like essence: "In Boon Hogganbeck there is something boyish" (351). Additionally, Twain repeatedly juxtaposes Huck's practicality with Tom's lack of common sense. Tom is "the eternal child, and would have Huck remain irresponsible and unrealistic" (Walker 78) so he will always have a playmate.

An even less suitable playmate for Lucius than Boon is Otis. Otis is "the

Arkansan nephew of Miss Corrie, an ill-mannered, perverse, greedy, and thieving 15-year-old who passes for 10 …" (Fargnoli and Golay 175). Otis's cussing, stealing, and obsession with "pugnuckling" sound like McCarthy's Gene Harrogate. In terms of age, Gene stands between Boon and Otis, still a child or at least child-like at 18, a man-child of sorts. He shares Boon's genuine feeling for the protagonist and zest for life, but Gene also has the perverseness of Otis. As Suttree tells Gene, "You look wrong. You will always look wrong" (McCarthy 60), which brings to mind Lucius's observation of Otis, "you remember I told you there was something wrong about Otis" (Faulkner, *The Reivers* 111).

Gene does not only look wrong; his actions are always all wrong as well. He deploys "tireless stratagems against the world, while incredulous Suttree stands by as witness. Except that Suttree seldom stands completely by" (Thomas Young 111). The same is true of Tom and Huck and of Lucius and Boon. Both novels contain obvious examples: Tom's pulling Huck into the totally unnecessary plot to save Jim and Boon's seducing Lucius to steal Boss's car and travel to Memphis with him. Boon's plots are much more grown-up than Tom's: prostitutes and brothels and stolen cars and horses rather than pretend pirates and magic genies. But nothing is more real or cruel than the false imprisonment Tom imposes on Jim for Tom's own amusement. Nancy Walker describes Tom as "the classic 'bad boy,' [who] turns from youthful prankster early in the novel to cunning – if not malicious – torturer during the 'freeing' of Jim at the end" (73). Gene's car-hood boat, bat caper, and failed bank robbery, although very real to Gene, are not too far removed from Tom's, Boon's or Otis's antics, just more absurd. Although

motivated by greed and the desire to be someone important, Gene's follies seem more sympathetic than Tom's, maybe because they are real rather than fantasy – and, as such, more pathetic.

Tom's, Boon's, and Gene's motives for seeking out the protagonists are much clearer than the protagonists' motives in these relationships. As Thomas Young observes, "Against his better judgment, Suttree keeps finding himself involved in Harrogate's schemes" (112). Huck and Lucius also find themselves caught up in others' schemes. Huck's attachment to Tom is motivated by boyhood awe. However, Huck's admiration is unfounded and naïve as well as a result of his lack of confidence and recognition of his own self-worth. Huck does not see his intrinsic superiority to Tom. After his ingenious and successful escape from Pap, Huck says, "I did wish Tom Sawyer was there. I knowed he would take an interest in this kind of business, and throw in the fancy touches. Nobody could spread himself like Tom Sawyer in such a thing as that" (Twain, *Huckleberry Finn* 31). Huck might not understand that he is more practical, realistic, and mature than Tom, but Lucius clearly sees that he is the one who is in charge. "I had been merely testing Boon: not trying my own virtue but simply testing Boon's capacity to undermine it…" (Faulkner, *The Reivers* 50-51). Huck and Tom are both children and on an equal footing of sorts, and although of superior intelligence, Lucius is still a child influenced at least by the appearance of an adult, an adult who is sanctioning that he do what he already wants to.

Suttree's ties to Gene are even less clear. Vereen Bell tells us, "Suttree is the

antithesis of Harrogate" (91), as Huck is undoubtedly the antithesis of Tom. Suttree is obviously intelligent and mature enough to see Gene's failings. His motivation seems to be in part sympathy for the less fortunate and the desire to protect those who can not protect themselves, which we see in Suttree's dealings with many citizens of McAnally Flats. Jarrett sees Gene as a "substitute son" for Suttree (61). Arnold sees Suttree's feelings for Gene as "deepened by his own son's death" ("Naming, Knowing and Nothingness" 59). Again according to Todd, "Suttree cannot help but act as his paternal protector despite his better judgment, hoping to save him from his own shortsightedness and obsessive desire to be somebody who counts" (sec. 3). Gene wants to be somebody who counts in the eyes of society, just as Tom is controlled by society's judgments. Suttree feels obligated to be Gene's caretaker, but he may feel a bit of envy and admiration as well, an admiration similar to his reverence for Ab. Vereen Bell says Suttree is "paralyzingly aware of everything that Harrogate's industry and simplicity shield him from: the true horror of death, the sure corruption and end of friends, love and all singular things; the impersonal relentlessness of time; the cruel absence of God from the world; the arbitrariness and insequentiality of identity in the face of all that" (91). Suttree is drawn to that simplicity and escape. He wishes to escape from all the horrors of the world of which he is so painfully aware. "In Harrogate's misdeeds there is always a buoyant innocence, as if he were merely making his way through the world by the same amoral wiles everyone else uses but is at pains to disguise" (Thomas Young 113). Suttree admires his optimism and straightforwardness. Gene's industry, although misguided, shows a sense of direction and purpose in life. He wants possessions and

prestige and plans and works to obtain them. Suttree, unfortunately, lacks this motivation for life, and, therefore, admires it in others. Bell asserts that Suttree "watches and learns" from Gene, that his "positive influence affects his intellectual growth and collaborates with other influences that move him off the dead center of his nihilistic immobility" (81).

The protagonists are drawn to these unlikely male companions while simultaneously avoiding female characters. Huck has to escape the Widow Douglas, Miss Watson, and Aunt Sally. Lucius runs from his mother, grandmother, and Aunt Callie. The protagonists, apparently, cannot achieve their goals, find themselves and a satisfactory way of life, in the company of women. Harold Bloom believes that "Change and travel are necessary for Huck; without them he cannot be independent" (*Modern Critical Interpretations* 3). Through their attempts to domesticate him, women prohibit this travel and change. Huck's adventure begins, "It was rough living in the house all the time, considering how dismal regular and decent the widow was in all her ways; and so when I couldn't stand it no longer, I lit out" (Twain, *Huckleberry Finn* 3) and ends, "but I reckon I got to light out for the Territory ahead of the rest, because Aunt Sally she's going to adopt me and sivilize me and I can't stand it. I been there before" (262). *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* begins and ends with Huck running away from women. Kearn asserts that Huck wishes to leave behind "the realm of women" for "a direct, unmediated experience of male freedom." "He rejects domestication" in favor of "the possibility that he will be the real master of his own debatable Territory" (120). For Huck and Lucius, Mary Jane and Corrie/Everbe are not included in this flight; the protagonists' role with these women is that of protector, knight in shining armor. As men,

they must rescue the damsel in distress. But Suttree, never a very good knight, must fly even from his lovers to find his territory. Running away from women is comic when a boy does it, but somewhat pathetic when a man runs, not just from women but from his responsibilities to them. Suttree's flight from Joyce and various other women in his life (his mother, his wife, Wanda, the Mother-She) reminds one of the flight from the influence of women found in the two earlier novels. Huck's Mary Jane and Suttree's Joyce, on the surface, do not seem to have much in common. However, the women in *Suttree* are the daughters and granddaughters of Faulkner's and Twain's characters. To invent the brothel in *The Reivers,* Faulkner combines the King and the Duke and the Wilkes girls. His girls are prostitutes and by nature con artists, but most have hearts of gold. Corrie/Everbe seems a combination of Huck's Mary Jane, who is without doubt pure of heart, mind and body, and Twain's criminal conmen. McCarthy carries this union a step further through Suttree's affair with Joyce: a variation of Faulkner's "good prostitute" (Rossky 377).

Suttree's first romantic relationship in the novel, however, is with Wanda, someone more like Mary Jane. He feels the same protective instinct for Wanda that Huck feels for Mary Jane and that Lucius does for Corrie/Everbe. Wanda, however, is more of a stereotype than is Mary Jane or Corrie/Everbe – more of an object. Huck feels not only protective toward Mary Jane and admires her purity, but also appreciates her intelligence and courage (Walker 82). As Thomas Young asserts, Wanda is "mostly allegorical," "the dream of a perfect – and therefore lost or unattainable – passion" (117), and thus must die. After her death, Wanda is replaced by Joyce, who combines all the elements of these

other characters. Joyce is a con artist, a prostitute, and a love interest for Suttree. She is shrewd, intelligent, and closer to Suttree's equal than any other character in the novel (118). She is Suttree's "soiled dove" (McCarthy, *Suttree* 401). Unlike Huck and Lucius, Suttree is allowed to possess the object of his affections, yet he is unsatisfied: "She had knelt beside him and nibbled on his ear. Her soft breast against his arm. Why then this loneliness?" (McCarthy 408). The failure of his relationship with Joyce is in part due to his own self-absorption. He eventually forces her out of his life as he tries to do with Wanda before the mudslide conveniently kills her. "Suttree subconsciously seeks the consolation of love in his ill-fated relationships with Wanda and with Joyce" (Parther 109). Vereen Bell says that for a short time each of Suttree's loves "offers, in her uncomplicated love for him, a way of escape" (101). Ultimately, this escape or consolation is inadequate. Love does not provide Suttree what he seeks any more than religion does. Love fails him.

Suttree's flight from women also originates from guilt. During his mother's visit to him in prison, his only response is to cry. He thinks, "See the hand that nursed the serpent…. Hopes wrecked, love sundered. See the mother sorrowing" (McCarthy 61). He can openly reject his father, but with his mother, he sees himself as a disappointment, a failure of the dreams that she had for her son. Eventually, he transfers the guilt or fear that he will disappoint onto his romantic relationships. This guilt is undoubtedly strengthened by the disappointment he has been to his wife, the mother of his son, and leads to his flight from her as well. When Suttree sees her before their son's funeral, the narrator says, "The derelict that she had taken for the son of light himself was consumed

in shame like a torch" (McCarthy 150). Terri Witek sees this flight from the "mater dolorosa" (McCarthy, *Suttree* 62), the sorrowing mother or woman, as an element of all of McCarthy's fiction: "One of the reasons men so early and guiltily leave home in McCarthy books is because of these women's power, derived from a pain so great that it becomes too much for the men who are implicated in their grief" (140). Suttree's inability to live up to their expectations and his responsibility to them highlights his inadequacy, adding to his self-loathing.

The protagonists of *Huckleberry Finn* and *Suttree* must likewise fly the pseudo-families they temporarily adopt. Suttree's time with the Reese family parallels Huck's with the Grangerfords. Suttree and Huck are both temporarily taken in from their wanderings to a deceptively stable family life, and are both required to adapt and conform to life with other people. The irony of these family communities is everywhere apparent. According to Walker, "Satirically treated are the Grangerfords and the Shepherdsons, to whom a half-forgotten lawsuit and murder are sufficient to maintain a multi-generational feud. Though Huck describes Colonel Grangerford as a 'gentleman all over,' we are meant to see the irony of the term 'gentle'" (73). Similarly, we are presented with Reese, another family man who adheres to a pious lifestyle at home, but in reality is very different. While his family works and starves, he is lazy and squanders money on restaurant meals, alcohol, and prostitutes when he is away from their camp. Despite this moral incongruity in both novels, Huck forms a connection with Buck and, although definitely different in nature, Suttree with Wanda. Both situations, although pleasant and brief havens from loneliness, prove disastrous. Huck's and Suttree's

conclusions after the experiences sound strikingly similar. Huck says after the feud, "I ain't agoing to tell all that happened – it would make me sick again if I was to do that. I wished I hadn't ever come ashore that night, to see such things" (Twain, *Huckleberry Finn* 105-106). McCarthy describes Suttree, after Wanda's death and his leaving the Reese family for good, as "a man with no plans for going back the way he'd come nor telling any soul at all what he had seen" (363). Neither character wants to relive the trauma or talk about it. According to Vereen Bell, while he resides with the Reese family, "the dark universe itself is exposed for Suttree each night in its enormity, unmediated by the human settlement" (101). As with Huck's time with the Grangerfords, for Suttree the protection of "human settlement" is only an illusion of defense from the world and from death if the communion is based on dishonestly and pretension.

Both of these protagonists must seek self-actualization elsewhere, possibly alone on the river. Obviously, the river is the paramount corollary between *Huckleberry Finn* and *Suttree*, Huck's Mississippi River and Suttree's Tennessee River. While Faulkner puts Lucius on the road instead of the river, it still represents a journey or quest and an escape: as Lionel Trilling has said, "rivers are [just] roads that move" (xvi). Rossky believes that the river/road connection is the "principal, spiritual tie between the two [Twain and Faulkner] books" (375). Despite the similar symbolism, the basic correspondence is closer between Twain and McCarthy than between Twain and Faulkner or Faulkner and McCarthy: Twain's and McCarthy's settings are both rivers as opposed to Faulkner's road. However, Faulkner's warnings concerning the encroachment of civilization on nature are a connecting point between his and

McCarthy's works. Lucius's "grandfather" voice warns that "roads will cover the countryside" (*The Reivers* 94) and that the clean air will soon be filled with the smell of automobile fumes: "commingling our dust into one giant cloud like a pillar, a signpost raised and set to cover the land with the adumbration of the future: the antlike to and fro, the incurable down-payment itch-foot; the mechanized, the mobilized, the inescapable destiny of America" (94). He laments the loss of nature to "industry, commerce, and railroads" (147) and blames the downfall of America on over-population: "there are too many of us; humanity will destroy itself not by fission but by another beginning with f which is a verb-active also as well as a conditional state" (193). Interestingly, this encroachment of civilization on the natural landscape does mark the key difference between the river in *Huckleberry Finn* and the river in *Suttree*.

The significance of the river for *Huckleberry Finn* has been discussed and debated since the publication of the novel, defined and redefined with each new generation and each new theory. Its significance seems as shifting as the river itself. For instance, Lionel Trilling thinks Huck derives his "moral life" from his "perpetual adoration of the Mississippi's power and charm" (vii). Eliot proclaims the river is God (Bloom, *Modern Critical Interpretation* 3). Bloom maintains that they are both wrong. Bloom's argument is:

> The river is a source of food and beauty and terror and serenity of mind. But above all, it provides motion; it is the means by which Huck and Jim move away from a menacing civilization. They return to the river to continue their journey. The river cannot, does not, supply purpose. The purpose is a facet of their

consciousness, and without the motive of escape from society. (13)

The river, for Bloom, is a vehicle. Man determines the meaning of the journey; the river does not determine meaning nor is it the meaning itself. Neil Schmitz maintains that the river and the raft hold very different meanings for Huck and for Jim; for Jim it is a means to an end, a way to freedom, but for Huck it is the end, the destination (51). Huck even calls the raft on the river "home": "I swum out and got aboard, and was mighty glad to see home again" (Twain, *Huckleberry Finn* 274), and "we said there warn't no home like a raft, after all. Other places do seem so cramped up and smothery, but a raft don't. You feel mighty free and easy and comfortable on a raft" (107). When Huck announces to Jim, "I wouldn't want to be nowhere else but here" (46), Jim could think of somewhere else he would rather be, the Illinois side of the river. But for Huck, it provides a way of life. His description of life on the river is one of the most famous in American literature:

> … we slid into the river and had a swim, so as to freshen up and cool off; then we set down on the sandy bottom where the water was about knee deep, and watched the daylight come. Not a sound, anywheres – perfectly still – just like the whole world was asleep…. Then the nice breeze springs up, and comes fanning you from over there, so cool and fresh, and sweet to smell … and next you've got the full day, and everything smiling in the sun.… Soon as it was night, out we shoved; when we got her out to about the middle, we let her alone, and let her float wherever the current wanted her to; then we lit the pipes, and dangled our legs in the water and talked about all kinds of things – we was always naked, day and night…. Sometimes we'd have the river to ourselves for the longest time….

> It's lovely to live on a raft. We had the sky up there, all speckled with stars, and we used to lay on our backs and look up at them, and discuss about whether they was made, or only just happened – Jim he allowed they was made, but I allowed they happened; I judged it would have took too long to *make* so many. (108-109)

Eliot's reaction to this passage is that throughout it "we were continually reminded of the power and terror of Nature, and the isolation and feebleness of Man" ("Introduction" 201).

The river can be as frightening as it is beautiful. As the river swells, it brings Huck and Jim provisions, including a house floating down the river filled with useful items and a dead Pap (Twain, *Huckleberry Finn* 47-48). Huck thinks, "Take it all around, we lived pretty high" (61). Conversely, the storms on the river can be dangerous, and the raft is damaged more than once during their journey. When Huck is lost in the fog, he reflects, "If you think it ain't dismal and lonesome out in a fog that way, by yourself, in the night, you try it once – you'll see" (76). Hearn asks, "But is Nature so terrible?" and speculates "the trouble lies not with Nature but with Man…. Twain seems to suggest that man needs only to enjoy and stop fighting the river to comprehend its beauty and power. But those who inhabit the land remain ignorant" (185). The river is frightening at times, but is not the true threat. "No matter how deceptively distant, the presence of men along the banks threatens the fugitives all throughout their otherwise idyllic journey down the river" (185). Despite the threat of humankind to Huck and Jim,

Twain never seems to say that man threatens the river. This threat to nature that Faulkner

warns of comes to fruition in McCarthy's work.

Twain and McCarthy both present their rivers as possessing positive and negative qualities. However, the duality of the Tennessee River in *Suttree* is heightened from that of the river in *Huckleberry Finn*. Vereen Bell says that the river sends mixed signals: "the squalid and beautiful alternating and intersecting unpredictably and convincingly" (76). The river upstream from Knoxville and when Suttree is with Wanda is a very different sight and brings about a very different mood. Alone after he and Wanda make love,

> Suttree moved down to the gravelbar on the river and spread his blanket there under the gauzy starwash and lay naked with his back pressed to the wheeling earth. The river chattered and sucked past at his elbow. He'd lie awake long after the last dull shapes in the coals of the cookfire died and he'd go naked into the cool and velvet waters and submerge like an otter and come up and blow, the stones smooth as marbles under his cupped toes and the dark water reeling past his eyes. He'd lie on his back in the shallows and on these nights he'd see stars come adrift and rifle hot and dying across the face of the filament. The enormity of the universe filled him with a strange sweet woe. (McCarthy, Suttree 353)

But this peace does not last. The rains come, the river swells, and eventually the mudslide destroys the camp and takes Wanda. Despite these natural threats, this image of the river is strongly reminiscent of Twain, especially with the reference to the freedom of swimming naked, feeling the river bottom against one's feet, and the "enormity" of the universe represented in both passages by stars. The tone of "sweet woe" pervades both as

well and is exhibited in Eliot's reaction to Twain's description: nature juxtaposed with "the feebleness of man."

Likenesses to Twain's river abound in *Suttree*. What might be more relevant to an interpretation of the novel, however, are the differences, particularly the change brought in the river as the result of time and "progress." Unlike Twain's Mississippi River of the 1840s, the city has reached McCarthy's Tennessee River in the 1950s. Civilization's evil drains off into the river. From the prolegomenon on, the image of the Tennessee River is mainly a dismal one: "*beyond the dark the river flows in a sluggard ooze*" (4). McCarthy provides many such pictures of the ugliness of the river: "gouts of sewage faintly working, gray clots of nameless waste and yellow condoms roiling slowly out of the murk like some giant form of fluke or tapeworm…. A welt curled sluggishly on the river's surface as if something unseen had stirred in the deeps and small bubbles of gas erupted in oily spectra" (7). The condoms, which appear often in the landscape, are symbols of sterility and sin. Everything in Suttree's world is broken and dirty, used and vile. Suttree's river has aged and seems much older than Huck's: it has become a "heavy old river with wrinkled face" (8). The river functions even more memorably than Twain's as temporary cemetery. The drowned man comes out of the river, and Leonard's father goes in, only to surface later. But the most disturbing image of death associated with the river is the dead baby Suttree sees floating by:

> Bloated, pulpy rotted eyes in a bulbous skull and little rages of flesh trailing in the water like tissuepaper. Oaring his way lightly through the rain among these curiosa he felt little more than yet another artifact leached out of the earth and

> washed along, draining down out of the city, that cold and grainy shape beyond the rain that no rain could make clean again. (306)

The dead baby, like the drowned man, is analogous with Suttree. He feels like "yet another artifact," as if he were already dead and being washed downstream. All of *Suttree* is filled with a sense that because everything is broken and ruined, that nothing Suttree does makes any difference. The river cannot help Suttree escape; civilization and the cruelty of man reach him even there. According to Thomas Young, "his attempts to live simply on the river, to penetrate into ever more primitive realms of being" are unsuccessful (99). Suttree, no matter how strong his desire, proves incapable of the kind of oneness with the river that Huck attained. In this polluted world, Suttree will not find the answer. Suttree cannot just escape as Huck does; the river cannot be his destination.

Since the river is unsatisfactory, Suttree tries to find something else. As a result, he sets out on his trip to the Smoky Mountains, which Shelton suggests is an attempt "to purify himself through contact with nature [;] ... however, nature is not benevolent, and this trip too becomes a form of suicide" (77). Robert N. Bellah, Richard Madsen, William M. Sullivan, Ann Swidler, and Steven M. Tipton explain this quest as "a deep and continuing theme in American literature," when "the hero … must leave society alone or with one or a few others, in order to realize the moral good in the wilderness, at sea, or the margins of settled society" (144). According to Traber, "Nature is no longer capable of giving the peace and protection from urban life Suttree has read about, rather it has become an inhospitable environment for someone raised in the city**.** Indeed, he is reduced to a delirious, hallucinatory state while attempting to survive in the wilderness of

the Smoky Mountains for a few weeks" (35). Suttree might have "read about" this "peace and protection" in Twain or the endangerment of it in Faulkner. Whatever the source of his hopeful belief, it is shattered by the reality of the wild and by his lack of Huck's resourcefulness. A century of civilization has changed mankind and separated him more and more from nature, deprived him of the potential for union. Suttree has to keep looking, has to continue his search for purpose.

The endings of *Huckleberry Finn* and *Suttree* both reflect this motif of continuous search and are both discussed by scholars in terms of their indefiniteness. Indeterminate and ambiguous, the closings convey that both of these characters' searches will continue.

Rossky says that often in Twain's and Faulkner's novels "each character moves through his experiences with difficulty toward a presumably higher guiding wisdom or ethic and is thus in a sense saved" (387); in "both Faulkner and Twain out of the very mutiny against conventional morality arises a higher morality" (385). However, Lucius is more accepting and comfortable with his moral discovery than is Huck, and it is more certainly defined. A major theme of *The Reivers* is redemption. Lucius learns from his grandfather that he must live with his mistakes in order to be a gentleman and without doubt does as Faulkner wanted him to, to appreciate and practice "courage and honor and generosity and pride and pity" ("To Robert K Haas" 124). In addition to this affirmation of an established, paternal order, in *The Reivers* Faulkner adds a wedding and a baby on the way, quintessential elements of the stock happy ending. Faulkner provides a concrete if contrived alternative; potentially redemptive, Twain still has Huck only reject.

If indeed it can be called redemption, Jarrett asserts that Suttree's "redemption in

the novel's final scene is ambiguous and provisional at best" (44). While the close of *Suttree* is not by any means a happy ending or one whose meaning is easily determined, it is also not as unresolved as Jarrett and others assert. The Celtic imagery of the hounds and the waterbearer that begin and end the novel provide rhetorical esthetic conclusion to the work, even if it may only signal another beginning. (The end of *Huckleberry Finn* is likewise, of course, another beginning.) In Celtic mythology, the hounds are the first to arrive when the god of the underworld comes for the dying and are a sign of death (Witcutt 167). The waterbearer is a sign of life and salvation – of healing. The novel ends as Suttree is leaving town and encounters a construction site. An angelic looking young boy with "blue eyes with no bottoms like the seas" (McCarthy, *Suttree* 471) appears before him and offers him water. Suttree takes the water, drinks it, and almost immediately a car approaches and picks him up. "When he looked back the waterboy was gone. An enormous lank hound had come out of the meadow by the river like a hound from the depths and was sniffing at the spot where Suttree had stood" (471). Vereen Bell believes that Suttree's consciousness of the waterbearer and the hounds at the end of the novel marks "his transcendence" (112).

These images symbolize Suttree's escape from Knoxville and his many pseudo-deaths. With this new beginning, Suttree has hope that he has escaped the transgressions of his past and has a clean slate. Like Huck, he is lighting out for the Territory. At the end of *Suttree*, a dead man is found in Suttree's houseboat. He has evidently taken up residence while Suttree is in the hospital with typhoid fever. The body has decomposed beyond recognition and is mistaken for Suttree (McCarthy, *Suttree* 469-470). Not

intentionally as Huck's was, but Suttree's own death has been faked, and he may now make his escape. Like Huck, no one from his old life will look for him alive, enabling him to begin a new one. The destruction of McAnally Flats in order to build the new expressway (463) ensures that nothing will be left of his old life, as do the deaths of Ab, Callahan, and the ragpicker; the imprisonment of Gene; and the migration of many of Suttree's friends. Jarrett calls McAnally Flats "the novel's objective correlative for Suttree's psyche" (54), and its dissolution signals the passing of the old Suttree and the necessity for rebirth, this time a successful one, resulting in a new Suttree. "Furthermore, this integration of the self makes possible a reintegration of Suttree into society" (Jarrett 61); at the end of the novel, he is now searching for that new community (62).

According to Shelton, "his future life is uncertain...., but at least Suttree is now determined to live a life of flight and revolt ... Suttree is prepared to defy death and create his own meaning and joy through the human will to action" (82-83). McCarthy tells the reader that Suttree "had divested himself of the little cloak godlet and his other amulets in a place where they would not be found in his lifetime and he'd taken for talisman the simple human heart within him" (*Suttree* 468). Suttree leaves behind his lucky charms and amulets because they are "tokens of a fear of deities unknown" (Vereen Bell 110), and he has no more fear. All he needs now is his own heart, himself. Likewise, Blufarb says, "Huck [is] reborn through the discovery of his heart" (161). What Suttree learns from his death dream or "the simple summary of his understanding [is] that there is no metaphysical first principle, no foundational truth" (Bell 108). The sheriff who runs Suttree out of town after his son's funeral tells him, "Everything's important. A man

lives his life, he has to make that important. Whether he's a small town county sheriff or the president. Or a busted out bum. You might even understand that some day" (McCarthy, *Suttree* 157). He does finally understand that and realizes that he must follow the sheriff's advice and provide his own truth and meaning. Thomas D. Young believes, "The assertion of the ultimate integrity and sufficiency of the self and of the value of a human community based on an affiliation of such selves is what Suttree – and McCarthy's fiction in general – comes to affirm" (120). When Suttree wakes from his typhoid fever delirium, he says, "I know all souls are one and all souls are lonely" (McCarthy, *Suttree* 459). "All men are one" (422). Through this transcendence, he realizes that "where and how people really live daily in the world becomes the touchstone of any value, the determinant of what is precious and what is not" (Vereen Bell 112). Suttree has found the simplicity he has been searching for: living, putting one foot in front of the other to walk through life, such as Gene and Ab do. He will not be the ragpicker. If Suttree is "all men," he will represent them better by not giving up or giving in to death. The world is not of ideas but of acts. Suttree's dilemma all along has been the tension between visions of the world and the materiality of it -- the ideas vs. existence. Vereen Bell says the survivors are "those who impose some human rule upon their otherwise bereft lives and change mere living into being" (115). At the close of the novel, Suttree has relieved what Bell calls his "ontological anxiety" (89).

The close of *Huckleberry Finn*, despite the predetermined destination, is actually more indefinite than that of *Suttree*. Huck's "lighting out for the Territory" (262), according to Walker, is "youthful escapism rather than a mature rejection of a corrupt

society" (85), as Suttree's flight is. "Huck thinks he can escape at the end and the reader knows he cannot – knows, that is, that the 'Territory' is simply another civilization" (80), or at least will be soon enough. For Julius Lester, "The 'lighting out for the territory' is a wrongful idealization of a white male fantasy of escaping responsibility, reflecting Twain's contempt for humanity" (347-48). James M. Cox says freedom is a lie (101) and that the final sentence of *Huckleberry Finn* represents "nihilism" (105). According to Bloom, "Huck's decision to go West ahead of the inescapable advance of civilization is a confession [on Twain's part] of defeat. It means that the raft [brotherhood] is to be abandoned" (*Modern Critical Interpretations* 19). Twain has nothing to replace what he has rejected in society, so having Huck go west is failure.

Twain affirmed these negative assessments of Huck's prospects. He planned to write a "New Huck Finn," which Kaplan says was primarily about how life was "loss and ruin" (552). He also wrote in his notebook in 1891 the sketch for another Huck Finn book:

> Huck comes back, 60 years old, from nobody knows where – and crazy. Thinks he is a boy again, and scans always every face for Tom and Becky, etc. Tom comes at last from … wandering the world and tends Huck, and together they talk the old times, both are desolate, life has been a failure, all that was lovable, all that was beautiful is under the mold. They die together. (*Mark Twain's Notebooks and Journals*, Vol. III 606)

The idea was revived again in 1902, but ultimately the book was never written (Hearn 35).

Kaplan says, "The humorist had concluded that the universe was a nasty cosmic joke" (537). This view of Huck's future seems to materialize in the adult Suttree. However, Huck's "light out" (Twain, *Huckleberry Finn* 262) is very different from Suttree's "fly them" (McCarthy, *Suttree* 471). Huck has hope of escape from society's corruptive and controlling forces, but Suttree knows nothing will have changed; only he can enact change. At least Suttree knows that he will need something more than a new place, that something in him has to change as well. The new location, free of his old sins and vices, is just a better staging ground for his change and possible ultimate redemption. As Suttree realizes, "Nothing ever stops moving" (McCarthy 461). McCarthy has said,

> I think the notion that the species can be improved in some way, that everyone could live in harmony, is a really dangerous idea. Those who are afflicted with this notion are the first ones to give up their souls, their freedom. Your desire that it be that way will enslave you and make your life vacuous. (qtd. in Woodward, "Mojave Rattlesnakes?" 36)

Possibly Suttree's epiphany is his realization of this fact, and change will come because, unlike Huck at the end of *Huckleberry Finn*, he is no longer "afflicted" with this "notion." Rather than fatalistic, this realization is liberating.

In the two novels' final scenes, Huck appears to have hope while the reader can see through this illusion, and Suttree's situation superficially appears hopeless while in reality he is more hopeful than at any other point in the novel. Faulkner's Lucius, although often confused and despondent, is never without hope, even faith, that life holds meaning and provides salvation. Considering the ending of the novels, McCarthy's is

much more a revisioning of Twain's than was Faulkner's. McCarthy, practicing Bloom's tessera, has partially answered the question implicitly and importantly raised at the conclusion of *Huckleberry Finn*.

Through *Suttree*, McCarthy has not only extended *Huckleberry Finn*, but transformed it. He created an adult Huck in the twentieth century and through him, the individuals he encounters, and the world he inhabits has addressed significant issues old and new -- religion, man's isolation, racial and gender tensions, and the destruction of the environment -- from a new and more realistically hopeful vantage point.

CHAPTER THREE

HUCK IN 100 YEARS

Joyce Carol Oates's assertion that *Cities of the Plain* is "a sobering vision as of an aged Huckleberry Finn in his later years, now a homeless drifter broken in body and spirit, for whom the romantic adventure of 'setting off for the Territory' is long past" (sec. 3) raises the question of how many Huck Finns actually do inhabit McCarthy's fiction. McCarthy's alignment with Twain begins almost at his beginnings as a writer, and certainly with his first published novel, *The Orchard Keeper* (1965). Not much notice has been taken of the echoes of Twain in this work of McCarthy's, however. Beyond brief comments, the novel's placement in the Huck Finn Tradition has been overlooked, but important parallels exist – and more.

The Orchard Keeper presents three generations of Appalachian Southerners: John Wesley Rattner, Marion Sylder, and Arthur Ownby, who live in Red Branch, a small, rural community in the mountains of East Tennessee. John Wesley is a fourteen-year-old boy who is without much parental supervision and who as a result befriends two older men: Sylder, a whiskey-runner John Wesley rescues after a car accident, and the elderly Ownby, the title's orchard keeper. The only link between the boy's mentors or surrogate fathers is the corpse of John Wesley's actual father, Kenneth Rattner. Sylder has killed him in self-defense and disposed of his body in an insecticide spray pit in Ownby' abandoned peach orchard. Ownby finds the body and tends to it throughout the novel.

Such basic technical elements such as point-of-view and narrative structure mark McCarthy's first novel as similar to *Huckleberry Finn*, but, more importantly, *The Orchard Keeper* is linked to *Huckleberry Finn* by parallel scenes, reminiscent characters, and similar natural settings. As with *Suttree*, McCarthy employs Bloom's theory of tessera. McCarthy's work echoes Twain's, but carries it further. McCarthy escalates his protagonist's precarious personal position and the social and cultural threats to his way of life.

As with *Suttree*, not appearing to be a similarity but an obvious dissimilarity between Twain's *Huckleberry Finn* and *The Orchard Keeper* is point of view. Huck tells his own story, but who the narrator of John Wesley Rattner's story is, is unclear. The narration at first appears to be something like third-person limited omniscient, shifting in a very Faulknerian way between the perspectives of each of the three main characters. However, just as *Suttree* may be more first-person narration than originally realized, many scholars believe that, like Huck Finn, John Wesley tells his own story. Dianne Luce suggests "that all of the narrative between the framing scenes in the cemetery has been John Wesley's partly remembered, partly imagined reconstruction of his past – and his father's, Sylder's and Ownby's" ("'They aint the thing'" 26), and "John Wesley's narrating presence can be detected in the story that disjointedly unfolds between the opening and closing frames" (26). Luce calls him the "narrator/inventor of the novel" (27). If the boy does indeed tell his own story, then the point of view of *The Orchard Keeper* comes more in line with the first-person perspective of *Huckleberry Finn*.

Likewise, the novel's structure takes the same form as *Huckleberry Finn* and S*uttree* – episodic. Edgar H. Goold criticizes Twain's structure when he says, "His own temperament and training did not tend to develop in him the ability to plan carefully and practice the sustained concentration necessary for tight and well-developed plots" (148). Frank Baldanza, however, defends Twain's technique and asserts that, although possibly not intentional, Twain finds his "best vehicle" in a "kind of episodic, spurting movement." His stories, including *Huckleberry Finn*, contain rhythms, especially a method Baldanza labels "repetition plus variation" (350). Variation gives a sense of "freshness and surprise" whereas repetition "ravishes the memory" (351). According to Matthew R. Horton, the narrative structure of *The Orchard Keeper* is "more stroboscopic than fluid" (301). The shape of the narrative is "unpredictable episodic sequences of discontinuous threads put in some semblance of order by frames and recognizable sections… but patterns gradually surface through thematic repetition and what David Paul Ragan terms 'structural juxtaposition'" (289). This explanation once again sounds rather like Twain's "fetching a horseshoe three-quarters of a mile around" (*Mark Twain's Autobiography* Vol. 1 237).

McCarthy's repetition and structural juxtapositions parallel if not reproduce Twain's repetition and variation: for example, Huck's hiding his escape efforts in Pap's cabin behind a blanket and then having Jim do the same in his cabin on the Phelps farm or bad characters meeting their demise by staying too long at the scene of the crime, as the robbers on the *Sir Walter Scott* do or the king and the duke do while with the Wilkes. McCarthy employs this same technique: for example, Sylder's buying of new socks at the

beginning of the novel and John Wesley's checking his in the final scene in the cemetery, the rabbit in the well and his father's corpse in the spray pit, the hunters' campfire by the creek and the boys' campfire in the cave, John Wesley's rescue of Sylder from the creek and then later his rescue of Lady, Sylder's hound, in the same fashion, and Ownby's and Sylder's incarcerations at the end of the novel (one in a mental institution and one in prison).

Parallel scenes exist not only within each novel but also between them. The basic elements of tessera present themselves in two parallel scenes about the rural towns showcased in the novels. Huck's description of the perils of living along the Mississippi River includes the danger of the basic construction of towns on such an unsteady foundation:

> On the river front some of the houses was sticking out over the bank, and they was bowed and bent, and about ready to tumble in. The people had moved out of them. The bank was caved away under one corner of some others, and that corner was hanging over. People lived in them yet, but it was dangerous, because sometimes a strip of land as wide as a house caves in at a time. Sometimes a belt of land a quarter of a mile deep will start in and cave along and cave along till it all caves into the river in one summer. Such a town as that has to be always moving back, and back, and back, because the river's always gnawing at it. (Twain, *Huckleberry Finn* 129)

Twain's description echoes in McCarthy's description of Red Branch; however, in *The Orchard Keeper*, McCarthy foreshadows direct report of a small-scale natural disaster.

What Huck merely describes, what he tells the reader has happened and could happen, does happen in McCarthy's story. As Twain has, McCarthy first sets the scene:

> a dozen jerrybuilt shacks strewn about the valley in unlikely places, squatting over their gullied purlieus like great brooding animals rigid with constipation, and yet endowed with an air transient and happenstantial as if set there by the recession of floodwaters. Even the speed with which they were constructed could not outdistance the decay for which they held such affinity. (McCarthy, *The Orchard Keeper* 11)

Passages like this one lead Grammer to read *The Orchard Keeper* as "asserting the insubstantiality of human communities, their helplessness before encroaching wildness" (33). Unlike in Twain's, in the world of McCarthy's fiction the human community actually succumbs to nature; in the postmodern world, things do come tumbling down. The Green Fly Inn falls into the pit:

> The porch has swung out and downward and now tottered for a moment on the strength of a single two-by-six before it too snapped and the whole affair slewed away with a great splintering sound. The figures clutching at the rails began to turn loose their holds, coming away by ones and twos like beetles shaken from a limb, and the entire wreckage descended in a slow tableau of ruin to pitch thunderously into the hollow… now from the knot of men clawing at the door single figures began to be sucked away in attitudes of mute supplication one by one down the dangling incline of the porch, gaining momentum among leaping

cans and bottles, and dropping at last with wild cries into the pit below. (McCarthy, *The Orchard Keeper* 25)

Twain presents the possibility and threat of the town's collapse while McCarthy has the Green Fly Inn, the community's gathering place, actually lose its precarious position on the mountain-side. Grammer says, "The interdependence of 'solidarity' and 'precariousness' is an essential idea for McCarthy; for him it seems that the only sort of permanence ultimately available to us is one based upon an intense awareness of impermanence; life is possible only in a continual and more or less cordial dialogue with death" (33).

The Orchard Keeper also contains a cave scene much like the one from Twain's novel. In *Huckleberry Finn*, the boys meet in Tom's secret cave to form the Tom Sawyer Gang and plot their first exploits:

> We [Huck, Tom, Jo Harper, Ben Rogers and the rest of the gang] went to a clump of bushes, and Tom made everybody swear to keep the secret, and then showed them a hole in the hill, right in the thickest part of the bushes. Then we lit the candles and crawled in on our hands and knees. We went about two hundred yards, and then the cave opened up. Tom poked about amongst the passages and pretty soon we ducked under a wall where you wouldn't a noticed that there was a hole. We went along a narrow place and got into a kind of room, all damp and sweaty and cold, and there we stopped. (Twain 8)

This scene resounds as McCarthy's John Wesley goes off on an adventure with his own gang of friends:

> It don't look like much, Johnny Romines said. It opens up inside, Warn said … and then disappeared down into the earth, crawling on hands and knees through a small hole beneath the rocks. They followed one by one, the stiff winter nettles at the cave door rattling viperously against the legs of their jeans. Inside they struck matches and Warn took a candlestub from a crevice and lit it …. They followed the strip of red clay that traced the cave floor into another and larger room, hooted at their lapping echoes…. This'n here's the biggest room, Warn said. Then I got me a secret room on back with a rock in front of it so you cain't see it. (139)

Both sets of boys led by the most adventurous, Tom and Warn, crawl into a cave hidden in the woods. Both find a secret room within the cave to hold their meetings. Both light candles and talk over their past and future adventures. Instead of robbers, Warn's gang talks of cave men and Indians. Tom's gang will play robbers while Warn's will play "whites and injuns." Both scenes present a degree of delinquency in the boys, but McCarthy takes it much farther. Twain has his boys take blood oaths, a common rite of passage, and fancifully talk of killing Miss Watson if Huck tells anyone about the gang. On the other hand, in their cave ornamented with boyish and obscene graffiti, McCarthy's boys smoke, cuss, and tell stories of actually dynamiting birds. Their adventure is also augmented with racist talk of "injuns" and "niggers." While Twain's boys get tired and Ben Rogers falls asleep, and they go home to bed with thoughts of pirates and ransom in their heads, John Wesley and his friends are smoked out by the campfire they have built. As they flee, McCarthy presents an image much like something from Dante's *Inferno*: "When they dried their eyes and could see again they were in some

volcanic and infernal under-region, the whole of the quarry woods wrapped in haze and smoke boiling up out of the rocky ground from every cleft and fissure" (142). Twain's cave scene is a bit of boyish misadventure as *The Orchard Keeper's* initially appears to be, but McCarthy then progresses to something symbolically threatening. The scene presents more of McCarthy's premonitions of man's demise in the postmodern world.

Parallel scenes suggest parallel characters, for surely Warn Pulliam is John Wesley's Tom Sawyer. Warn is the talker, the planner, the adventurer. Like Tom, Warn is very comfortable with himself and his place in the world. He has a home. As Eliot says of Tom, Warn "has the environment into which he fits" ("Introduction" 199). Warn owns the cave ("I got me a secret room"); Warn cusses best; Warn makes fun of and corrects the other boys, especially Boog; Warn shows John Wesley where to set his traps so that they are hidden and will not be "stole" (143); Warn knows where to find mink; Warn tells the other boys to leave the cave because of the smoke; Warn knows the stories of the Hobie family (who parallel the Grangerfords), Ownby, and the panthers. The boys enter the cave with "Warn in the lead" (139). Like Tom, Warn is obviously the leader of the little band of boys.

Warn has a family and a comfortable life, yet he takes sojourns into the woods, day trips into a Huck-like world as Tom does in *Huckleberry Finn*. Warn is a lover of adventure and stories (Horton 302). Similar to Tom's following the plots he finds in romantic novels, Warn has his book, *Trapping the Fur Bearers of North America,* to direct the boys' exploits. In it "they found a plan of such devious cunning as appealed to their minds," and Warn decrees they must follow it (McCarthy, *The Orchard Keeper*

208). Warn is also prone to hyperbole and cruelty, especially to animals (Horton 302). Tom, likewise, is prone to exaggeration and, certainly, cruelty. Warn's buzzard on a string is an echo of Tom's rats on strings in *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*. However, Tom's rats are dead and Warn's buzzard is alive. Warn's cruelty to animals also parallels Tom's cruelty to Jim, whose humanity Tom has denied by prolonging his imprisonment. Warn and Tom both mistreat other creatures for their own amusement.

Another correspondence between the novels presents itself in the situation with McCarthy's Wanita Tipton. Both authors craft scenes that show the protagonists interacting with girls their own age: Huck and Joanna, John Wesley and Wanita. Both sets of teens are playing a game of twenty questions. The girl is trying to best the boy, and the boy is treading water, in John Wesley's case almost literally. He is trying to hang on to his dignity, hold his own with a girl who may be more cunning. Huck's lies about England that Joanna refuses to believe correlate to John Wesley and Wanita's sexually charged banter. In both scenes, the girl has the upper hand and makes the boy very uncomfortable: Huck is almost caught in his lies, and John Wesley is almost revealed in his sexual excitement. Like Joanna and her sister whom Huck must save, Wanita is a damsel in distress whom John Wesley saves from a dragon of sorts. John Wesley removes a leech from her leg, but Wanita still gets the best of him because he is overly flustered by her closeness to him. "The huge expanse of flesh and the bloomers and her holding him by the collar with her feet somehow in the water on either side of him" (71) was more than he could stand. Huck fares better than John Wesley and is holding his own despite his many slips; "Well, I was gone up again" (158). Both boys are very

embarrassed, but Huck ultimately bests Joanna with the help of Mary Jane forcing Joanna to apologize, which is ironic since Joanna is right. Huck is lying. After Mary Jane makes Joanna apologize and Joanna does it, he "felt so ornery and low down and mean, that I says to myself, My mind's made up; I'll hive that money for them or bust" (160). While John Wesley was embarrassed and humiliated, Huck was deeply ashamed of himself. Both girls know the score but because of social conventions are forced to pretend otherwise and enact a façade of politeness. Both scenes present a male/female dynamic in which the female must play a submissive role despite her obvious superiority. Wanita presents another example of the combination of two Twain characters in that she is both Mary Jane, the girl Huck loves, and Joanna, his female nemesis. In McCarthy's more complex and realistic world of male/female relationships, the same woman is a possibility both of comfort and a threat.

Besides presenting parallel pairs to Twain's Tom and Joanna, *The Orchard Keeper* has its own duke and king reflected in Earl Legwater and Jefferson Gifford. Legwater even sounds a bit like Bridgewater, the name of Twain's fake duke. Both sets of characters provide comic relief within the novels. All four characters are farcical, but at the same time reveal a sinister side of mankind. Gifford, the constable as king, is the head clown in "*the carnival atmosphere*" of the Green Fly Inn fire and presents a hilarious image particularly when he catches his toes on fire after the Inn burns: "*One brogan toe began to blister and blacken and a moment later he was hopping away snatching at his shoelaces. Goddamn, Whew. Leaning against a tree with his naked foot*

cradled in his hands like a hurt bird he dared a snicker with fierce eyes" (McCarthy, *The Orchard Keeper* 163).

Legwater, like the duke who is the lesser of the two dignitaries, is "toadlike," "a longlegged and emaciated toad" (116), who, extremely ironically, is the county humane officer who shoots dogs, "one of them seven times, it screaming and dragging itself along the fence in the field below the forks while a cluster of children stood watching until they too began screaming" (117). Nothing in the novel is more absurd than Legwater spending days in the orchard spray pit sifting through Kenneth Rattner's ashes, trying to find the platinum plate that was supposed to be in Rattner's head: "by nightfall he was a feathery gray effigy – face, hair and clothing a single color. He spat gobs of streaky gray phlegm" (239). And nothing is more treacherous than Legwater unnecessarily shooting Ownby's dog. The sacrifice of Ownby's dog Scott is similar to the king and duke's turning in Jim for bounty money, though it is more despicable because at least only mostly greed motivated the king and the duke. Legwater appears to be motivated in addition by aggravation and cruelty if not malice. In Barbara Brickman's discussion of McCarthy's assimilation of Celtic mythology, she asserts that killing Ownby's faithful hound signifies "an incredible betrayal" (63).

Gifford also, like the king and the duke, is an opportunist who will take advantage of anyone he can. He menaces John Wesley by taking his precious traps and threatening to jail him for "bettin criminals" (159). Sylder assesses him accurately when he says "he knowned you didn't have no daddy, nobody to take up for you in the first place is the reason he figured he could jump on you" (161). As Brickman says, "The constable was

counting on John Wesley's weakness as individual without clan support" (61). The king and the duke do the same when they come upon an orphaned boy and a runaway slave and then the orphaned Wilkes girls. They would not and did not fare as well when dealing with a man. Both sets of characters are bullies and control through intimidation of those weaker than themselves. Obviously presented much more comically in Twain, the sets of characters represent the falsity of those assigned to rule or govern. Sylder says, in his final assessment of Gifford,

> *He's a rogue and a outlaw hisself and you're welcome to shoot him, burn him down in his bed, any damn thing, because he's a traitor to boot and maybe a man steals from greed or murders in anger but he sells his own neighbors out for money and it's few lie that deep in the pit, that far beyond the pale*. (McCarthy, *The Orchard Keeper* 214-15)

However, Sylder only thinks this assessment. What he tells John Wesley is that Gifford is just doing his job, a claim of which John Wesley was "calmly incredulous" (213).

Ragan thinks John Wesley "has learned more from judging people's behavior than from accepting their pronouncements" (24). Huck is an excellent judge of character despite what people profess to be. When Huck decides that the duke and king are fakes, he thinks to himself, "It didn't take me long to make up my mind that these liars warn't no kings nor dukes, at all, but low-down humbugs and frauds. But I never said nothing, never let on; kept it to myself; it's the best way; then you don't have no quarrels, and don't get into no trouble" (Twain, *Huckleberry Finn* 115). John Wesley, like Huck, keeps quiet to get along and stay out of trouble despite what he knows Gifford and

Legwater to be. Huck muses, "Sometimes I wish we could hear of a country that's out of kings" (Twain, *Huckleberry Finn* 141). Those assigned to rule or govern are often worse than nothing at all. Brickman asserts that these representatives of the new order "must find ways to control or debilitate people who preserve and protect the old traditions" (65), people like Ownby, Sylder, and John Wesley.

The mass of men does not judgmentally fare much better than individuals in McCarthy's world as shown by his description of the crowd in town on the day John Wesley receives his hawk bounty and buys his traps. McCarthy's portrait is a composite of all the crowds in *Huckleberry Finn* that prompt Huck to think "it was enough to make a body ashamed of the human race" (Twain, *Huckleberry Finn* 148). *The Orchard Keeper* collection is loud and sweaty, individuals "straining their necks" to see the temperance parade (McCarthy, *The Orchard Keeper* 82). They are as "solemn as refugees" (82). Possibly they are refugees from a dying world, refugees who cannot find a place in a new one. They are "shabby backlanders trafficking in the wares of the earth" who have come to town to see the spectacle among the "outlandish buildings" (82). John Wesley walks past "women with faces like dried fruit" and "among overalled men and blind men and amputees on roller carts or crutches" (82), all gathered in the name of commerce.

As we also see from this particular scene, religion does not receive any more favorable attention in *The Orchard Keeper* than it did in *Suttree,* or with Twain, although presented less often. John Wesley's isolation keeps it on the periphery. The only representation of organized religion with the exception of references to Mildred Rattner's

attending church and to church buildings is a street preacher John Wesley observes on this trip to town. "On the corner a man was screaming incoherently and brandishing a tattered Bible. Next stood an old woman strapped into an accordion, mute and patient as a draft horse" (82). The people, their town, and their religion are unappealingly pathetic, especially juxtaposed to McCarthy's descriptions of nature.

While these scenes and characters represent some clear correlations between *Huckleberry Finn* and *The Orchard Keeper*, the main parallel is between these novels' young protagonists. John Wesley is a fatherless boy seeking guidance, longing for purpose, and finding he does not fit in the civilized world. Nothing screams HUCK FINN more than John Wesley Rattner sleeping on his lean-to porch. McCarthy says, "He could not bear to be in the house" (McCarthy, *The Orchard Keeper* 66), a loud echo of Huck's pronouncement as his adventure begins – "it was rough living in the house all the time" (Twain, *Huckleberry Finn* 3). John Wesley's room in the loft is described as "cobwebby gloom" (McCarthy, *The Orchard Keeper* 72). His mother nags at him to bring his bed back into the house, and Huck complains that the Widow Douglas "won't let me sleep in the woodshed" (Twain, *Huckleberry Finn* 15). John Wesley cannot live completely in nature or totally off the land as Huck does, but his settling on the front porch shows his longing for a life in nature. According to Vereen Bell, "the log cabin that John Wesley and his mother live in he manages to make seem as much like an animal's den as a human dwelling, scurrying into and out of its gable window like a night creature after his mother is asleep. It is literally and symbolically remote from civil jurisdiction" (14).

This scurrying into and out of the window mirrors Huck Finn's escapes through the window of the Widow Douglas's house to romp through the woods with Tom Sawyer. According to Natalie Grant, John Wesley

> contemplates the natural world in order to find identity and belonging. He is both awed and delighted by the workings of nature and looks to it for companionship. He spends much of his time out of doors regardless of the weather and his understanding of time and reality comes from what he observes there. (65)

Nature, of course, is a vital companion to Huck.

John Wesley and Huck, then, share a love of nature and the urge to be independent from the constraints of life in a house. Rick Wallach writes, "McCarthy's evocation of nature in the mountain forests has won nearly universal praise; among the shifting fortunes of the novel's characters, the presence of nature remains a breathtaking constant; nature becomes, in effect, a character" ("The Orchard Keeper" par. 4). In all the many debates over *Huckleberry Finn*, no one doubts the importance of nature or that the river is a character in the work. On a superficial level, the river and its naturalness provide a place for boys to be boys, but for Twain and McCarthy deeper symbolism exists. John Wesley and Huck look at civilization and say "I been there before" (Twain, *Huckleberry Finn* 262).

Huck flees from the tyranny of his father and the unyielding demands of society by escaping on a raft: "'Jim, this is nice,' I says. 'I wouldn't want to be nowhere else but here. Pass me along another hunk of fish and some hot cornbread' " (Twain, *Huckleberry Finn* 54). Prior to this point, Huck had only temporarily gone on adventures and always

returned to become subjected yet again to the abusive character of Pap or the unbearable demands of the Widow Douglas's social etiquette and Miss Watson's religion. Now he is on his own. He experiences a feeling of pure freedom, living by no rules but his own. The fish and cornbread symbolize another dimension of this newly-found independence, living off the land and enjoying the simplicity of life in nature. Rather than receiving his sustenance on a plate at a dinner table, Huck reaps satisfaction from getting it on his own, the fish from the river by his own efforts, the cornmeal for the cornbread taken from his father as part of his trick played on the townspeople that he was murdered and that his murderer stole Finn's supplies. Huck has taken his first step into a larger world toward whatever adventures await him on the Mississippi River. This life of freedom in nature and away from civilizing forces was much more accessible for Huck in the mid-nineteenth century than for John Wesley in the twentieth, of course.

The Orchard Keeper is set almost a hundred years after the action of *Huckleberry Finn*, in the 1940s instead of the 1840s, but as has been said of McCarthy's *Suttree*, the characters live almost as if the setting were a hundred years in the past. John Wesley is especially extraordinarily drawn to that past. The absence of modern conveniences and the abundance of the natural environment make the novel's setting appear to be in a much earlier time. The house John Wesley and his mother live in is "supposed to be the oldest in the county" (McCarthy 63). They have no electricity or running water; the well is even nonfunctioning. They pay no taxes and no rent and appear to be completely under the radar of the modern world.

No Mississippi or Tennessee River looms large in this novel's landscape, but a creek provides several picturesque and harrowing episodes. The creek, like Huck's river, is a prominent feature in all John Wesley's wanderings. It is where he sets his traps, where he talks with Wanita, where he hunts with Sylder. The word creek as opposed to river should not be taken to imply some significantly lesser force of nature. McCarthy's creek in *The Orchard Keeper* can be as threatening as any river. It almost takes John Wesley's life twice, as well as the lives of Sylder and his dog, Lady. It rushes in "fantastic motion" (178). According to William Prather, in *The Orchard Keeper* "plainly, the violence of nature can intrude at any time to destroy a person's life or even the world" (44). The creek certainly presents a sense of danger similar to the river's and represents a natural force that man and his society have yet to subdue.

Despite the lack of exact correspondence between the time and physical settings, *Huckleberry Finn* and *The Orchard Keeper* share an important mythic juxtapositioning of wilderness and civilization. An attempt to be at one with nature is reflected in John Wesley's pursuits and in those of his friends. Vereen Bell believes, "The lives of the four boys, independently of one another and together, seem to revolve exclusively around their fascination with wild animals" (15). Although both creatures die, John Wesley tries to feed the rabbit in the well and nurse the sparrowhawk back to health.

The boys' conversations and activities are centered on trapping and hunting. Twain's description in his autobiography of the thrill of the hunt reflects the attitude in *The Orchard Keeper*:

> I remember the 'coon and 'possum hunts, nights, with Negroes, and the long marches through the black gloom of the woods and the excitement which fired everybody when the distant bay of an experienced dog announced that the game was treed: then the wild scramblings and stumblings through briers and bushes and over roots to get to the spot: then the lighting of a fire and the felling of the tree, the joyful frenzy of the dogs and the
>
> Negroes, and the weird picture it all made in the red glare – I remember it well, and the delight everyone got out of it, except the 'coon. (168)

This description sounds much like the hunt John Wesley has with Sylder and his friends. McCarthy's novels "engage the conundrum of the lost craft of the hunt; the Appalachian protagonists often ache to recover lost crafts" (Wallach, "Prefiguring" 16). John Wesley certainly "aches" for the hunt.

Although he is notably unsuccessful, he is particularly enthralled with fur trapping and through this pursuit hopes to find a means of living off the land. According to Jarrett, "in the inability of Rattner and his friends to trap muskrat, mink, or wildcat, the novel demonstrates the postmodern disconnection not only from the past but from nature, which humanity itself has depleted" (32). For Twain, unlike McCarthy's boys, the hunt ended in triumph": "after three hours of tramping we arrived back wholesomely tired, overladen with game, very hungry, and just in time for breakfast" (Twain, "from *Mark Twain's Autobiography*" 168). According to Nancy Sawyer Fox, "the contrast that Twain establishes between life controlled by nature and life controlled by society portrays how nature can be more caring than man" (par. 8). Grammer sees a main theme

of *The Orchard Keeper* as the community of Ownby, Sylder and John Wesley trying to keep up "its end of the tug of war with nature" (34). This tug of war reflects McCarthy's theme of old order vs. new order, agrarianism vs. industrialization and is very reminiscent of Twain.

While nature can be frightening and dangerous, the really serious threat to the rural life of *The Orchard Keeper* comes from the city. It is all much like Twain's river and shore dichotomy. For example, although John Wesley comes close to freezing to death more than once, Sylder almost drowns in the creek, and Ownby fears panthers (which represent the wilderness and death), nature is no where near as threatening as the mysterious government tank that has intruded upon the orchard. The city is continuously increasing its domain and gobbling up the wilderness. Like the highway coming through in *Suttree*, a new road has just recently been built that will connect the rural community to Knoxville, that will make destructive access to it easier for the encroaching city. Elements of the new order seem to be set on obliterating any remaining holdouts of the old. Sylder is pursued by the constable who wants to jail him for bootlegging, and Ownby by government agents for shooting an X in the tank. John Wesley feels this state of affairs even more than the two older residents of Red Branch do. As Trilling says of *Huckleberry Finn*, "the relaxing influence of the frontier was coming to an end. Americans increasingly became 'dwellers of cities' and 'worshippers of the machine'" (xv). *Huckleberry Finn* is "a hymn to an older America of violence and even of cruelty, but which still maintained its sense of reality, for it was not yet enthralled by money, the

father of ultimate illusion and lies" (xv). McCarthy hardly sings a hymn to the American past.

During his town visit, John Wesley is almost sucked into society's commercialism when he turns in the hawk for the dollar bounty. His reverence for money shows in McCarthy's description: "He held the dollar in his hand, folded neatly twice. When he got outside he took it and folded it again, making a square of it, and thrust it down between the copper rivets into the watchpocket of his overall pants. He patted it flat…" (McCarthy, *The Orchard Keeper* 79). However, John Wesley immediately uses the dollar to purchase traps, symbols of his attempt to tame nature, to subdue it to a point where he might live in it comfortably. The struggle within the boy between nature and civilization is obvious in this one action. In this conflict, which at the time John Wesley is unaware of, he eventually rejects civilization by returning the hawk money even though he will not be able to retrieve the hawk. He is trying to reverse his actions and negate his participation in society's attempt to purchase nature.

This decision is foreshadowed by John Wesley's worshipful affection for the traps: "on the morning of the fifteenth of November he got up early and crossed the icy floor of the loft, reached in and pulled them out and went back and sat in bed, feeling the shape of them through the dusty paper" (85). Marking the date that he will first use the traps, he begins the process as if it were some ancient religious ritual. Even the storeowner understands the traps' value and importance: he "lifted one down and set it on the counter before the boy at a quarter-angle, straightening the chain, as one might show a watch or a piece of jewelry" (84). To John Wesley, the process of trapping and the success of that

endeavor are worth any sacrifice: "by the time he got home he was chilled and shaking but he had his four sets laid" (86). John Wesley's reverence for the traps functions similarly to Huck's for the raft. Both objects present a means for the boys to subdue the wilderness, a means of survival in that menacing world that they both long for and fear, a way to further their companionship with nature.

Both these orphaned boys still need human contact, however; they need family. One of the most obvious parallels of the two novels is between the protagonists' fathers, who unfortunately provide no family structure for their sons. As Huck is at the beginning of the novel, John Wesley is fatherless, orphaned, yet not without a father. John Wesley's father, Kenneth Rattner, is a drunk, a thief, a conman, and a compulsive liar. By page two, Rattner is shoplifting; by page fifteen, he has stolen someone's wallet. In a matter of hours, he has lied about tire pumps, his fictitious new Ford, his nonexistent daughter in an Atlanta hospital, and his own name. By page thirty-seven, he adds attempted murder to his crimes. As Gifford mentions much later in the novel, he was, in fact, wanted in three states (McCarthy, *The Orchard Keeper* 235).

As the story begins, Rattner is returning to Knoxville, to his wife and son whom he abandoned a year earlier. In the short time he appears alive, Rattner is compared to an "ungainly bird" (8), "leeches" (22), "pigs" (33), and "bird-droppings" (33); he is described as "loathsome" (33) and "the presence of evil" (33). Kenneth Rattner is Filthy, lazy, drunken, dishonest, thieving, and violent. The only major fault of Pap's he does not seem to share is bigotry. Otherwise, he is Pap Finn, basically useless and destructive when he is present; his name is, after all, Kenneth RATtner. Rattner is described as

"carplike" (36), and Huck says Pap is "fish-belly white" (Twain, *Huckleberry Finn* 19). Both men are presented as something too disgusting to touch. Huck thinks so little of his father that pap is not capitalized.

Pap is the motivation for Huck's flight, but, ironically, what Jim knows and Huck does not is that Pap has been dead for most all of his journey. Like Pap's, but more so, Rattner's death also provides a source of mystery. Ironically, he is killed by Marion Sylder, but his body is not identified until late in the novel and even then not definitely. Uncle Arthur Ownby watches over the corpse in the pit, and John Wesley and his friends eventually cremate it as a consequence of the cave fire. Though unknowingly, Sylder and Ownby hold the secret of Rattner's death as Jim holds the secret of Pap's. They are unaware of the dead man's identity, as Huck is unaware of the identity of the dead man he and Jim discover in the riverboat. Kenneth Rattner's unburied body recalls Twain's unburied corpses in *Huckleberry Finn*, including the body from the river, Pap, Boggs, Buck and his family, Peter Wilkes, and the baby in the barrel from the Raftsmen's Passage. (Unburied bodies similarly appear in *Suttree*, of course, the corpse from the river, Leonard's father, the man in Suttree's houseboat, and the baby floating by in the river.)

Because of his unidentified and unburied status, John Wesley's father is present in body and more importantly in spirit despite his absence, just as Pap pervades Huck's life even after his death. Eliot says, "There is no more solitary character in fiction" than Huck Finn; "the fact that he has a father only emphasizes his loneliness" ("Introduction" 198). Guerin believes that "knowledge of [Huck's father's] death brings a curious sense

of relief – and release – for the reader" (164), and I would add for Huck as well. Huck has been motivated by escape from his father as, ironically, John Wesley is affected by his mother's request that he avenge his father:

> You goin to hunt him out. When you're old enough. Goin to find the man that took away your daddy...he was a Godfearin man if he never took much to church meetin ... the Lord'll show you boy. He will not forsake them what believe. Pray and the way will be made known to ye ...you swear it boy. (McCarthy, *The Orchard Keeper* 66-67)

In great distress, his mother demands that he find his father's murderer. John Wesley does not promise to find the man responsible for his father's absence from their lives, but he does promise to "never forgit," "never as long as [he] lives." His mother mistakenly takes this to mean the full promise. The narrator tells us "he never forgot" (67), and despite the half-promise, John Wesley is as plagued by the idea of his father as Huck is.

Pap and Kenneth Rattner both represent a way of life Huck and John Wesley never want to experience. They represent the worst aspects of society. According to Guerin, "Mark Twain showed a remarkable pre-Freudian insight when he dramatized this theme of [social] rebellion in the portrayal of Huck's detestable father as the lowest common denominator of social authority" (165). However, due to his pledge to his mother, John Wesley is not afforded complete rebellion or a clear sense of escape or even relief from his father's presence. When John Wesley leaves Red Branch, his mother mistakenly believes it is to fulfill his promise to her, but ironically, he leaves more to escape that promise than to fulfill it. Both fathers ultimately become "the catalyst for

their [sons'] travels" (Fox par. 6). Huck, likewise, has been freed by the absence of his destructive father. According to Luce, this separation from the father is necessary for growth: "Before a boy can become a man, his father must be cut down to size" ("'They aint the thing'" 28). Therefore, despite living parents, Huck and John Wesley are orphaned, and ironically, part of their quests is to free themselves of the little parental influence they have been afforded. In an attempt to replace his father, John Wesley is drawn to possible surrogate fathers.

With the failure of family, both boys must look elsewhere to satisfy their need for human companionship. They perhaps unconsciously embrace the search for family ties and replace their blood fathers with surrogates. Although not as closely aligned as are Pap and Kenneth Rattner, Jim and John Wesley's surrogate fathers are also parallel. Uncle Arthur and Marion Sylder together serve as John Wesley's Jim. According to Mark Altschuler, *Huckleberry Finn* "is a book of people in pairs" (31), and McCarthy further makes pairs of Twain's model individuals. Vereen Bell believes

> that Sylder and Ownby between them form a surrogate paternity for John Wesley, who has been abandoned by his father, a man who was never much of a father for him in the first place… Between the two men and the boy there emerges what might be called a ghost community, complementary traits cohering around common beliefs. (25)

These two are John Wesley's mentors and, like Jim, assist him in his struggle with the forces of society and aid his development to adulthood. Brickman sees these

relationships as representative of the ancient Celtic custom of fosterage and as further symbols of an older order (59).

Ownby, or Uncle Arthur as John Wesley refers to him, gives the boy Muskydine wine and tells him stories, but his offerings are much more substantial than mere entertainment. Like Jim, Uncle Arthur is well-versed in woodcraft, superstition, and storytelling – all of which he passes on to John Wesley. Jarrett says that Ownby "on one hand is fiercely independent, individualistic, true to his own code yet also quick to violence, suspicious of the literal or cultural intrusions of the outside, modern world" (66). Ownby assists John Wesley with avoiding the modern world and attempting to live off the land. He provides him with knowledge of nature and sets an example for the boy that his goal is achievable. Ownby is an "old man whose traditional lifestyle enables an almost mystical connection to the cycles of nature" (Ragan 18). The old man teaches the boy how to read weather signs: "you can read the signs. You can feel it in your ownself… But it'll be hot and dry. Late frost is one sign if you don't know nothing else" (McCarthy, *The Orchard Keeper* 225). But, despite this natural wisdom, Ownby is very naïve in the ways of the modern world and is as superstitious as Jim.

His superstitious beliefs are represented best by his fear of cats, particularly the old wives' tale that a cat can suck one's breath away: "He feared their coming in the night to suck his meager breath" (McCarthy, *The Orchard Keeper* 59). The cat's cries symbolize Ownby's fear of death. Vereen Bell holds that "Arthur Ownby's uncharacteristic superstitious dread of cats is a pervasive reminder of … nature's patient claim upon us … He also believes that the cats may be possessed by the spirits of the

dead" (18). Ownby tells John Wesley, "A body dies and their soul takes up in a cat for a spell. Specially somebody drowned or like that where they don't get buried proper" (McCarthy, *The Orchard Keeper* 227), which makes Ownby think of Rattner's body in the pit. Ownby concludes his lesson to John Wesley with "they's lots of things folks don't know about sech as that" (228). People indeed do not know the superstitions; they are losing the old ways, locking them away to be forgotten, as Ownby himself is locked away at the end of the novel. McCarthy labels Ownby as "catlike" (88), implying he holds the same magical significance as Ownby attributes to the cat. The reference seems a trivial simile to describe Ownby's movements, but it is not in light of the extreme nature of Ownby's attitude toward the animal and McCarthy's many references to it through the novel.

A witch very much like Mother-She from *Suttree* gave Ownby this idea of himself when he was a child. She "chanted over him so that he would have vision" and told him about the "wampus cat." "Ain't no sign with wampus cats, she told him, but if you has the vision you can read where common folks ain't able" (59-60). Ownby sees the world inhabited by things we do not and cannot see. For instance, when he is on his trek to the Harrykin, "grotesque, shapes of creatures mythical or extinct [were] silently noting his passage" (189). As with superstition in *Suttree*, Ownby's beliefs are meant to be taken seriously by the reader whereas Twain presents Jim's wisdom as existing in spite of his comic superstitious beliefs. Like Jim, "Uncle Ather relies as well on the ability to read visionary signs" (Ragan 22). Ragan tells us, "He carves a sort of wand, covered with cryptic symbols, and he is ostensibly a savant, identifying the exact day of

the week on which the social worker was born" (23). But unlike the superstition portrayed in *Suttree*, for *The Orchard Keeper's* Ownby superstition represents benevolent forces. He is magical rather than "superstitious," which has a negative connotation. Grant calls Ownby "shaman-like," a "druidic figure" (62) and "a forest sage" (63). McCarthy refers to him as a "gnomic old man" (98), "dwarflike" (132), and "prophetic" (150). When Ownby begins his story of the panthers, "his face [was] composed in wisdom, old hierophant savoring a favorite truth" (McCarthy, *The Orchard Keeper* 148). McCarthy clearly portrays Ownby as a religious figure. As Brickman says, he is "a holy man and … the preserver of tradition" (61). While he tells the boys the story of his experiences with the panther, an almost sacred figure in his ancient lore, he holds his cup of wine "before him in both hands like a ciborium" (156), as if he offered them Holy Communion.

Ownby is "The Wise Old Man" of Jungian archetypes: clever and insightful. According to Jung,

> The old man always appears when the hero is in a hopeless and desperate situation from which only profound reflection or a lucky idea … can extricate him. But since, for internal and external reasons, the hero cannot accomplish this himself, the knowledge needed to compensate the deficiency comes in the form of a personified thought, i.e., in the shape of this sagacious and helpful old man. (217)

The old man's words to John Wesley at the end of the novel when he is in "the crazy house" are an example of Ownby's wisdom. John Wesley is struggling with what to do,

and Ownby tells him to "read the signs" (225). The "lean" year is upon them, and it will be another seven before one of plenty. Whatever Ownby's cryptic message meant (McCarthy never tells), it leads to John Wesley returning the hawk bounty (his rejection of the new order) and leaving Red Branch. Ragan concludes that "the values which he passes on to the boy are clear and uncompromising: personal responsibility and self-sacrifice" (25). In the same way, Jim shows Huck how to survive in nature and teaches him that the meaning of life is love and that he should do what is morally right despite what society may believe. It is – or they both are – a lesson of personal responsibility and self-sacrifice. Brownell claims that Jim is "the voice of love and conciliation in an erratically malicious and quarrelsome world, although a voice touched with fear …" (76). Jim's actions and words teach Huck to follow his heart in doing what is right even though it may go against what society deems correct. As do Ownby's to John Wesley.

During John Wesley's final visit with the old man, Ownby tells him, "Well, I hope [Sylder] fares better'n me. I cain't get used to all these here people" (McCarthy, *The Orchard Keeper* 226). "Most ever man loves peace, he said, and none better than a old man" (229). (This situational statement sounds like a seed that may have grown into one of McCarthy's later published novels, or at least reflects in the title *No Country for Old Men*.) Ownby is a dying breed, not because he cannot survive but because his world is disintegrating around him. The pit where Ownby ritualistically tends to the body of John Wesley's father has an "aura of antiquity" (90), as do Ownby's home and all his actions. The old world and the old ways are dying out. Ultimately, it isn't the cat but the government agent who "all but took his breath" (203) as he takes Ownby into custody.

As John Wesley's mentor, Ownby obviously parallels Jim. But he appears to resemble Huck as well. William Van O'Connor criticizes Twain when he says "the difficulty we have in conceiving of what Huck might be as an adult is an indication of the limited usefulness of Huck as a symbol" (10). Yet Bloom gives Twain credit for the fact that we cannot imagine Huck growing up. It somehow adds to his power or significance as a symbol of boyhood and all that that entails. However, numerous other writers have envisioned and revisioned Huck as an adult, a girl, a Southerner, a Northerner, a city dweller, and an individual in many other situations. McCarthy gives us ideas of Huck's adulthood though characters like Ownby, Suttree, and Billy Parham. Ownby could very well be Huck Finn at 83 or 84 (Ownby is not sure which). He is a hermit, lovesick from the loss of his first and only true love, fighting off civilization and living off the land. Huck's parting words about Mary Jane sound like a recipe for the same longing Ownby experiences for his wife who ran away sixty years earlier: Huck says Mary Jane "was the best girl I ever see," and she "wasn't ever going to be before me no more in this world" (Twain, *Huckleberry Finn* 258), but "I've thought of her a many and a many a million times …" (244). Early in the novel as Ownby sits on a log in the woods smoking his pipe, he is the picture of Huck, calling in his hunting dogs with his goat-horn and helping himself up with the "pole of hickory" he has cut and "hewed … octagonal and graced the upper half with hex-cravings – nosed moons, stars, fish of strange and pleistocene aspect" (46). Ownby, like Huck, tries to run away. Instead of the river or the West, Ownby runs to the mountains, the Harrykin, to avoid civilization and being caught by the authorities. Ownby is a sad picture of Huck's future but still more positive an image than Oates sees

in Billy Parham of *Cities of the Plain*. Huck could become a crazy old man living alone in the mountains. It is not a pretty picture, but Twain's own projected, unpublished version of Huck's later years is not much prettier.

Like that of Huck and Jim, much of Ownby's significance comes from an act of civil disobedience – for him, the shooting of the government tank which, "like a great silver ikon, fat and bald and sinister," "capable of infinite contempt," (93) has invaded his orchard. McCarthy not only personifies the tank and its intentions, but also makes it an "ikon," with an archaic spelling, an image or representation, of the new order, possibly picking up on the religious connotation of the word to imply man's worship of this new era. According to Jarrett, "Sylder and Uncle Arthur's struggles with the law can be seen as echoes of a heroic rebellion" (98). Dianne Luce says:

> The urban, institutional mechanization of human interaction is represented in such inflexible legal codes as the taxation of liquor and by a government-erected tank atop a mountain. This structure so offends Ownby that he shoots an *x* on its surface to protest its encroachment on his natural environment. ("'That aint the thing'" 30)

Ownby is against conforming to society and its beliefs. He wants to preserve nature and to keep society at bay. His protestant actions teach John Wesley to follow his heart and do what he believes despite society's mandates. Jim's running away and Huck's assistance to him are full-blown civil disobedience and heroic rebellion, but Ownby's act appears more a feeble gesture, symbolic of his feelings but with no real effect. It is an attempt on principle to fight the MAN but is as unsuccessful as Ab Jones's war on the

Knoxville police department. Ownby's shooting the tank is closer to Suttree's driving the police car into the Tennessee River. Grant says, "The old man, because of his almost mystical mindset, cannot reconcile the technological advances of the modern age to his naturalistic world view, and is undone by the resulting collision of universes" (67). Unlike Ab, he is allowed to live, but unlike Jim, who finally acquires his freedom, he is forced to live his final days locked away from his home and nature in a mental institution. His attempts to fight off progress have been a failure. When John Wesley visits him, Ownby thinks to himself, "Them fellors never had no business there and if I couldn't run em off I could anyway let em know they was one man would let on that he knowned what they was up to" (McCarthy, *The Orchard Keeper* 229). "Them fellors never had no business there" is much the way Miss Watson has no business owning Jim, making Jim's running away a justified act of civil disobedience. Despite Ownby's apparent failure, Brickman sees Ownby's success in John Wesley. She says that "John Wesley survives to take [Ownby's] values west" (66). John Wesley has assumed Ownby's role as orchard keeper. William Van O'Connor sees Huck similarly as the "unconscious critic of civilization, its pursuits, wickedness, and vagaries… Life on the raft may indeed be read as implied criticism of civilization" (6). But Huck becomes no guardian.

Ownby teaches John Wesley how to live in and with nature. Sylder's job is to teach him not how to live in the modern world but rather how to coexist with it. He does this more by negative than positive example. Potential surrogate fathers like Mr. Eller, the storeowner who gives him a ride and a quarter and tries to take care of him, do not appeal to John Wesley. As a storeowner living in town, Mr. Eller represents the new

order. John Wesley prefers men who resist the pull of society because their sentiments are closer to his own heart. Sylder, like Jim, is a runner, except that he is a blockade runner, a moonshine runner. John Wesley saves Sylder from drowning, but Sylder and John Wesley, in a way, save each other. Sylder tries to live in the new world without becoming a part of it, and this skill is what he attempts to pass on to his young disciple.

McCarthy draws the contrast between Sylder and the new order by juxtaposing him with the agency men who have come to investigate the damage to the tank, clear examples of the postmodern world: "Just beyond the creek he passed an olivecolored truck, the driver and the other man in the cab looking serious and official, but somewhat sleepy and not in any particular hurry. Genial, unofficial, and awake, Marion Sylder drove to town" (McCarthy, *The Orchard Keeper* 98). This encounter follows immediately Sylder's witnessing Ownby's shooting the government tank and the image of Ownby "standing on the hill above him at the turnaround, holding the shotgun in one hand and leaning on a cane" (98). Positioned between the official agency men (the new world) and the solitary Ownby (the old world) is Sylder.

When John Wesley and Sylder first meet, Sylder puts his hand on John Wesley's shoulder in "an attitude of fatherly counsel" (McCarthy, *The Orchard Keeper* 102). They emerge from the creek, "looking like the last survivors of Armageddon" (104), and they may very well be the last survivors of an old world. Sylder gives the boy a hunting dog that can aid him in his quest to be a hunter, not just a lowly trapper, and live off the land. Sylder also takes him hunting to instruct him in ancient ways (120).

Sylder protects the boy who has "no daddy" (McCarthy, *The Orchard Keeper* 171), in much the way that Jim protects Huck. John Wesley looks up to Sylder: after telling Sylder what Gifford had said to him, John Wesley "sat back in the chair, finished now and waiting to know what to do, just beginning to be not so scared" (160). He waits for Sylder to instruct him, and just being in the older man's presence and confiding in him eases John Wesley's fear of Gifford and the encroaching new order. Sylder avenges Gifford's menacing of the boy by slipping into the constable's house and punching him in the face while he sleeps. Sylder is a better parent than John Wesley's biological parents. As Ragan says, "Sylder's interests are altruistic, fatherly, protective; [but his mother's] are selfish, vindictive, serving no needs but her own" (19).

After Sylder is arrested, John is adamant about seeing that he be freed, just as Huck wants to free Jim. However, Sylder tells him:

> You jest stay away from Jefferson Gifford, that's all…Me and Gif are square…I ain't forgotten about jail. You think because he arrested me that thows it off again I reckon? I don't. It's his job. It's what he gets paid for. To arrest people that break the law. And I didn't jest break the law, I made a livin at it…but you, you want to be some kind of a goddamned hero. Well, I'll tell ye, they ain't no more heroes. (McCarthy 212-214)

Despite what Sylder says, he does not believe he and Gifford are square or that Gifford is just doing his job. Sylder makes this speech to protect John Wesley. He will no longer be with the boy to guide and protect him, so he lies to him to deter him from getting into trouble. John Wesley denies that he wants to be a hero. Huck was not trying to be a hero

either when he vowed to go to hell to save Jim. Huck's willingness to give not just his life but his immortal soul to save his friend is what makes this moment the climax of the book. John Wesley is, too, experiencing a Huck-like "I'll go to hell" moment. He is obviously willing and is planning to sacrifice himself for Sylder, who will not allow it. As with Huck and Jim, John Wesley and Sylder have become a family, and John Wesley is responding to the natural urge to protect his kin. Their like-mindedness rather than their blood has joined them. Lionel Trilling says of Huck and Jim, "The boy and the Negro slave form a family, a primitive community – and it is a community of saints" (ix).

Huck may not be a hero, but as Trilling says, "Responsibility is the very essence of [Huck's] character" (ix) as shown in his concern for Jim, the Wilkes girls, the king and the duke when they are caught by the mob, even the murderers in the *Sir Walter Scott*. William Van O'Connor asserts that Huck is "self-sufficient and yet dependable, he is the proper kind of individualist" (8). While maybe not heroes, the boys are becoming "individualists," possibly something more important to both Twain and McCarthy. In the words of Vereen Bell, McCarthy's characters are individualists because of

> the conviction each has that one should be able to live as one chooses – so long as harm is not done to others – independent of society's conventions and expectations. Each is also motivated by a strong sense of natural justice that serves as a code of dignity and honor [,]…. obedient to a responsible inner voice and an ordered inner world. (24)

This conviction is shared by Huck and, Twain hopes, transferred to the reader. Trilling says:

> In point of fact *Huckleberry Finn* is a subversive book – no one who reads thoughtfully the dialectic of Huck's great moral crisis will ever again be wholly able to accept without question and some irony the assumptions of the respectable morality by which he lives, nor will ever again be certain that what he considers the clear dictates of moral reason are not merely the engrained customary beliefs of his time and place. (xiii)

One might say Huck is an individualist rather than a hero because he is too "modest" to be a hero and "could not well endure the attention and glamour which attend a hero at the book's end"; thus Twain had to create Tom's big finish: "some device is needed to permit Huck to return to his anonymity, to give up the role of the hero, to fall into the background which he prefers" (Trilling xvi). All of McCarthy's protagonists likewise "fall into the background," especially John Wesley who cannot save Sylder or Ownby. McCarthy's protagonists literally disappear. Each of them, as Eliot says of Huck Finn, "has no beginning and no end. Hence, he can only disappear" ("Introduction" 202).

The individualists of both writers stand between two worlds: nature's and man's. Wes Morgan proposes that McCarthy's characters' interests in nature, like Twain's characters' interests, are autobiographical. "His hiking experiences on Brown's Mountain as well as his interest in dogs can be seen in *The Orchard Keeper*; his interest in fishing, in *Suttree*; and his interest in old guns in *Blood Meridian*" (4). McCarthy, like his characters, has heard the call of the wild. Vereen Bell says that when reading *The Orchard Keeper* "we are set into this environment, in which the human and not-human are so commingled" (17). McCarthy, as Morgan points out, has converted his interest in

dogs into symbolism in *The Orchard Keeper*. The main characters and their three generations are clearly represented by/in their dogs: John Wesley's pup that his mother won't let him bring home, signifying her attempt to deny nature's pull on her son; Sylder's young and strong Lady that John Wesley rescues from the creek and Sylder says has "too much heart" to ever give up (126); and Ownby's Scott, that is seventeen years old and is eventually destroyed by Legwater, a symbol of man's new world. Even the beagles with Warn and the other boys are described as having "white brows and whiskers, gnomic and hoary-faced as little old men" (135). These dogs look like Ownby and represent the boys and their potential for carrying on the old ways. Dogs generally are representative of man's attempts to live the old way in nature. They are animals and wild but also domesticated; they mark a middle ground. Vereen Bell believes coonhounds and the coon hunt are "an ancient bridge between the human world and the feral one" (17).

Cats, on the other hand, represent something very different in McCarthy's animal mythology and even provide a further connection with Huck. As De Voto says, "Huckleberry Finn wanders into immorality [and *The Adventure of Tom Sawyer*] swinging a dead cat" (190). He first appears in the earlier novel with a dead cat he plans to use to cure warts. He has been told by a witch that the cat is in league with the demons that come to bear away the souls of wicked men (Twain, *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* 57), a legend similar to Ownby's belief about cats. Ownby also tells John Wesley that "cats is smart," even housecats who are "smarter'n a dog or a mule. Folks thinks they

ain't on account of you cain't learn em nothin, but what it is is that they won't learn

nothing. They too smart" (227).

As with dogs in the novel, McCarthy presents three versions of the cat. The wampus cat, now just a legend, is a powerful symbol of nature and her force, but the wampus cats are long gone, surviving only in man's lingering fear of the unknown. Ownby tells of a wampus cat stealing his hogs years ago when he was but nineteen and newly married. The wild cat had come for her kit that Ownby had attempted to keep as a house pet. He still bears the scars on his hand from the kit's initial capture. The mother panther was so terrifying that Ownby's wife cannot even tell what she has seen; "she just stood there and shook like she's freezing to death" (155).

The second image is of the crazed and hungry "housecat," startling Mildred in the smokehouse and trying to steal the dead mink from John Wesley's trap. The three-legged cat "trod the high crown of the road, bedraggled and diminutive, a hunted look about her," her "eyes incandesced with madness" (174). McCarthy follows this homeless cat's wanderings for five pages before he leaves her:

> The rain had plastered down her fur and she looked very thin and forlorn. She gathered burdock and the curling purple leaves of rabbit weed as she went; a dead stalk of blackberry briar clung to her hind leg. Just short of the road she stopped, shivered her loose skin, ears flat against her head. She squalled once, hugging the ground with her belly, eyes turned upward at the colorless sky, the endless pelting rain. (176)

She returns in the end of the novel only to be snatched up by a predatory owl. This cat

represents the present.

McCarthy juxtaposes immediately the third image of the cat, the future of the cat, represented by the kittens in Mr. Eller's store. "A loosed box of kittens came tottering aimlessly over the floor, rocking on their stub legs and mewling. Their eyes were closed and festered with mucus as if they might have been struck simultaneously with some biblical blight" (180). Sylder tells Mr. Eller, "Them's the nastiest-lookin cats I ever did see" and "a Christian'd of drowned em" (180-181). After Sylder leaves the store, the cats, lost and blind,

> wander about the floor, passing and repassing each other, unseeing. One staggered past a coffeecan set next the stove, slipped, fell in the puddle of tobacco spittle surrounding it. He struggled to his feet again, back and side brown-slimed and sticky, tottered across to the wall where he stood with blind and suppurant eyes and offered up to the world his thin wails. (181-182)

The strength of this feline natural force is quickly deteriorating under man's control: "after a while a little girl in a thin and dirty dress came through the door behind the counter and gathered up all the kittens, now wailing louder and in broken chorus, carried them out again" (182). The cat whose roar could once instill fear in a grown man can now be scooped up by a little girl -- and not just one cat but several at once. All that's left of the majesty of the cat is the legend that frightens the men in the store but, as Ownby knows, what is now heard is only an owl whose screech sounds like the call of the once grand wampus cat.

The cat seems from these images to be losing what Richard Marius calls one of

McCarthy's "most persistent themes," "the struggle for existence" (11). Ownby is the panther, Sylder the stray housecat, and, unfortunately, John Wesley the blind kittens. Ownby through his stories is aligned with the wampus cat and the strength of nature; Sylder is the wandering, ferocious but feeble stray representing nature's current place in man's world; John Wesley is a blind kitten, a boy who would live the old way but "staggers" defeated through a new world. The cats and the characters correspond to Ragan's assessment of McCarthy's presentation of the struggle between the old and new order:

> Arthur Ownby – the old man whose traditional lifestyle enables an almost mystical connection to the cycles of nature; Marion Sylder and Kenneth Rattner, representatives of contrasting responses to the new social order; and the boy John Wesley Rattner, who attempts unsuccessfully to find a compromise between the old dispensation and the new. (18)

David Paul Ragan synopsizes the novel as McCarthy's depiction of "a world in which traditional embodiments of value – religion, community relationships, agrarian connections with the earth – have deteriorated as a result of the increasing pressure of urban culture, commercial interests and governmental intrusions upon the lives of the novel's essentially rural characters" (17). Vereen Bell, more philosophically, says it "is an elegy commemorating a doomed way of life; it is also a lament for the impermanence of human life generally and a meditation upon the irrelevance of the human in the impersonal scheme of things" (10). According to W. D. Howells, this awareness

originates with Twain:

> The inventions, the appliances, the improvements of the modern world invaded the hoary eld of his rivers and forests and prairies, and, while he was still a pioneer, a hunter, a trapper, he found himself confronted with the financier, the scholar, the gentleman. They seemed to him, with the world they represented, at first very droll, and he laughed. Then they set him thinking, and, as he never was afraid of anything, he thought over the whole field and demanded explanations of all his prepossessions – of equality, of humanity, of representative government, and revealed religion. (174)

Huckleberry Finn, Bernard De Voto asserts, is a book about "the rush and clamor of America becoming something it had not been" (191).

As *The Orchard Keeper* ends, John Wesley stands alone in his struggle, the words of his foster fathers ringing in his head, or perhaps merely the images of their message, for the boy seems to want to deny words. "John Wesley's practically wordless life seems guided exclusively by the need to become subsumed into that mysterious and wordless world" (Vereen Bell 15). At this point, John Wesley obviously has no attachment to blood family; he has not found a home with his father or mother. At his mother's grave, he tries to "conjure up an image" as he touches the stone, but it is "a carved stone less real than the smell of worksmoke [referring to the fire he built in the woods with Sylder] or the taste of an old man's wine," referring to a time in Ownby's cabin when he served John Wesley and his friends "Muskydine wine" (McCarthy, *The Orchard Keeper* 245). Ragan says, "These are the men whose values he has embraced as an adult, whose view

of the world determines the direction the young man must take at the close of the book" (19). Sylder and Ownby have become his family, just as Jim becomes Huck's family. John Wesley has given back the hawk bounty and renounced a society that jails his friend and locks old men away in the crazy house. The boy, despite the formation of his new community/family, is once again alone. In the end, John Wesley, like Huck, went "out to the western road" (McCarthy, *The Orchard Keeper* 246). According to Fox, "the constant movement, mainly westward in [*Huckleberry Finn*] is reflective of the pioneering attitude of America… The West represents a source of hope and a wealth of experience" (par. 12). In an interview, Norman Mailer said of Twain's ending, "Movement is always preferred to inaction. In motion a man has a chance" (qtd. in Fox par. 16).

McCarthy tells us that John Wesley "passed through the gap in the fence, past the torn iron palings and out to the western road, the rain still mizzling softly and the darkening headlands drawing off the day, heraldic, pennoned in flame, the fleeing minions scattering their shadows in the wake of the sun" (McCarthy 246). The ending of *The Orchard Keeper* is as indefinite and controversial as are the endings of *Suttree* and *Huckleberry Finn*. Scholars debate whether it is tragic or hopeful: whether John Wesley found a place in this new world or a way to survive in the old. Some scholars have interpreted hope in this final passage, but most have not. Arnold says the end of the novel is the beginning of McCarthy's recurring theme that "nothing lasts except loneliness and pain" ("The Last of the Trilogy" 240). Horton says,

John Wesley's retreat down the "western road" as the novel comes to a close is

> invested with the reality of death and the feeling of being cut off … the story ends when John Wesley "no longer cares to tell." He loses the connection; the transmission is interrupted somehow. Or perhaps he merely gives up, becomes fed up with the trying, when he cannot find any sign that what has been will survive. (307)

As McCarthy concludes, "No avatar, no scion, no vestige of that people remains. On the lips of the strange race that now dwells there their names are myth, legend, dust" (McCarthy, *The Orchard Keeper* 246). While the values he has inherited from his two mentors "have become arcane, outmoded, impractical" (Ragan 19), John Wesley survives, and Ragan believes that John Wesley's leaving the area symbolizes his rejection of the new order (23). Grammer asserts, "The book ends tragically … but affirmatively; we might think of it as an elegy for an older sort of pastoral community, nobly resisting but finally defeated" (35).

All of these assessments speak of defeat, seeing no hopeful future for John Wesley. On the other hand, Jarrett says that the ending seems "to optimistically point forward into a more promising future for Rattner… Our last glimpse of Rattner catches him no longer pensive with memory but, in Whitmanesque fashion, stepping out of the graveyard to set forth on the open Western road" (33). Jarrett does not see McCarthy's narratives as "nihilistic" (33). In another positive view of John Wesley's prospects, Luce says John Wesley walks away from the cemetery into his future, "leaving behind the artifacts of the past that have attended [his] healing hallucinated recollection" ("'They aint the thing'" 29). Luce speaks of healing rather than defeat, and Jarrett's reference to

Whitman implies not only a positive future for John Wesley but also a remaining possibility for oneness with nature. Ragan sees John Wesley's fate as within his own hands. "John Wesley is the man his past has made him, and that past condemns him to isolation in the modern world…. John Wesley must adapt himself, like a living tree to the iron will of the expanding new order" (Ragan 26). All depends on his ability to adapt. Dissimilarly, Huck has yet to figure out that he will have to make this accommodation. He still thinks he will not have to adapt, that he can outrun this new order and the civilizing forces. McCarthy thus furthers and revises Twain: "by providing one survivor who has been indoctrinated into the old order, McCarthy allows for preservation of that tradition and the resistance possible from such preservation" (Brickman 55). Brickman believes John Wesley, like the Methodist leader for whom he is named, "survives to take his values west" (66).

Eliot says that for Huck "neither a tragic nor a happy ending would be suitable. No worldly success or social satisfaction, no domestic consummation would be worthy of him; a tragic end also would reduce him to the level of those whom we pity. Huck Finn must come from nowhere and be bound for nowhere" ("Introduction" 202) -- so, too, with John Wesley at the end of McCarthy's novel. McCarthy has John Wesley head down "the western road" (McCarthy, *The Orchard Keeper* 246), as McCarthy later did himself and as Twain has Huck do. In his interpretation Horton returns to the idea of point of view and whether John Wesley tells this story: "If John Wesley does conjure the larger sections of the novel, then he succeeds the old man as a keeper of cherished values: he becomes a storyteller trying to save from oblivion some sacred remnant of a passing

time" (305). The triumph is in the telling of the story, an idea which foreshadows what McCarthy says at the end of *Cities of the Plain*: "the world of our fathers resides within us" (281) and "each man is the bard of his own existence" (283).

As Twain once did and as Huck does, then, McCarthy heads John Wesley west. The boys may not be sure where they are going, but it is important that they are going. According to Vereen Bell, "in the moral environment of the *The Orchard Keeper* [and, I would say, in the environment of most of McCarthy's fiction] aimlessness is a virtue because it is only the aimless who can be adequately open to the saving rhythms of experience" (27). Perhaps Huck and McCarthy's character go west so that they can gauge their consciences` against reality without the interference of society's corrupting forces. In *The Orchard Keeper,* however, McCarthy has transformed the adventures of young Huck into John Wesley's coming of age and prospectively of his assuming new responsibilities. John Wesley is never heard from again, but with McCarthy's own movement west, he will provide in his fiction other young men who take up the Western adventure and who will as a result be new and not old Huck Finns.

Chapter Four

Huck in the Territory

In one of the most celebrated literary exoduses since biblical times, Twain has Huck head west to the "territory" at the end of *Huckleberry Finn.* Similarly, McCarthy's fiction heads west after *Suttree*, paralleling McCarthy's own physical relocation. McCarthy left Tennessee for Texas early in 1977. He fictionalizes this move in *Suttree*, his last novel set in the South, and foreshadows it earlier in *The Orchard Keeper*. Suttree hits the road headed out of Knoxville, John Wesley leaves Tennessee and heads out on the "western road," and when "at fourteen [the kid] runs away… He wanders west…" (McCarthy, *Blood Meridian* 3-4). According to Jarrett, in *Blood Meridian* "McCarthy has his protagonist escape Tennessee for the violence of the West, thereby revising both the conclusion of *Suttree* and John Wesley Rattner's departure from Red Branch in *The Orchard Keeper*" (62) – it might be added, Huck's from the Phelps's farm. McCarthy now thus becomes a Western writer rather than a Southern one -- or a Western and Southern, a duality he shares Twain. In *Blood Meridian*, as usual, though, McCarthy produces a text that is beyond simple parallelism with Twain's.

Henry B. Wonham says Twain "enjoys the unique distinction of having been claimed by four different sectors of the United States as a spiritual native son" (par. 8). "At age 26, he was already a 'desouthernized Southerner'" (par. 10), and consequently,

"numerous critics have insisted that Twain's literary achievement bears an unmistakably Western stamp" (par. 12). By 1867, his status as a writer of the Far West had been established (par. 11). Howells believes "we have already forgotten, perhaps, how truly Western he is, though his work, from first to last, is always reminding us of the fact" (175). Stephanie Le Menager in "Floating Capital: The Trouble with Whiteness on Twain's Mississippi" claims that the Mississippi River is a metaphor for the West (405), for unclaimed territory. Therefore, in her view, Huck, when he leaves his father's cabin, has already gone west. Twain did, of course, envision Huck's adventures farther west, but he did not complete *Huck Finn and Tom Sawyer among the Indians*. The fifteen thousand-word, unfinished story stops in mid-sentence.

As Joseph Flora has said in "Relocating Southerners in the West," "Southern presence in the literature of the West precedes" contemporary Western writers and particularly McCarthy: "Mark Twain is the most obvious example – posed as he was with a westward look even if he did write his greatest fiction depicting a southern heritage. Huck Finn was not the only southerner to light out for the territory" (Flora 150). McCarthy after *Suttree* likewise becomes a "desouthernized Southerner." The controversy over the region of these regionalist writers is fitting considering Wonham's observation; "the persistent gesture in Twain's fiction is one of flight" (par. 15). Similarly, Oates says, "The yearning to leave home and 'light for the Territory' is perhaps the most powerful of yearnings in McCarthy's novels" (41). Huck and the kid, as well as almost all of McCarthy's main characters, share the desire for flight.

George Guillemin attributes this desire to the characters' orphan status. According to Steven Shaviro, "orphanhood is taken for granted in *Blood Meridian*" (146) – as indeed, in all of McCarthy's fiction. Arnold calls the kid "another of McCarthy's unparented children" ("Naming, Knowing and Nothingness" 62). This status aligns the kid with Huck, that "most famous orphan" (Guerin 264). Guillemin thinks that journeys are motivated by this "primal loss," the loss of the mother or father or both. The kid's "mother dead these fourteen years did incubate in her own bosom the creature who would carry her off." His father, who has been a schoolmaster, "lies in drink" and "quotes from poets whose names are now lost. The boy crouches by the fire and watches him" (McCarthy, *Blood Meridian* 3). The death of the kid's mother in childbirth and his father's rejection through neglect, a situation he shares with Huck, cause an exile from the self that leads to a physical running away with no sense of a destination (Guillemin 251). For the kid, this self-exile ultimately results in perpetual homelessness. The kid has no quest when he leaves home; he, like Huck, does not know where he is going or what he is looking for, but he does have a clear picture of what he does not want and where he does not want to be. The kid's motivation is not as clearly defined as that of Huck, who tells the reader his quest is escape from civilization. The kid, according to Jarrett, is just wandering (98). He, like so many McCarthy characters, experiences an "incomplete journey" (Jarrett 106). However, the kid's journey is more complete than Huck's, at least for the reader who knows where and how the kid ends up, if not the specifics of his demise. The completion of Huck's journey we will never know.

Including this vital action of youthful flight, the connections between Twain's Huck and McCarthy's *Blood Meridian* have been noted more than have such echoes with any of McCarthy's other works. Tim Parrish calls *Blood Meridian* "a kind of unholy combination of *Huckleberry Finn* and *Moby Dick* (thereby making it truly holy – or holy as hell)" (33). Similar claims and recognitions pervade McCarthy scholarship on this novel.[2] While Twain is not the only progenitor named – far from it-- some reference to him appears in almost every tracing of influence. Usually he is designated as the literary grandfather.

In fact, though, on the surface, *Blood Meridian* seems less like *Huckleberry Finn* than any of McCarthy's other novels: there are fewer parallel scenes, fewer familiar characters, and a drastically different natural and social environment. This perceived contrast could exist because *Blood Meridian* seems more a sequel to *Huckleberry Finn* than a remake. John Cawelti asserts, "*Blood Meridian* is a 'postmodern' vision of madness and chaos…. in some ways, a strange sequel to *Huckleberry Finn*" (170). *Blood Meridian* does appear to pick up where *Huckleberry Finn* leaves off. The kid looks like Huck heading for the territory. Jarrett recognizes this sequential feel when he subtitles a

[2] McCarthy's fiction has been at the center of a literary paternity suit. The search for the father that John Vanderheide notes in McCarthy's fiction (177) must have inspired a similar pursuit in literary scholarship. Commentary on *Blood Meridian* names Homer, Dante, Melville, Emerson, Whitman, Dostoyevsky, Conrad, Hemingway, and Faulkner as potential fathers, but only one mother, Flannery O'Connor. Robert Hass has been the leading detective in this investigation; he suggests McCarthy's writing embodies at least ten major writers. Hass says McCarthy will remind readers of Twain and a host of others: "there is hardly time to reflect on its many literary cinematic echoes or on the fact that Mr. McCarthy is a writer who can plunder almost any source and make it his own" (1). Donald Kozlosky warns that Hass "has started a train of comparisons that could conceivably never end" (31).

section of his chapter on *Blood Meridian* "Lighting Out for the Territory." He says the novel is "another escape to the West" (63), a "postmodern rewriting of the [escape] tradition" which began with Twain (66). He sees Huck as the kid's "predecessor" (65). The kid's adventures on his own are far more horrifying than any of Huck's, although as Elliott has said, "At the end of the book when he 'lights out for the Territory,' … the reader has no reason to feel very optimistic about Huck" (xxxiv). Twain's notebook sketch of Huck at 60 is not a pleasant vision either. A reader might expect Huck's situation to deteriorate, but probably not into the nightmare the kid experiences.

Certainly there are a number of obvious similarities of *Blood Meridian* to *Huckleberry Finn.* Each chapter of *Blood Meridian* begins with brief fragments of description for the events in the chapter, just like those found in *Huckleberry Finn*. Chapter one's title is "Civilizing Huck – Miss Watson – Tom Sawyer Waits." Chapter one's title for *Blood Meridian* is "Childhood in Tennessee – Runs Away – New Orleans – Fights – Is shot – To Galveston – Nacogdoches – The Reverend Green – Judge Holden – An affray – Toadvine – Burning of the hotel – Escape." Both novels continue in a like manner.

Literary scholars have noted several similarities. Jarrett calls attention to the texts' stylistic similarities: "The narrative voice's reliance on the conjunctive 'and' – a stylistic feature on which Twain's Huck has relied – careens both the onlooking kid and ourselves at a breakneck pace through the mind-numbing violence…" (89). And Barcley Owens says many critics have noted McCarthy's characters' "literary antecedents in the frontier realism of Mark Twain" (13-14). Adam Parkes compares the Rev. Green scene

and the tent meeting in *Huckleberry Finn*: "the scene is reminiscent, of course, of various escapades in Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884), particularly those involving the king and duke" (107). He further muses that the kid and Huck could have actually met: the kid's trip down the Mississippi to New Orleans "may cause him to cross paths with Twain's hero: the date of the kid's journey, 1848, suggests that such a coincidence is possible" (282). Parkes outlines other easily-seen parallels: the kid running away, "turning himself, in effect, into an orphan," the judge offering himself "as a potential foster-father," and images of the judge that recall "Twain's pseudo-aristocratic imposters," the king and the duke (282). Additionally, Parrish feels that "*Blood Meridian's* opening scene, for instance, which introduces the fourteen-year old kid whose mother died in childbirth and whose father is a drunk, clearly means to evoke the circumstances of Huckleberry Finn" (34). Mark Graybill claims "this fascinating account of exploitation and violence parodies *Huckleberry Finn*" (95). Graybill implies this parody is intentional whereas Parrish outright claims conscious intention: McCarthy "clearly means to evoke."

Again, though, despite the noted similarities, there is significant difference. The major contrast is the setting -- not just South vs. West but more specifically, river vs. prairie. The setting is no longer on water, although rivers flow through the kid's trek west. Characters in McCarthy's Western stories are always crossing rivers, but not riding them or living on them. In *Blood Meridian*, the prairie is not God as Eliot saw the river. It frightens and threatens without providing the sustenance or comfort that Huck finds in nature. No dawn passages of nature's loveliness can be found regarding McCarthy's

landscape. McCarthy says, "This desert upon which so many have been broken is vast and calls for largeness of heart but it is also ultimately empty. It is hard, it is barren. Its very nature is stone" (*Blood Meridian* 330). In *Huck Finn and Tom Sawyer among the Indians*, Huck tells that the reader the prairie "was the biggest, widest, levelest world – all dead; dead and still; not a sound. The lonesomest place that ever was; enough to break a body's heart, just to listen to the awful stillness of it" (21). Both descriptions correspond with the archetypical symbolism in which the desert represents "spiritual aridity; death; nihilism, hopelessness" (Guerin 189).

In *Huckleberry Finn* Huck embraces nature, the river, as a father, but what a menacing father the prairie renders. The prairie would appear more fitting for the individualist, since it would allow him more control than a river over his journey. The sense of control which it provides is only an illusion, however, as McCarthy's Western characters learn. They may not be at the mercy of a river, their journeys controlled by its swift currents, but nature finds other ways, far less predictable ones, to affect the course of the protagonists. In this extensive landed world, the sun is "urinecolored" (McCarthy, *Blood Meridian* 47), and the "sunset" is blood – a truly frightening terrain. (Years earlier, Twain has Huck make the same observation on the prairie: he watches "the sun go down and turn [the sky] into blood" (*Huck Finn and Tom among the Indians* 58).) The "Blood" in McCarthy's title foreshadows the violence found in his novel.

The most striking, definitive characteristic of *Blood Meridian,* and the most often critically discussed, is its violence. "In this novel, the dynamics of cultural exchange are primarily controlled not by language but by violence" (Jarrett 88). McCarthy once said,

"There's no such thing as life without bloodshed" (qtd. in Woodward, "Mojave Rattlesnakes" 36). According to the book jacket, *Blood Meridian* is:

> an epic novel of the violence and depravity that attended American's westward expansion, brilliantly subverting the conventions of the Western novel and the mythology of the "wild west." Based on historical events that took place on the Texas-Mexico border in the 1850s, it traces the fortunes of the Kid, a fourteen-year-old Tennesseean who stumbles into a nightmarish world where Indians are being murdered and the market for their scalps is thriving.

Notably, the violence in McCarthy's fiction is traced by Jarrett to Twain. "*Blood Meridian* scrutinizes American violence, analyzing its function in the national ideology, history, and identity. Such violence has been the theme of the American historical novel," particularly for Twain in *Huckleberry Finn* (88). According to Van Wyck Brooks, Twain was no stranger to violence at home in Hannibal or out West. He lived through many "gruesome experiences" in both places and especially in the West where "gambling, drinking and murder" were the "diversions" (181).

Twain shows us some of this violence in his Western sequel for Huck, particularly in the scenes in which the Indians massacre the Mills family. Huck watches as the father and mother are brutally murdered by Indians they believed to be their friends, just as he watched Buck Grangerford and his family murdered by the Sheperdsons in the earlier novel. One Injun shot Mr. Mills "through the head … and scalped him, another one tomahawked [Mrs. Mills] and scalped her" (*Huck Finn and Tom Sawyer among the Indians* 19). The fate of Mr. and Mrs. Mills's sons is far worse: Buck and Sam Mills

were "tomahawked and scalped, and stripped; and each of them had as many as twenty-five arrows sticking in him" (20). Tom tells Huck "how else they had served the bodies, which was horrible, but [Twain says] it would not do to put it in a book" (20). McCarthy, of course, does put it in a book:

> … those right pilgrims nameless among the stones with their terrible wounds, the viscera spilled from their sides and the naked torsos bristling with arrowshafts. Some by their beards were men but yet wore strange menstrual wounds between their legs and no man's parts for these had been cut away and hung dark and strange from out their grinning mouths. (*Blood Meridian* 152-153)

One aspect of *Blood Meridian* and *Huckleberry Finn* which has particularly disturbed some readers is that humor is intermingled with this violence. Howells's summation of Twain's views of the West might provide some explanation of both works:

> Anyone who has really known the West (and really to know it one must have lived it) is aware of the profoundly serious, the almost tragical strain which is the fundamental tone in the movement of such music as it has. Up to a certain point, in the presence of the mystery which we call life, it trusts and hopes and laughs; beyond that it doubts and fears, but does not cry. It is more likely to laugh again, and in the work of Mark Twain there is little of the pathos which is supposed to be the ally of humor, little suffusion of apt tears from the smiling eyes. It is too sincere for that sort of play; and if after doubting and fearing it laughs again, it is with suggestion of that resentment which youth feels when the disillusion from its

> trust and hope comes, and which is the grim second-mind of the West in the presence of the mystery. (174)

According to Parrish, "Twain's unmatched understanding of the violence at the heart of the American character was overshadowed by his singular ability to deflate the threat this violence poses. This was the function of Twain's comedy" (33). Parrish feels that Twain's mixture of "atrocity" and comedy is even more disturbing than McCarthy's because Twain's is so easily taken for granted (34). The reader laughs without noticeable discomfort.

Many critics have discussed the more unusual nature of the humor in *Blood Meridian*. Why do we laugh in the midst of all this cruelty, bloodshed, and horror? Dana Phillips says some want to read it as a Southern novel and therefore "redemptive" (19). If the novel is redemptive, then the violence must have some purpose, as does comedy. Those who see it as a Western novel are less inclined to join in the search for meaning. According to Shaviro, in McCarthy it is "useless to look for ulterior, redemptive meaning"; McCarthy did not intend any (148).

John Emil Sepich believes the violence in *Blood Meridian* fails "to serve any comprehensible purpose" (149). As Phillips says, the novel strongly resists "pigeonholing" (22), so the debate rages on. It is a strange book, a difficult one to read, requiring many starts and stops, some abandonments. As Terrance Morgan says, the violence and gore is shocking but eventually numbing to the point of boredom (37). The reader becomes desensitized eventually. Owens asserts, "The novel's violence repulses yet attracts"; "it can shock for only so long before it begins to numb" (8). If we become

uncomfortable again, however, we laugh to relieve that tension and renew our sensitive attentions. The comic relief in the novel is without a doubt, and definitively, incongruous. However, Howells's and Parrish's explanations of the violence and humor in Twain's western writings seem an apt description of McCarthy's as well: disillusionment, discomfort, and nervous laughter – so that the cycle can continue.

Jarrett and others discuss and occasionally dismiss the violence in *Blood Meridian* as merely historical (90), much the way Twain scholars have attempted to explain away his use of the word nigger in *Huckleberry Finn*. Sepich calls it historical revisionism. The novel and the violence have also been interpreted as nihilistic, symbolizing a general meaninglessness in life. Arnold counters these accusations; he believes it is a moral parable about the bloodthirsty nature of man. To Owens, McCarthy's thesis is that "mindless, atavistic violence is the true nature of mankind, a genetic heritage in common with apes and wolves" (4). Most scholars see *Blood Meridian* as a look into man's soul. If that is so, then it is a very dark soul indeed. McCarthy is showing his readers the un-noble savage. The reader sees as Huck and Tom did among the Indians "that book Injuns and real Injuns is different" (Twain, *Huck Finn and Tom Sawyer among the Indians* 61). However, McCarthy's white Glanton Gang is equally savage. Scholars dismiss the Indians' violent nature as inherent; these are Indians after all. They focus instead on the motives, the gang's and McCarthy's, behind the violence of the gang, the white men who are presumed to have been civilized. Vereen Bell believes that "survival as a challenge to manhood is partly what *Blood Meridian* is about" (118). The gang members are "sociopaths" who have "wholly transcended fear" (118). Vereen Bell seems to propose

that, to the civilized man, courage and the overcoming or transcendence of fear is the ultimate test of manhood. To have no fear is insanity. Bell believes the gang practices "opportunistic nihilism" (118). Violence is the men's attempt at "holding nothingness at bay" (118), which echoes Flannery O'Connor's Misfit in "A Good Man is Hard to Find' who says nothing but "meanness" can make a man feel alive in the face of life's meaninglessness (2252).

Tracing an initial connection between the Glanton Gang and *Huckleberry Finn* is not difficult. The Tom Sawyer Gang becomes a real gang of murders in *Blood Meridian*. The kid joins a gang reminiscent of the one from Tom's fantasies. However, the members are more than Tom's romanticized pirates, the women are not just ransomed, and their leader, the judge, is someone far worse than the overly adventurous Tom. Frighteningly, the existence of the Glanton Gang is historical fact, as reported in Samuel Chamberlain's journal and in other sources (Jarrett 83). McCarthy's realism does not allow cowboys who wear black and white hats, and no honor exists among these thieves. Cawelti maintains, "The kid is a Huck-like innocent who encounters a world of terrible violence and corruption and grotesque characters Twain would surely have appreciated" (176). The group members seem to be varying degrees of bad. They live by carpe diem sentiments but in combat rather than revelry (Owens 57). Despite some mingling of good and evil, these are not "courageous men taming the West for civilization"; according to Owens, such men do not exist in this novel. The men of *Blood Meridian* reflect "the violent character of a brutal environment" (7). The correspondence to Tom's fantasy gang is obvious; however, the Glanton Gang may have more in common with Sherburn's

mob. As Sherburn says, "the pitifulest thing out is a mob; that's what an army is – a mob; they don't fight with courage that's born of them, but with courage that's borrowed from their mass, and from their officers" (Mark Twain, *Huckleberry Finn* 134). Leslie Fiedler believes "The attempted lynching in Bricksville bears the marks of 'frontier justice,' which once usurped legally sanctioned trials in certain areas of the country" (*Love and Death* 75). The prairie the Glanton Gang rides manifestly qualifies as one of those areas. The gang calls itself an army, but hardly fights with courage or shows any individual bravery. During the massacres, the gang members borrow their courage from the judge: the gang's "*half* a man" (Twain, *Huckleberry Finn* 134). An army is an organized body of soldiers, soldiers who are organized for a specific cause. The gang forgets its cause halfway through McCarthy's novel. A gang is an organized group of criminals, but a mob is a disorderly and lawless crowd. As Wallach says, the judge instigates "mob violence" ("Judge Holden" 134).

According to Parkes, "in the absence of psychological laws governing human behavior, there can be no distinctions between individual psychology and group psychology; a group thus turns out to be nothing more than a random aggregation of individuals" (113). The Glanton Gang is made up of murderous individuals who fall together for lack of any other direction, each ripe for the judge's charismatic persuasion and the chance to act out their bloodthirsty inclinations. McCarthy's comment that in the kid "broods already a taste for mindless violence" (*Blood Meridian* 3) applies equally to the other gang members. Owens says that in *Blood Meridian* "Virtue does not defeat Vice" (3) and that the novel is "devoid of ethical or mythic comfort" (7). The violence of

Blood Meridian and the apparent lack of purpose or motive behind it are all disturbing. The gang lives in a milieu in which any atrocity is acceptable and without judgment or sanction. The cause originally may have been to protect Mexican villages from renegade Indians, but it provides a pretense for complete lawlessness, the creation of a world without compassion or empathy or distinction between enemy and comrade, innocence and guilt. The gang members attack the innocent Indians as well as the murderous, the Mexicans they were sent to protect, and each other.

In *Huck Finn and Tom Sawyer among the Indians,* Huck meets a gang of horse thieves very much like the Glanton Gang, and Brace Johnson is forced to kill two of them to protect Huck. The Indians in Twain's sequel also look a great deal like McCarthy's. In addition to befriending and then murdering the Mills family, they take Peggy to a fate worse than death, one so terrible that Brace gives her a knife as a gift and instructs her, tries to make her promise, to take her own life if ever kidnapped by Indians. Brace eventually explains to Huck why he wants Peggy to kill herself if abducted, but Twain does not allow Huck to share that explanation with the reader. Obviously, as with the murders, "it would not do to put it in a book." The Indians also take Jim and Flaxy, Peggy's seven-year old sister, as slaves. Twain's West, though sanitized, is not very different from McCarthy's. Lee Nelson believes Twain did not finish his sequel for that very reason, that he was unable to write the story without realism and did not know how to deal with the true reality of the West ("Introduction" *Huck Finn and Tom Sawyer among the Indians* vi). Twain could not write, and publish, about the West without showing the reader what McCarthy does in *Blood Meridian* and his other Western novels.

The disturbing nature of McCarthy's novel has brought a large number of objections: Oates calls *Blood Meridian* "repellant" (41), for instance. Likewise, in the introduction to the Oxford edition of Twain's book, Elliott summarizes some of the contemporary commentary on *Huckleberry Finn*: "For other readers it is a tale so disturbing in its plot and so repulsive in some of its language that the positive meanings it may aspire to cannot redeem its negative effect" (Elliott viii). Obviously, Twain recognized the potential effect of a necessarily more graphic sequel and may have withheld the book because many readers had already objected to the first Huck book. In fact, however, even in the more jaded *Blood Meridian* comes far closer to this harsh judgment than does *Huckleberry Finn*. "In the genteel culture of New England of the 1870s Huck was seen as a vulgar, 'low-class' delinquent and symbol of what was worst in the emerging American character" (xi). In this century, we do not see Huck as the delinquent his own time did, but the kid of *Blood Meridian* deserves that title and far worse. He is by any standard "a vulgar, 'low-class' delinquent." Huck may be uncivilized – by choice – but the kid is almost feral: when the novel begins, he is unwashed, nameless, barely verbal, crouching by the fire, like some prehistoric caveman. Despite the shock to the nineteenth-century reading public's system, Twain's book "helped to open new territories in American fiction," "smashed the barriers of 'respectability," and inspired writers to "explore more daring subjects," in particular violence (xiii). Twain "tested the limits of Realism's appetite for 'otherness'" (xvii). He "repeatedly alert[s] the reader to the huge gaps between the illusions and realities of

human experience" (xix). This new territory is where *Blood Meridian* resides, its inhabitants reaching a new height of otherness. McCarthy refashions the romanticized West and Twain's beginnings of realism in a postmodern way.

Certainly, McCarthy shatters illusions about the Old West. According to Graybill, Twain "helped establish the cultural authority of a mythologized West," and McCarthy "has done much to question that authority" (95). This revisionism is attempted from within, meaning McCarthy re-creates rather than attacks. McCarthy's revisioning of Twain is an attempt to destabilize the mythology Twain presumably presents and the illusion McCarthy distrusts. I would venture to posit, however, that Twain was as disgusted with this mythology as McCarthy and younger writers are, and some critics would agree, particularly Le Menager. Twain's sequel can be seen to indicate that Twain is conscious of not having dared enough, the primary component of Bloom's tessera, and aware of the level of realism required in an authentic portrayal of the West.

Owens is close to the right track when he claims *Blood Meridian* is a retelling of the Vietnam era, a war that lead to the reassessment of American myths, particularly myths of the Old West. He sees the novel as a reflection of this war as well as of the Civil Rights Movement, of gang violence in the streets, all captured in film and leading to violence in our society (31). Peter Josyph says *Blood Meridian* "reminds us of the monsters we will encounter out on the streets this afternoon when we take the book out far a walk with maybe our wives and our daughters too…" (186). Different in the degree of violence from the other books in McCarthy's canon, this novel still, in many ways, shares a particular telling realm with all of McCarthy's other creations and with the Huck

Finn Tradition. According to Jarrett, the violence of McCarthy's characters "reflects 'natural' man stripped of his civilization" (140). I think, rather, that McCarthy is saying that civilization, possibly the overly aggressive quest for civilization, causes this violence or at least promotes it. (Suttree, for example, believes the problem resides in his father's institutions, "in the law courts, in business, in government" [*Suttree* 14], not as his father believes in the streets where the presumably less civilized reside.) One needs look no further than the racism presented in *Blood Meridian*, a pressing topic for Twain as well. The white man must civilize the West, and the first step is to rid it of what civilized man considers less civilized forces, initially the Native Americans and eventually the Mexicans who hired the Glanton Gang, in essence a white clearing of the land. Western expansion becomes racial purification, and this directive not only forced the Native Americans to turn violent, but the white man to become what he thought he was attempting to eradicate. As Wallach says, "the American dream became a nightmare of genocidal appropriation" ("Judge Holden" 135). We Americans, he continues, are then forced to create the myth of the old West to live with the guilt of what we have done, a guilt that is the result of our "racist dream" (135).

The judge stands at the head of the Gang and the center of this dream; the critics' focus on him as the key to understanding the novel is correct, just as discovery of the core of Twain's message lies as much in Jim as in Huck. However, much of the discussion of the judge is misdirected. Understanding *Huckleberry Finn* requires an understanding of the relationship between Huck and Jim. The same is true of the two principal characters in *Blood Meridian*. The novel starts with and is loosely centered on the kid. Like Huck,

the kid is an observer who adapts to various situations. The kid falls in with many different groups and, like Huck, adapts. According to Eliot, Huck is "the impassive observer; he does not interfere, and … he does not judge" ("Introduction" 198). Once again, Twain did not dare enough; McCarthy creates the kid and carries the idea of the impassive observer to the extreme. The kid barely speaks. McCarthy, then, juxtaposes the kid who does not judge against THE judge, his potential surrogate father. As in earlier McCarthy novels, an obvious parallel between *Huckleberry Finn* and *Blood Meridian* is the protagonist's search for a father, what John Vanderheide sees as the search for God (177). McCarthy highlights this particular young man's search for direction with the subtitle of chapter eight: "Another cantina, another advisor."

The absent fathers in McCarthy's fiction are an attempt by his characters to sever ties with the past. Their biological fathers represent the world into which they were born; they represent society. As Guerin has said, Huck's rejection of Pap "as the lowest common denominator of social authority" (165) constitutes social rebellion. The kid's biological father has failed him, particularly as a former schoolmaster who does not teach his son to read. The kid is an outcast, like Huck, Suttree and John Wesley, resisting a perverse institution. Once these characters have denied society, a world they find repugnant, they must search for a replacement. Huck never declares his need for a father figure. He merely stumbles upon Jim on Jackson Island, and nature takes its course. He is lucky. Huck finds Jim is better than Pap, but the kid falls victim to less benevolent surrogates. Just as Huck is presented with more than one possible father -- Judge Thatcher, Mr. Grangerford, Uncle Silas, and even the king and the duke -- the kid has

many possible father figures, including the judge; Toadvine; Tobin, the ex-priest; and even an old hermit who crosses his path.

The kid first encounters the hermit, reminiscent of Arthur Ownby in *The Orchard Keeper*, who shelters him early in the novel. The kid's time with the old man is brief but instructional. The hermit shows an understanding of the kid's sense of displacement when he asks, "God made this world but he didn't make it to suit everybody, did he?" The kid replies, "I don't believe he much had me in mind." The old man asks if a better world exists and how we come by the "notions" of it:

> Can ye make it be? No. No. It's a mystery. A man's at odds to know his mind cause his mind is aught he has to know it with. He can know his heart, but he dont want to. Rightly so. Best not to look in there. It aint the heart of a creature that is bound in the way that God has set for it. You can find meanness in the least of creatures, but when God made man the devil was at his elbow.
>
> (McCarthy, *Blood Meridian* 19)

Man is a creature who can make a "machine," an "evil that can run itself a thousand years, no need to tend it" (19). This warning is the extent of the old man's tutelage because the kid moves on. However, it foreshadows what the kid will find down the road, what he is to find in the human heart and in the machine, the society man has created.

The old hermit is ominous, hovering over the kid as he sleeps, but still he is helpful. Huck's surrogate father, Jim, is a wonderful man: kind and loving. In *The Orchard Keeper*, John Wesley has two surrogate fathers who both care about him, who try to instruct him, and look after him. They are both criminals, but technically so is Jim.

Suttree's Ab Jones is criminal and violent, but still a guiding light for Suttree. However, the kid's guides are much less benevolent. The kid has three potential fathers, but none who is good or caring. They are not instructional in any positive way. Toadvine, after fighting with the kid, involves him in murder and arson. The ex-priest, Tobin, is somewhat caring and stays by his side, but he is more interested in using the kid as a weapon against the judge than in guiding the boy. Most scholars see the judge as the kid's surrogate father, but a horrible father he will be, far worse than the kid's biological father. Twain never inflicted anything so terrible on Huck, nor McCarthy on any of his previous Huck-like characters. Giving the kid the judge as his surrogate father is equal to Twain's tossing Huck completely to the mercy of the king and the duke. In this new world, McCarthy has infected Jim with the king and the duke to form the judge who does not share Jim's protective and loving nature. According to Gail Moore Morrison, "'the kid' under the tutelage of Judge Holden, his surrogate 'father,' wanders through the desert more or less committed to horrific violence and destruction" (177).

Arnold's assessment of the judge aligns him with Twain's two rapscallions: "the judge is an endlessly fascinating and seductive and even comic character for all his abhorrent vileness" ("Naming, Knowing and Nothingness" 62-63). Far worse than the king and the duke, though, he is Melville's Ahab or Conrad's Kurtz, or even, as one critic proposes, the white whale (Phillips 44). With the judge, we seem to be looking directly into the heart of darkness. The center of most all analyses of the book, the judge engenders many interpretations. Interpretations vary; few agree. In Owens's words, he is "a devil and a man, an Antaean set of juxtaposed opposites: childlike yet giant, perverse

yet wise, barbaric yet cultured, murderous yet kind. His smile charms yet deceives; it is a smug, Cheshire cat smile of preternatural knowledge and unlimited powers" (16-17). One thing seems clear: he has no real prototype in Twain's book.

At the end of *Blood Meridian*, when the kid is now "the man," the judge tells him, "don't you know I'd have loved you as a son?" (McCarthy, *Blood Meridian* 306). But the judge's statement is in the conditional tense. "Would have," if what? He would have been his father, supposedly if the kid had allowed him, if the kid had given himself to the judge. But unlike Jim with his unconditional love, the judge does indeed judge. The judge is not an official court title, but a symbolic name. The kid asks Tobin what "the judge is the judge of," and Tobin warns him not to let Holden hear him ask such a question (135). The judge has decided he is the judge. He is the judge of all. Is the judge God? This speculation emerges for the kid in a dream of judgment, very much like the one Suttree has in his typhoid delirium, but in Suttree's dream, the Christian God does the judging. The kid's dream concludes, "Of this is the judge judge and the night does not end" (310). The judge "peered down with his small and lashless pig's eyes wherein this child just sixteen years on earth could read whole bodies of decisions not accountable to the courts of men and he saw his own name which nowhere else could he have ciphered out at all logged into the records as a thing already accomplished…" (310). The judge judges man's world, "this residual specie current in the markets where men barter" (310). He is collecting souls. However, this is a dream and only the kid's

perception. Children often perceive their fathers as god, judge of all. The judge is not

God in the more general reality of the book.

Arnold, along with most other scholars, does not believe the judge is God but "clearly Satanic" ("Naming, Knowing and Nothingness" 62). Jarrett labels him a "diabolical agency" (79). Rather than discovering God, the kid has presumably, then, found Satan. The judge may not be Satan, but he is an evil person, more of the human sort of evil than the supernatural. In psychological terms, he is a pathological narcissist. "He is a demented embodiment of Walt Whitman, who celebrates himself" (Owens 61). McCarthy is no stranger to mentally ill characters; the judge is yet another of McCarthy's psychologically disturbed individuals. The judge, in particular, could possibly suffer from Narcissistic Personality Disorder (NPD), and his personality and behavior, his truly evil nature, can be explained as symptoms of the disorder. He is centered on self to the point that no one else matters.

In "Explaining Evil Behavior: Using Kant and M. Scott Peck to Solve the Puzzle of Understanding the Moral Psychology of Evil People," David Ward explains evil as a result of this disorder. He uses Kant's and Peck's theories to come to an understanding of why people do evil deeds. Ward's basic premise is that good people do good because they base it on a universal principle: they ask themselves what would happen if everyone acted this way. If good will result, then the inclination is good and we must follow it -- good for its own sake and for the overall good of mankind, even if in the immediate situation it is not good for the individual performing the action. The problem with understanding evil deeds is our inability to see the universal principle behind them. Ward hypothesizes that the universal principle for evil people is based in pathological

narcissism, protection of one's self-image at all costs. However, he believes that the principle, although perceived by the narcissist as universal, is unconscious, hidden but still serving as a defense mechanism. We cannot explain evil behavior because we cannot imagine doing evil things; we are at a loss for motive without universal principle. "I suggest that the explanation for this disagreement is that evil behavior is actually principled human behavior, except that the principles involved are principles of which the actors are unconscious" (1). Evil behavior is calculated, not random, so we are driven to look for the principle behind it (7). When we cannot find a principle, then we see this behavior as inhuman or nonhuman, and these evil people become monsters in our eyes (7). The judge is truly a monster. According to Ward, "A Narcissistic self-image governs the will of such people and their behavior is motivated by the need to protect and maintain this self-image at all costs. Evidence that tends to undermine this self-image is suppressed" (8). Ward says innocent people may need to be attacked or victimized in order to maintain the self-image, and therefore the idea of the scapegoat enters into evil behavior (9). People are things to the narcissist, means to an end, and have no value other than how they might serve. Interaction with others is based on the fear factor. Either the narcissist is afraid of them, or they of him (Ward, "The Complexity of Evil Behavior" 24).[3]

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[3] According to the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM-IV), the primary symptom of NPD is "a grandiose sense of self-importance," to the point of delusional thinking. This exaggerated sense of one's own importance and superiority leads to strong feelings of entitlement and motives the sufferer to see others as inferior, as objects or tools. Narcissist individuals desperately need excessive admiration, recognition of their specialness, and therefore develop charismatic personalities in an effort to acquire the admiration they need to sustain their sense of self. Since they

The judge undoubtedly sees himself as special and superior to others. Owens calls him "bellicose grandiosity" (18). He has delusions of grandeur. In order to maintain his glorified sense of self, he requires excessive admiration. This trait also seems similar to Tom who "always needs an audience" (Eliot, "Introduction" 199). As a result of this need, the judge employs his talent at oratory or speechifying to gain that admiration, but he also just loves to hear himself talk. The judge feels the need to explain if not justify his actions. He would have everyone understand the great beauty of his reasonings, his philosophy. "He preaches to us about the primal nature of mankind" (18). He is drawn to philosophy not for itself or to give life meaning, but to fill his speeches, to draw attention to himself. Scholars erroneously look to the judge and his speeches for meaning, but he is insane, a false prophet, a diversion, a temptation to evil. He speaks in riddles and often contradicts himself. The more he can confuse people, the more he can frighten them. He can threaten their souls, their immortality. The more they will listen, the more he can control them. While he appears to be the only man in McCarthy's novel who reasons, his reason is faulty. The judge says "your heart's desire is to be told some mystery. The mystery is that there is no mystery" (McCarthy, *Blood Meridian* 252). The hermit introduced the kid to the idea of this mystery early in the novel. Ironically, in the act of denying the mystery, the judge implies he has the power to solve it. He tells the kid close to the end of the novel, "Hear me, man, he said. There is room on the stage for

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objectify others, they are incapable of empathy. Things do not feel; they only serve the narcissist's needs. The need for power and control is a fundamental part of this disorder. They "need power to inflate their self-image" (Lowen 101). According to Alexander Lowen, seduction and manipulation are tools toward this end.

one beast and one alone" (331). He at first appears to imply that man will be that one and stand above the beasts, but then he tells him that the world is made of "Bears that dance, bears that don't." The judge will be that one. The dance is life, and all is self-contained, no meaning and no heaven.

The judge tempts others to evil and will say anything to collect souls, his admirers, but he is not Biblical evil, not Satan. He wants the power of corrupting someone. Through that process of corruption, he then owns his victims, has penetrated their hearts. Like the pathological narcissist, the judge is extremely charismatic in the fulfillment of his needs. Owens says that "the story often refers to Judge Holden's charismatic power over the gang, as if they are his 'disciples in a new faith' (McCarthy, *Blood Meridian* 130) (15). "His power of manipulation is absolute" (Owen 17). Parkes suggests the judge is "inherently theatrical. To be Judge Holden is to play the role of Judge Holden" (107). He is not himself but a manufactured image, one molded specifically to entertain, mesmerize, and ultimately capture. The judge plays roles, changing himself to better manipulate different audiences. He convinces through a show of learning, and the audience, "reckoning him correct," he "encourages until they were right proselytes of the new order whereupon he laughed at them for fools" (McCarthy, *Blood Meridian* 116). Many scholars want to see the judge as speaking for McCarthy, as revealer of the book's meaning, and therefore attempt to deconstruct or decipher his ramblings. However, as Phillips says, "he is not sounding the novel's themes" (28). Arnold suggests that Tobin is the character who speaks for McCarthy ("Naming, Knowing and Nothingness" 63). The judge's speeches "are delivered as highly ironic and playful lectures; the judge never

misses an 'opportunity to ventilate himself'" (McCarthy, *Blood Meridian* 240) (Phillips 26).

Ever the narcissist, the judge has no empathy for others. Other people's lives and desires are meaningless next to his own. He sees others as objects to fulfill his own needs. In the reader's introduction to him, he apparently sets the town against Rev. Green for his own amusement. The episode is reminiscent of Tom who mistreats Jim for his own entertainment and whom Marcia Jacobson also labels a narcissist (49). Perhaps the judge is the combination of the two primary people in Huck's life: his father-figure Jim and his brother-figure Tom. But the judge is capable of far more evil deeds in the name of self-satisfaction than the prank played on Rev. Green. Arnold says, "The judge has used the gang throughout the book, directing and manipulating them for his own purposes" ("Go to Sleep" 45).

In addition to the gang, the judge objectifies the children he abducts, rapes and then murders. He has a sense of entitlement. He has a right, he believes, to take these people for his own pleasure. He is more important; they are inferior. The judge's "blatant atrocities shock even the other gang members" (Owens 38). He is saying in essence, "I will make my presence felt and reign supreme. You will acknowledge me. The world will acknowledge me."

The judge's cataloging is part of his attempt to control, to have power over all, not just the gang and his individual victims. What he cannot control does not exist. The judge would have all birds in zoos. He says that their "freedom insults me" (McCarthy, *Blood Meridian* 199). Luce believes that "Judge Holden's sketching of birds he has

killed, or of historical artifacts which he then destroys, eradicates and replaces the thing itself" ("The Road and the Matrix" 205). She interprets this passage as the judge's awareness that artifacts are misrepresenting "the vanished world they pretend to symbolize or summarize" (205), but more likely, this activity is a result of NPD. The judge can now claim them as his creations. As he says, "Whatever in creation exists without my knowledge, exists without my consent" (McCarthy, *Blood Meridian* 198). The judge is exerting his control by destroying what he cannot rule. He will be "suzerain of the earth" (198) and rewrite the natural order of the universe. The judge proclaims that "even in this world more things exist without our knowledge than with it and the order in creation which you see is that which you have put there, like a string in a maze, so that you shall not lose your way" (245). That man can not know or control the order of existence is intolerable for the narcissist, and he must forcibly impose his own order. He does not acknowledge any other man's right to consider his own motives and actions, only his own. The judge aims to control and submerge others into his huge sense of self. He believes the only meaning in life is the one that man imposes on it. His cataloging of everything, such as the birds he kills, is an attempt to control nature, the world; and killing is the ultimate control. As Sepich says, the judge "knows that it is impossible to transgress when there is no Law to violate" (149). The judge believes moral law protects the weak, and they should not be protected. Life is survival of the fittest. "Moral law is an invention of mankind for the disenfranchisement of the powerful in favor of the weak" (McCarthy, *Blood Meridian* 250). Laws are for the weak; the strong do not need them. They have the natural law of selection, survival of the fittest. This belief stems from his

narcissistic disgust with those he sees as inferior. The belief is not necessarily social Darwinism but a more extreme and corrupted Darwinian interpretation, survival of the self. Everyone has to look to and after himself. The pathological narcissist says, "The fact that I can do this evil to someone justifies it. If that person allows it, then he is weak, and his weakness justifies my action." Twain's king and duke, who engender the judge, are never motivated by such limitless desire for control. Their motivations are mere laziness and greed. With the judge, McCarthy has extended far beyond *Huckleberry Finn* and revealed a potential evil in mankind Twain only hints at.

If this evil is directed by an unconscious universal principle, then the ultimate conclusion is war. Ward asserts, "If this maxim suddenly became a law of nature, society would be quickly reduced to a war of all against all because it is unlikely that the means I would need to employ to protect my self-image would mesh harmoniously with the similarly motivated activities of the rest of the community" (Ward, "Explaining Evil Behavior" 10). Therefore, the judge exalts and glorifies war, deifies it. He tells the kid, "War is god" (McCarthy, *Blood Meridian* 249). Obviously, he is aware of the principle that most narcissists are not aware of and he knows the universal outcome, cherishes it, beckons it, as the ultimate preservation of the self-image. This awareness makes him different from the typical narcissist and much more dangerous. The judge is afraid of no one. With this conscious awareness of the universal evil principle and this lack of fear, he is the uber-narcissist. Narcissism is the mad dance with the self, the mad dance that we see the judge engaged in at the close of the novel.

The judge's type of pathological narcissism results from a narcissistic wound, a point in childhood when an individual felt extreme insignificance and impotence, possibly due to abuse, neglect, or abandonment. Exaggeration of self is a defense mechanism, an attempt to provide importance to the self when outside forces, particularly parents, have denied this importance. It is an assertion of control over one's identity. As a result of their wound, narcissists are halted in their development, childlike in their sense of place and importance in the world. Narcissism results from being arrested in a developmental phase of childhood, one in which the child sees himself as the center of the universe. The judge's neoteny is the subject of much critical commentary. Guillemin believes McCarthy goes to great lengths to show the judge as a "monstrous child" (249). The last image the reader has of the judge is of "an enormous infant" (McCarthy, *Blood Meridian* 335). However, attempting to discern the judge's wound would be only speculation. McCarthy tells us not just that his origin can not be discovered but that he has no origin:

> Whoever would seek out his history through what unraveling of loins and ledgerbooks must stand at last darkened and dumb at the shore of a void without terminus or origin and whatever science he might bring to bear upon the dusty primal matter blowing down out of the millennia will discover no trace of any ultimate atavistic egg by which to reckon his commencing. (310)

According to Wallach, "Holden ranks among those great literary scoundrels who combine cunning and malignity with scene-stealing charisma and defy our efforts to explain their currency by reference to their origin" ("Judge Holden" 125). But yet, at the

end of the novel, he does hint at some form of abandonment in his childhood. He asks the kid if he has "that feeling in the breast that evokes a child's memory of loneliness such as when the others have gone and only the game is left with its solitary participant. A solitary game, without opponent" (McCarthy, *Blood Meridian* 329). This passage emphasizes the judge's need for others to maintain his sense of self. He cannot play the game without an opponent; he has no identity without a mirror, without a victim to reflect a sense of who he is back to himself.

The kid tells the judge at their last meeting, "you aint nothing," and the judge responds, "You speak truer than you know" (331). Likewise, the judge's "eyes were empty slots" (147), not a ledgerbook as in the kid's dream. McCarthy tells us that the windows to his soul reveal there is nothing. The judge as a narcissist knows he is nothing, that he is empty of identity. This lack of self is his greatest fear. He resents, even despises, the kid who has recognized this fact all along. Therefore, the judge must suppress the kid. The kid is the scapegoat. He disrupts the judge's sense of self and therefore must be sacrificed. According to Wallach, the kid is dangerous to the judge because he "threatens to comprehend what lies behind these manipulations, which would shatter the judge's exaggerated and perhaps illusory fullness of presence" ("Judge Holden" 134). The kid figures him out; he sees the self behind the image.

The judge cannot exist if the group contains even one dissenter, negating his illusion. The judge's tactic is to accuse the kid of forsaking his brothers:

You came forward, he said, to take part in the work. But you were a witness

> against yourself. You sat in judgment of your own deeds. You put your own allowances before the judgments of history and you broke with the body of which you were pledged a part and poisoned it in all its enterprises. Hear me, man. I spoke in the dessert for you and you only and you turned a deaf ear to me. … Only each was called upon to empty out his heart into the common and one did not. Can you tell me who that one was? (McCarthy, *Blood Meridian* 307)

The judge also accuses the kid of deserting specific members of the gang, other potential surrogate fathers or mentors: "Where is Shelby, whom you left to the mercy of Elias in the desert, and where is Tate whom you abandoned in the mountain?" (331). The kid sold his soul to the devil when he joined the gang, and the judge believes he reneged on that Faustian deal (Sepich 125-128). The kid is not mutinous to the gang but to the judge. The kid's "blankness" (McCarthy, *Blood Meridian* 151) pushes the judge to want him, want what he cannot have or penetrate. If the judge cannot make his presence ultimate to the kid, then he does not succeed in his quest for control. This failure results in the judge's obsession with the kid. Shaviro asserts, "It is [the kid's] indifference that irritates the will of the judge, and that he seeks to master and appropriate: this seductive child's loneliness that he needs to baptize and give (re)birth to" (152). The judge prefers a challenge to the easy win. "The kid cannot refuse the judge's election, any more than he can live up to it" (152). The narcissist will have his way.

In the desert, the kid will not rejoin the judge, but he will not kill him either, despite Tobin's encouragement. He will not join the new society the judge offers, or destroy it. He does not have the strength to change the world he finds, but he does have

enough to resist it. The kid experiences a crisis of conscience; he "sat in judgment of his own deeds" (McCarthy, *Blood Meridian* 307) and those of the gang as well as of the judge. Jarrett says Huck has a "good" heart (66), and Daugherty sees the kid as having a "spark of goodness" (160), but McCarthy says the kid heads west to test "whether his own heart is not another kind of clay" (McCarthy, *Blood Meridian* 5). Owens believes the novel presents "no heroic protagonists, no narrative Gulliver to condemn the 'whole damned human race' to oblivion" (39), although it does contain a Huck Finn to observe that he is "ashamed of the whole human race" (Twain, *Huckleberry Finn* 148).

Arnold sees the kid as "the moral center of the book" ("Naming, Knowing and Nothingness" 62). Like Huck, the kid has an "I'll go to hell" moment when he denies the judge. According to Daugherty:

> the kid reminds us here of Huckleberry Finn, who, in the crucial act of saving his friend Jim from slaveholders' justice, similarly defies the will of a pernicious subculture, but who is judged only by his own cultural conscience, saying to himself at the novel's turning point, "All right, then, I'll go to hell." Both these boys are a little bit awakened by the spark of the divine, and both extend acts of fraternal mercy when they are "not supposed to." In the Mark Twain world, Huck gets away with it; in the McCarthy world, the kid is killed by the judge for it in an outhouse. The kid has "awakened," but not progressed sufficiently in wisdom much beyond mere awakening and this has no chance of survival, much less at the victory of Gnostic liberation. (165)

This denial comes from the emergence of the kid's conscience. The judge tells the kid,

"There's a flawed place in the fabric of your heart. Do you think I could not know? You alone were mutinous. You alone reserved in your soul some corner of clemency for the heathen" (McCarthy, *Blood Meridian* 299). The kid is guilty of compassion, empathy for others, an act of which the judge is incapable. The difference between the judge and other men is that he has no conscience. He never doubts that he is right in what he does. He has no struggle with his heart.

The judge turns against the kid because the judge suspects the kid has a good heart. The kid's conscience forces him to judge himself and puts him against the gang's motives. Therefore, the kid is guilty of mutiny. No one should judge but the judge. The judge is sparked by the kid's denial of him to destroy or consume the kid. This need to consume is made clear by the cannibalistic images, outlined in Guillemin, throughout the judge's exploits and the possible concluding fate of the kid. The indefinite ending of the novel, the kid's fate, is heatedly debated, particularly in Patrick W. Shaw's article "The Kid's Fate, The Judge's Guilt: Ramifications of Closure in Cormac McCarthy's *Blood Meridian*." Readers are left unsure as to what actually happens to the kid. Shaw believes what the men saw in the jakes at the end of the novel is the raped, murdered, and partially eaten kid.

Until that time the kid has been almost invincible. Like Huck, he appears to be an image of renewal: as McCarthy says, "He waded out into the river like some wholly wretched baptismal candidate" (*Blood Meridian* 27). Early in the novel, he is shot just below the heart, but survives (McCarthy, *Blood Meridian* 4). Near the end of the novel, he undergoes surgery for an arrow in his shoulder and again survives. In between those

incidents, he survives the Comanche attack (57). Whatever the dangerous circumstance, he always rises and walks away. He and the judge are also the only survivors left from the gang. Jarrett says, "The movement away or westward from the geographical South is associated with psychological rebirth or renewal" (64).

The kid is even offered an opportunity to become a mentor or surrogate father himself. When he is 45 years old, he encounters a gang of young boys very much like his prior self, for "the country was filled with violent children orphaned by war" (322). However, he ends up killing the most aggressive of the boys. He refuses the election. The kid is obviously something special, different from the other characters. McCarthy announces the kid's significance as his story begins: "All history present in that visage, the child the father of the man" (3). Like Huck, he lacks much of what society would admire, but more than most men, he is able to know his own heart. He is able to judge society. Ultimately, though, he fails. He is unable to emerge significantly from the control of the world, to change himself or change it. He is able to recognize the evil of it but only partially to resist and never to understand. This failure leads to his humiliating demise in the outhouse at the end of the book, at the hands of the judge, society. He almost sacrifices himself.

The kid attempts not only to reject the old order represented by his biological father but also the new – its replacement – represented by the judge, his surrogate father. Just as society attempts to eliminate the nonconformist, the judge stamps out the kid. The judge is a false prophet, just as civilization is an illusion of meaning and comfort. The kid's rejection of the judge is the individual's rejection of a corrupt society. After all, a

judge is an official, an officer of the court, an enforcer of society's laws. He bands and holds the gang together as well as gives them a quest, albeit a murderous one. Owens claims, "He is the double-column ledger book of human society, itself, with every credit undone by a destructive debit, negating all efforts toward progress" (57). He is the machine of which the old hermit warns, that which we are told repeatedly in the conclusion of the novel, never sleeps and will never die.

Without this psychological explanation, evil people, the judge, are viewed as supernatural, as Satanic. However, for McCarthy the judge is more than psychological evil; he is symbolic of societal evil. Alexander Lowen sees pathological narcissism as a consequence of societal narcissism: "the narcissism of the individual parallels that of the culture" (x). "On the cultural level, narcissism can be seen in a loss of human values – in a lack of concern for the environment, for the quality of life, for one's fellow human beings. A society that sacrifices the natural environment for profit and power betrays its insensitivity to human needs" (ix). He further asks "can a culture be insane?" (xi). I believe McCarthy would answer yes. And so would Twain, who saw slavery as insanity and a product of a narcissistic society.

The narcissism of McCarthy's judge is symbolic of man's ethnocentrism. The judge is the uber-white man. His whiteness is stressed throughout the novel, enough to prompt Phillips to see him as an echo of Melville's white whale. Josyph calls the judge fate (180). Possibly, he is America's fate. Sepich says that McCarthy sought to "explode the American dream of manifest destiny, and racial domination and endless imperial expansion" (146). According to W. Eugene Hollon, the novel contains "twin strains":

"civilization and extermination – marched side by side through American history" (129), Manifest Destiny and genocide. The judge's narcissism represents man's egocentrism and ethnocenticism which in the United States promotes imperialism, western expansion, and manifest destiny. According to Bob Allen:

> The taming and settlement of the American frontier were, for nearly a century, symbolic of our national courage, undaunted pioneering zeal and manifest destiny. But in contemporary literature, as often as not, the tables have been turned. The westward expansion and its cultural and ecological implications – particularly the devastation of Native-American cultures and the pillaging of the environment – have become symptomatic of our collective national guilt. (X08)

Most scholars agree McCarthy and Twain both criticize this aspect of the American character. The judge rather than being a symbol of man's baser nature, as many perceive him, is a consequence of civilization.

Blood Meridian's portrayal of attempts to exterminate the Native American population parallels the portrayal of slavery in Twain's novel. Le Menager maintains, "Twain recognizes that the romantic pirate of child's play, the Indian fighter, and the historical slaver are one" (431). The men of *Blood Meridian* engage in what Jarrett calls "Indian-hating" (92). However, McCarthy does not portray the Indians as helpless victims like the slaves, used by the white man for his own profit and advantage. They are as ruthless and murderous as the men sent to kill them. All characters of *Blood Meridian* are "deep in the pit" and "far beyond the pale," as Sylder says of Gifford in *The Orchard*

Keeper (215).

McCarthy not only appears to complete Twain, he seems to be applying Bloom's tessera upon his own work – to complete himself. McCarthy shatters the myth of the Old West, but this was not a myth that Twain created, as many scholars theorize, or that Twain even believed. He would have shattered it himself had he completed *Huck Finn and Tom Sawyer among the Indians*. In *Blood Meridian* McCarthy carries violence to a greater extreme than ever before in his fiction. He also carries the combination of violence and humor found in Southwest Humor and the Western tale, coming from Twain, to extreme absurdist conclusions. He asks "how do you like it now? Is this funny? Is man's inhumanity to man funny?"

Blood Meridian is a horrifyingly prophetic vision of our future, ironically staged in our past. Twain employed the same device when he set a novel about Reconstruction and racism in pre-Civil War times. McCarthy's purpose might be seen in, as Parkes says, that "the novel suggests that the script of American history remains open to rewriting" (120). We may be unable to change the past, but we can stop repeating it, or even more importantly, stop intensifying its mistakes. Certainly McCarthy completes a message of the danger of ostensibly civilizing forces.

As Guillemin says, "the stories of the past are told in expectance of future generations implicated in, while alienated from, a past not theirs" (262). McCarthy begins *Blood Meridian* with "See the child" (3), and Guillemin purposes McCarthy refers not just to the kid, but to children in general (249). *The Orchard Keeper's* blind kittens become a tree of dead babies in *Blood Meridian* (57). The novel's focus on children

implies the importance of the future. *Blood Meridian,* like *Huckleberry Finn,* is like finding a message in a bottle, wisdom from relatively recent history. Twain's *Huckleberry Finn* seems very far in the past.

CHAPTER FIVE

HUCK ON, AND OFF, THE BEST SELLER LIST

After *Blood Meridian*, McCarthy's fiction settles in the West. His next novel was *All the Pretty Horses*, the first of his Border Trilogy and the first work to bring McCarthy popular success. Woodward calls the novel "Huck Finn and Tom Sawyer on horseback" ("Mojave Rattlesnakes" 30). Henry Kisor in his review "Lighting Out for the Territory: Breakthrough for a Cult Novelist?" says, "The story, at least in its bare bones, is familiar: Huck and Tom light out for the Territory, experience all sorts of hair-raising adventures, and return sadder and infinitely wiser" (1). Irving Malin's review compares *All the Pretty Horses* to "the traditional initiation we find in *Huckleberry Finn* or, for that matter, in Faulkner's *The Reivers*" (29). Owens asserts, "The cowboy protagonists are likeable, good-natured young men who set off on quests for adventure, in the mode of Huck Finn" (63). Many reviews as well as subsequent scholarly articles discuss the correspondences between *Huckleberry Finn* and *All the Pretty Horses* in particular and the Border Trilogy in general. Likewise, Shaw highlights the trilogy's connections to *Huck Finn and Tom Sawyer among the Indians* when he says:

> Mark Twain, for example, attempted to replicate Huck Finn's journey down the Mississippi by setting him loose on the Western frontier. Twain soon recognized the limitations of the genre and abandoned the tale. Yet, despite such precedent

> as this, McCarthy employs the combination twice in succession and reemphasizes it in the third novel. (257)

He implies that McCarthy, possibly unadvisedly, set out to finish what Twain could not.

In the Border Trilogy, McCarthy creates orphans who, like Huck, embark on journeys in search of a home. In these quests, they enlist the aid of guides or mentors. They seek assistance from surrogate parents, lovers, and brothers, but still find no place where they belong, no country of their own and no hopeful frontier in the territory beyond. *All the Pretty Horses* may be the McCarthy novel most like *Huckleberry Finn*; however, McCarthy carries it beyond what Twain proposed. Huck finds no satisfaction where he has been, but looks West with hope of something better. McCarthy's protagonists, already West, head to Mexico with the same hope. However, they find no salvation there. McCarthy travels the same road as Twain, only farther down it, to find nothing at the end. The Border Trilogy provides a resolution to Twain's indefinite ending in *Huckleberry Finn*.

All the Pretty Horses (1992) relates the journey of John Grady Cole and his friend Lacy Rawlins. After the death of John Grady's grandfather and the sale of the family ranch, he and Rawlins head to Mexico in search of adventure and fulfillment. Along the way, they meet Jimmy Blevins, who has presumably stolen a valuable horse which is then stolen by locals. They become separated from Blevins during an attempt to regain the horse and ride on to Don Hector's ranch where John Grady impresses Don Hector with his horsemanship and falls in love with the ranch owner's daughter, Alejandra. When Alejandra's father discovers their affair, he turns John Grady and Rawlins over to the Mexican police who have been looking for Blevins's accomplices in the horse theft.

Blevins is executed by a corrupt police captain, and John Grady and Rawlins are sent to the state prison in Saltillo. After their release, Rawlins goes home to Texas, but John Grady returns for Alejandra and the horses. Alejandra refuses John Grady's marriage proposal and returns to her family. John Grady returns to Texas with the horses; however, in the end, he rides off once more in search of a place where he belongs.

The second novel of the trilogy, *The Crossing* (1994), chronicles Billy Parham's three trips from New Mexico to Mexico. On the first trip, Billy attempts to return a pregnant she-wolf to the mountains of Mexico. After many dangerous struggles with the wolf and the people who try to steal her from him, Billy is forced to kill the wolf rather than allow her to suffer at the hands of her captors. Billy returns home to find that his parents have been murdered by Indians, who have also stolen their horses. Billy and his younger brother Boyd travel back to Mexico to recover their horses. Boyd falls in love with a Mexican girl and eventually leaves Billy. Billy searches for his brother, but ultimately returns to New Mexico alone. Three years later, Billy returns to Mexico, but finds only his brother's bones, which he brings home to bury on American soil.

The third novel, *Cities of the Plain* (1998), unites John Grady and Billy on a ranch in Alamogordo, New Mexico. John Grady falls in love with a Mexican prostitute, Magdalena. He plans to marry her, but he must first rescue her from her pimp, Eduardo. Eduardo has Magdalena killed rather than lose her, and John Grady kills Eduardo but not before Eduardo inflicts a fatal stab wound. John Grady later bleeds to death in Billy's arms. The novel's epilogue jumps fifty years into the future; Billy has become a homeless drifter in Arizona.

All three of these works present a Huck Finn protagonist. Despite already living in Texas, John Grady still "lights out for the territory." This time he heads to the only close frontier left, Mexico. Thus, as with *Blood Meridian*, *All the Pretty Horses* seems to pick up where *Huckleberry Finn* left off. In scholarly discussions of *Blood Meridian*, this novel's protagonist takes a critical backseat to the violence he witnesses and perpetrates and to his nemesis the judge, but in *All the Pretty Horses* most commentary focuses directly on John Grady Cole. According to Morrison,

> This novel is fundamentally a *Bildungsroman*, a coming of age story in the great tradition of Hawthorne, Twain, Melville and James, that archetypal American genre in which a youthful protagonist turns his back on civilization and heads out – into the forest, down river, across the sea or, as in John Grady's case, through desert and mountain on horseback – into the wilderness where innocence experiences the evil of the universe and risks defeat by it. This initiation tale also is imbued with the uniquely American variation on the theme of the fall from innocence into experience so aptly explored by James in particular, but also by Hawthorne and Twain, in which the American naïf with his straightforward, unsophisticated notions of right and wrong, his code of honor and his simplistic conception of good and evil, is challenged by the moral relativism of an older, more complex civilization to deepen that vision. (178)

She paints a clear picture of John Grady and, like Shaw, highlights the novel's indebtedness to Twain's work.

Morrison seconds Jarrett's point concerning McCarthy's protagonist when she says, "John Grady is clearly more hero than anti-hero" (178): it is a significant change in

McCarthy's fiction. Josyph is probably representative in his reaction that "there is no one in *Blood Meridian* I can give a damn about" (189), but most readers will care for John Grady. As Josyph says, John Grady is who the kid is unsuccessfully trying to become (182). John Grady is not "a fourteen carat gold plated son of a bitch" (McCarthy, *All the Pretty Horses* 155). He is the stereotypical white-hat wearer. John Grady's special-ness is even more obvious than Huck's is. He speaks Spanish fluently, communicates with horses as if he were one of them, and impresses all who see him with his horsemanship. He also reveals a capacity to love, a self-control, a maturity, and a fearlessness in the face of danger beyond his sixteen years – he has a sense of honor. Once again, commentary on Huck aptly applies to one of McCarthy's young men. As Guerin claims, "The mass of humanity is hopelessly depraved, and the genuinely honest individual is constantly being victimized, betrayed, and threatened" (128). John Grady is caught up in Blevins's crimes because of his compassion for the hapless boy. He insists on helping Blevins recover his stolen horse despite Rawlins's better judgment. He is eventually imprisoned and nearly killed for this compassion for Blevins and his love for Alejandra. Like Huck, his compassion for others ensnares him in a dangerous web.

John Grady tells the Mexican captain who questions him about Blevins's exploits and his and Rawlins's involvement, "There aint but one truth… The truth is what happened. It aint what come out of somebody's mouth" (168). When John Grady is holding the captain captive, John Grady declares, "I aint goin to kill you, he said. I'm not like you" (278). John Grady has set out on a mission to right wrong, to reverse his past and correct his mistakes. His skill and goodness are surpassed only by his passion for life. McCarthy says, "What [John Grady] loved in horses was what he loved in men, the blood

and the heat of the blood that ran them. All his reverence and all his fondness and all the leanings of his life were for the ardenhearted and they would always be so and never otherwise" (*All the Pretty Horses* 6). He is the most Huck-like character in the trilogy and is usually seen this way by critics. However, the trilogy really has two protagonists. Billy Parham sparks almost as many Huck Finn comparisons, or at least he does for his part in *The Crossing*. In *Cities of the Plain*, John Grady stays Huck, but Billy becomes the older, wiser friend. He takes on the role of mentor.

John Grady and Billy, as do all of McCarthy's protagonists before them, share Huck's orphaned status, John Grady figuratively and Billy literally. *All the Pretty Horses* opens with the funeral of John Grady's grandfather, his primary parent and the owner of the Texas ranch where he has been raised. His parents are divorced and apparently long ago reneged on their responsibility to the boy. His father is damaged by his experiences in World War II and incapable of caring for anyone else. He is a good man, but not a father to John Grady. He tells John Grady, "I aint the same as I was. I'd like to think I am. But I ain't." John Grady, desperate to have his father, replies, "You are inside. Inside you are" (12). Likewise, his mother is living but dead to John Grady, cut off from her son by the drastic differences in their priorities and desires in life. They have no understanding of one another, and although John Grady tries to understand his mother, she has no interest in understanding him. His mother is too caught up in her city life and her own aspirations of a career as an actress to care about the boy or the ranch he holds dear. She will sell the ranch and use the money to finance her new life. She represents the modern world she longs to join. They will never be able to communicate because the gulf between them is too great: between past and present, between the city and John

Grady's country. His father is around briefly and provides some words of wisdom, but in no way satisfies John Grady's longing for guidance. His mother is usually physically absent from his life and completely absent emotionally. At sixteen, John Grady, despite his two living parents and the family's financial means, is on his own. Similarly, after the murder of Billy's parents early in *The Crossing*, he becomes an orphan. He had good parents, loving and attentive ones, but they are slain by Indians.

John Grady and Billy also share with Huck and McCarthy's other protagonists the need for escape. Once again in McCarthy's fiction, according to Jarrett, "the theme of the journey [is] at the center" (vii). As *All the Pretty Horses* begins, John Grady "stood like a man come to the end of something" (5). Despite this ominous opening, the novel does begin with hope. John Grady and Lacy Rawlins start their journey in much the same spirit as Huck, with excitement over the possibility of great adventure. They may be running away, but at least they feel they are doing more than running away from something; they are running to something better. In *Blood Meridian*, the kid has lost this excitement and innocence long before the first page. However, when John Grady and Rawlins head farther west, they are in a paradoxical position, "loosely jacketed against the cold and ten thousand worlds for the choosing" (McCarthy, *All the Pretty Horses* 30). They are headed to Mexico. In 1948, unlike 1848 when the kid sets out, Texas is no longer "the territory." Civilization has caught up with it. They must go to Mexico. What they initially find is the Hacienda de Nuestra Senora de la Purisima Conception, and it is heaven on earth. Rawlins asks John Grady how long he would like to stay on the ranch, and John Grady replies, "About a hundred years" (96). McCarthy describes the ranch

and Alejandra as "real horse, real rider, real land and yet a dream withal" (132), but unfortunately, their journey cannot end there. According to Jonathan Yardley:

> The great American metaphor is the road: the road we followed as the frontier pushed steadily westward, the road to self-discovery (or self-delusion), the road to everywhere (and nowhere), the road to escape (Huck Finn lighting out for the territory), the road to that most persistent of American dreams, a new life. ("Nomad's Land" C09)

Yardley quotes Richard Grant, who observes that "the road is America's preeminent symbol of freedom," a symbolism crystallized by Twain. "Freedom is impossible and meaningless within the confines of sedentary society … the only true freedom is the freedom to roam across the land, beholden to no one" (C09). John Grady, like Huck, is very aware of this fact, but Billy only subconsciously so. In *The Crossing*, he believes his quest is to return the she-wolf's freedom and may never fully realize it is his own freedom he pursues. He begins his journey more by accident and in desperation than the sense of fun and hope that Huck and John Grady experience.

As with Huck and the kid, John Grady reaches out to many potential guides in his search. Luce says the first trilogy novel presents "his rejection of a series of mentors and models, chief among which are Rawlins, Alfonsa, and the judge; and Blevins and the Encantada captain as negative models" ("When you Wake" 159). She could also include Don Hector, Perez (the prison godfather), and various old Mexican men John Grady questions in Spanish along his travels. Conversely, Alfonsa appears to be the voice of reason. She spends a great deal of time explaining her reasoning to John Grady. However, most scholars agree that her treatise on the meaning of life goes unheeded by

her would-be disciple. Don Hector also offers his world view, but neither Don Hector nor Alfonsa has John Grady's best interests in mind. Their primary concern is Alejandra. The darker side of life's meaning comes from Perez, who philosophizes concerning the nature of evil and what lies deep within men's hearts. He gives advice but no assistance. He sounds like the judge from *Blood Meridian* when he says that "Like all men of means … my only desire is to be entertained" (191). He is ultimately an illusion, a man like Judge Holden who would use John Grady for his own selfish purposes. The most significant of his Mexican guides is the old man who tells him about the souls of horses: "finally he said that among men there was no such communion as among horses and the notion that men can be understood at all was probably an illusion" (111). His message is that what John Grady seeks is probably unattainable.

John Grady's search for a surrogate father is as unsuccessful as the kid's until the close of *All the Pretty Horses* when he finds an actual judge to judge him. The judge is a man with unselfish concern, but one who knows he has very little to offer the boy. In court after hearing John Grady's story, the judge proclaims, "I've sat on the bench in this county since it was a county and in that time I've heard a lot of things that give me grave doubts about the human race but this aint one of em" (McCarthy, *All the Pretty Horses* 289). John Grady later visits the judge at his home because the judge's words in the courtroom "was like I was in the right about everthing and I dont feel that way" (290). John Grady seeks absolution, and the judge tries to provide it: "you strike me as somebody that maybe tends to be a little hard on theirselves. I think from what you told me you done real well to get out of there with a whole hide. Maybe the best thing to do might be just to go on and put it behind you. My daddy used to tell me not to chew on

somethin that was eatin you" (291). John Grady replies, "it just bothered me that you might think I was something special. I aint" (293). When he leaves the judge, he is only half convinced that his sins can be forgiven. He must learn to forgive himself.

Unlike Huck, who discovers Jim, McCarthy's young men repeatedly search for the father or mother unsuccessfully. Many scholarly discussions of this search for the father miss the point that failure is understandable considering that the shedding of parental influence is fundamental to emotional growth and part of the maturation process. If McCarthy is writing Bildungsromans, coming-of-age stories, then the protagonists must ultimately, in a sense, be orphaned. They must be moving away from the parent. The absence of parents is also important for Huck. Twain scholars criticize Huck for leaving Jim in the end, but he too must move on. Adulthood brings adult relationships. Don Hector, speaking of his daughter, tells John Grady, "A father is nothing" (146). Children must grow up. For the first time in a McCarthy novel, the protagonist of *All the Pretty Horses* looks seriously to romantic love to fill his emotional void. An obvious difference from previous McCarthy novels and something that probably contributes to this novel's increased popularity is the inclusion of a love interest for the protagonist. Unlike Suttree's affairs, the relationship between John Grady and Alejandra is a major plot element. However, the love affair in the book is a conventional Shakespearean Romeo and Juliet story. The reader also learns of the love affair between John Grady's parents, a relationship that at one time was passionate. The failure of his parents' relationship foreshadows the failure of romantic love in general and John Grady's in particular.

The inclusion of a love interest might first seem a contrast with *Huckleberry Finn*, but Alejandra appears to be an echo of at least Twain's Sophia Grangerford and possibly of Mary Jane Wilkes. Gary Hink asserts that Twain does introduce sexuality into *Huckleberry Finn* via the character of Sophia, who runs away with Harney Sheperdson (par. 5). The message in the Bible arranging their rendezvous makes her "mighty red in the face … and her eyes lighted up, and it made her powerful pretty" (Twain, *Huckleberry Finn* 120). According to Hink:

> It is imagery that confirms Sophia is a female with sexual passion…. This character is not a stereotypical Victorian woman, especially since she is excited about running away and allegedly eloping with Harney…. Twain supports Sophia and Harney, as they make it across the river safely, and condemns Southern violence between and consequent loss of life in the Grangerford and Sheperdson families. (par. 5)

This sexual passion is evident in Alejandra, and John Grady's time with her is a respite from the violence of the rest of the novel. John Grady believes Alejandra is "ardenhearted" but finds that she is only rebellious and reactionary, not like him at all. She tells him, "I couldnt stand for her [Alfonsa] to have that power" (251). She had to defy her aunt, and the purpose of her relationship with John Grady has been primarily to shock and defy her father. Ultimately, she chooses her father's love over John Grady's, a step back in the maturation process. Mosle asserts she "doesn't have the courage to run away with him" (16), as Sophia does with Harney.

Although not reciprocated, Huck's feelings for Mary Jane are romantic and passionate, as are his feelings for Peggy Mills in *Huck Finn and Tom Sawyer among the Indians*. The fates of John Grady's loves parallel those of Huck's. Huck and Mary Jane have an age gap while John Grady and Alejandra a social barrier. At their parting, Huck knows he will never forget her, and John Grady "saw very clearly how all his life led only to this moment and all after led nowhere at all. He felt something cold and soulless enter him and he had no reason to believe it will ever end" (McCarthy, *All the Pretty Horses* 254). Mary Jane, like Alejandra, lives on to find a more suitable mate possibly. These first girls' lives continue, but the protagonists' later loves do not fare as well. Peggy and Magdalene, of *Cities of the Plain,* suffer similar fates: Magdalene has been victimized and turned into a whore by Eduardo, and the same fate is what Brace fears for Peggy at the hands of the Indians. We never know Peggy's ultimate fate because Twain stops writing in the midst of Huck's quest to save her, but we can speculate that Peggy suffers a fate worse than death among the Indians, and in *Cities of the Plain,* Magdalena is murdered on her pimp's orders, despite John Grady's efforts to rescue her. Both girls become victims of sexual exploitation. Neither protagonist is a knight in shining armory. John Grady gets himself as well as his love killed.

As Nancy Walker and others have argued, with *All the Pretty Horses* and the rest of the Border Trilogy, McCarthy's bringing romance and women into his fiction resulted in bringing women readers to his books. This new and intensified emphasis on affairs of the heart may or may not indicate a changed view of women in the trilogy. Rawlins tells John Grady, women "aint worth it," and John Grady after some thought, replies, "Yes they are" (McCarthy, *All the Pretty Horses* 10). However, many scholars believe this

new interest and inclusion of women is superficial. Nell Sullivan refers to "McCarthy's narrative misogyny" (252). She says that through his fiction he is "trying to make women unnecessary" (252). Yet others want to believe much of the novel's philosophy for the first time is voiced by a woman, Alfonsa. She explains to John Grady about men and women, history and war, the politics of Mexico, the nature of man, and the meaning of life. Shaw, on the other hand, believes that Alfonsa has no substance as a character and no real power (259) and that Alejandra is a clichéd Latin female, nothing more than a "plot facilitator" (260). Mosle concurs: "None of the women in these novels [of the Border Trilogy] are particularly believable" (16). While Jane Tompkins calls *Cities of the Plain* a "womanless milieu" (44), Mosle proposes that "the most complex and sympathetic female character in the trilogy may be the wolf" (16) from *The Crossing*. If the latter is true, then the protagonists' desires would be more for communion with nature than with women. John Grady is more at one with horses than with either of his lovers. As Mosle says, "One can't help suspecting that deep down McCarthy wonders, Henry Higgins fashion, 'Why can't a woman be more like a horse?'" (16). It is hardly a question that Twain would ask.

Shaw believes McCarthy recognizes that men and women are so discordant that they cannot ever connect in any meaningful way (267). McCarthy is "juxtaposing [men's] intellectual obtuseness with the subtlety and cleverness of the collective feminine intelligence" (263). Women consider and act; men just act. Males "act on instinct" (267) and have the "disturbing trait of letting rash action precede thought" (265). The female "perceives, reflects, then acts" (266). Don Hector cryptically warns John Grady, "Beware gentle knight. There is no greater monster than reason" (McCarthy, *All the*

Pretty Horses 148). The summation of Shaw's argument might be "men are from Mars, and women are from Venus." Therefore, no real solace can be found in romantic relationships, only further complication. In his review, Michael Dirda explains, "McCarthy does paint the time-worn round of cowboy life as a male idyll, a world of masculine camaraderie and skillfulness, one in which women may bring temporary happiness but ultimately only grief and regret" (X05). As Owens says, for McCarthy's characters "romance does not lead to domestic stability" (65).

Perhaps domestic stability is not the goal. Domesticity blocks a man's ability to define himself, to find his individual identity. According to Sullivan, women are property in the trilogy: objects in the rivalry between two men. The real relationship is between men (247), men who are pioneers, "free to define themselves and to create their own will, to carve out their mythic space" (Owens 72). They are men who share an understanding of the open road, the river, the sea, and the barren prairie. Like parental relationships, romantic ones are inadequate. Parents hold a young man back in an effort to protect their child; women do not see a logical reason for their journeys.

Like parental and romantic ones, a relationship with God appears to provide inadequate comfort or guidance as well. Hope in that search, a primary quest in *Suttree*, has waned in McCarthy's later fiction. *All the Pretty Horses* begins with a dismissal of God. At the funeral of John Grady's grandfather, "The preacher's words were lost in the wind" (4), and with numerous references to abandoned churches, the issue of religion is all but deserted in the trilogy, certainly compared to its importance in *Suttree*. John Grady expresses his apathy or at least ambiguity concerning religion when Rawlins questions him about his beliefs: "you think you can believe in heaven if you dont believe

in hell? [John Grady replies] I guess you can believe in what you want to… You fixin to get religion on us?" (91). John Grady does not see any answers there. What one believes does not matter. I have to agree with Shaviro's claim that *Blood Meridian* marked an abandonment of McCarthy's serious consideration of faith in religion and God: "*Blood Meridian* is not a salvation narrative; we can be rescued neither by faith nor by works nor by grace" (113).

While fathers, mothers, lovers, and God have all disappointed McCarthy's young men, brothers are a different story. Oates declares that the Border Trilogy "celebrates brotherhood" (42). Moving from the search for the father to the search for a brother or buddy is also a sign of maturity, and brothers, unlike women, understand the protagonist's quest. In McCarthy's "textual pairings" (Shaw 266) brothers prevail. He presents three sets of brothers. John Grady Cole and Lacy Rawlins of *All the Pretty Horses*, the actual biological brothers Billy and Boyd Parham of *The Crossing*, and eventually John Grady and Billy in *Cities of the Plain*. In this last novel of the trilogy, Billy's final thoughts are of his brother, over fifty years after his death: "I'd give about anything to see him one more time" (281).

Sullivan claims that in McCarthy's fiction "the attraction between men is often more passionate than that between a man and a women" (246). The brothers "do value each other above their typical level of concern for others. One hesitates to term these emotions 'love,' yet they do surpass mere camaraderie" (Shaw 266). Male camaraderie is a popular topic for McCarthy commentary, and this camaraderie is a major motif, and critical subject, for *Huckleberry Finn*, of course. Leslie Fiedler in "Come Back to the Raft Ag'in, Huck Honey!" was one of the first critics to recognize what he calls "a

peculiar form of innocent homosexuality" (*Love in Death* 349), "a chaste male love," an "immaculate male love" ("Come Back" 533), and "the ultimate emotional experience" (530). Fiedler is referring to the connection of Huck and Jim, what most see as a father and son relationship. However, *Huckleberry Finn* contains a very famous brother relationship as well – Huck and Tom, two boys who stay together through four books and many adventures. Their relationship seems closer to what Fiedler calls "buddy – buddiness" (529), a type of boyhood relationship that precedes an awareness of sexual experience, a time when "the possibility of a fall to the carnal had not yet been discovered" (531).

Tom and Huck share a love for one another. When Huck meets back up with Tom at the Phelps's farm, he knows without consideration that he will do as Tom wants. Huck comes up with a quick and workable plan to free Jim, but gives in to Tom's machinations: "I see in a minute it was worth fifteen of mine, for style, and would make Jim as free a man as mine would, and maybe get us all killed besides" (Twain, *Huckleberry Finn* 210). Despite his awareness of the danger, Huck's only objection to the plan is a consideration for Tom, not Jim. He tries to reason with Tom, to protect him and his character from the charge of "nigger stealing" because, as Huck says, Tom "had a character to lose" (210). But once again Huck acquiesces: "If he was bound to have it so, I couldn't help it" (211). Huck must do as his brother wishes; he will forsake all for his love.

Huck may support Tom completely and admire him unconditionally, but Tom is a weak brother for Huck. He is self-serving, and like many other people in Huck's life, he uses him for his own purposes – in Tom's case, for amusement. Tom never understands

Huck or his quest for freedom and identity. Huck, unlike Tom, upholds the brother code and tries to stick with Tom in his lunacy even though he does not understand it. Tom's narcissistic tendencies interfere with his devotion to Huck. Huck understands the bond of brothers even if Tom does not. The conclusion of *Huckleberry Finn* pits Huck's father relationship against his brother relationship, and ostensively Huck chooses the brother, despite his intense and genuine desire to free Jim. Fortunately, this decision ultimately results in the freeing of Jim anyway. Alone on the river, Huck has needed his father figure, Jim. This reliance on the father is also characteristic of Huck's younger age, 13 or 14, while the kid of *Blood Meridian* is only 14 and, like Huck, still searching for a father which makes him vulnerable to the judge. The "boys" of *The Border Trilogy* are young men. McCarthy's youth now are never faced with the decision of choosing father over brother. Their fathers are already gone. Alejandra does face that choice, and she regresses to the childhood alternative of father: "I didn't know that he would stop loving me. I didn't know he could. Now I know" (McCarthy, *All the Pretty Horses* 252).

Bloom says that Tom is Huck's "idol" (*Bloom's Guide* 20), implying Huck is Tom's sidekick, but the relationship also places Huck in the feminine role. Fiedler identifies Huck as feminine and calls the relationship between Huck and Jim an unfortunate "marriage" doomed to failure: "they pet and sustain each other in mutual love and trust; make on their raft an anti-family of two, only a transitory, perilous present of peace and joy" (*Love and Death* 278-279). Fiedler has recognized that this relationship, although between a man and a boy, is not quite father and son; however, it is not that of lovers either, despite the gender inversion. Huck and Jim both wear dresses at various points in the novel, as does Tom during the grand "evasion" (Twain, *Huckleberry*

Finn 241). However, Jim does not really need a dress; slavery has already emasculated him. Their relationship is more mother, or mammy, and child than father and son, brother, or lover. Jim, unlike Solomon, "knows the value" of a child (73). According to Hink, "the novel is about Huck's maturation as a result of his interaction with women and a man, (Jim), who displays the stereotypically feminine characteristics of valuing family and caring for Huck" (par. 9). If anything, Jim is a mother figure – feeding and petting Huck, nurturing him as a mother would -- and the pseudo-sexual attraction that Fiedler observes can be more accurately described as the oedipal one that mother and son share. Whether Jim is metaphorically father or mother, Huck, at the end of the novel, has moved from a parental relationship to a brotherly one in his union with Tom, a movement marked by his decision to stick with Tom's plan over Jim's best interests.

Like Twain who makes Jim a mother and Tom a lover, McCarthy is trying to make "women unnecessary" (Sullivan 252). Sullivan applies Fiedler's theory to John Grady and Billy Parham. In "Boys Will Be Boys and Girls Will Be Gone," she says, "While women are systematically eliminated from the narrative in the trilogy, the feminine itself remains and is ultimately 'performed' by biologically male characters" (229). She provides ample support for "Billy's feminization" (237). Her essay argues that Billy Parham plays the girl to his brother's boy and eventually, in *Cities of the Plain,* to John Grady's masculine presence. Sullivan's argument does not include the earlier novel, but this motif of multi-gendered brotherly love begins in *All the Pretty Horses*. The same premise of feminization applies to Rawlins. His first name is Lacy, and he idolizes John Grady. Their repeated promise to never "quit" one another exemplifies an intense commitment: John Grady asks Rawlins, "you aint fixed to quit me are you?

[Rawlins replies] I said I wouldn't" (91). Christopher Looby adds to Fiedler's argument that "frontier communities were another site of homosexual emergence," for example, mining camps and ranches (545), and cowboy love has been recently showcased in the Academy Award winning film *Brokeback Mountain*. Andrew J. Hoffman in "Mark Twain and Homosexuality" speculates that Twain himself may have had homosexual relationships while out West (40). McCarthy's male characters' relationships never become overtly sexual, but the young men share a love and commitment beyond any male/female union in the novels. Despite their love for one another, McCarthy's brothers do not always completely empathize with the protagonists' motives either, just as Tom cannot empathize completely with Huck's. But they stick by them, love them unconditionally and value their quest, even when they think they are wrong. Rawlins appears to be the sensitive side to John Grady's strong, silent demeanor. Like the kid and most cowboys, John Grady is not much of a talker. He is fond of saying "and that's about all I got to say" (156). Rawlins is certainly more prone to voicing his love and commitment to John Grady, but he also attempts to reason with John Grady on several occasions. Like the women Shaw describes, Rawlins is the voice of reason, but reason does not always prevail. Reason would hold a man back in his pursuit of self. Most notably, Rawlins tries to reason with John Grady shortly before they involve themselves in Blevins's fight: "Ever dumb thing I ever done in my life there was a decision I made before that got me into it. It was never the dumb thing. It was always some choice I made before it. You understand what I'm sayin?" (McCarthy, *All the Pretty Horses* 79). Yet, John Grady always ignores him and impulsively acts. Rawlins plays it safe, but

John Grady will not play along, and neither does Huck. He will risk everything for Jim, even if it means going to hell.

John Grady has more than one "I'll go to hell" moment in the novel, and as a result actually does go to a hell of sorts because of his actions. The decision to help Blevins as well as the decision to pursue Alejandra combine to land John Grady and Rawlins in a Mexican prison. Together, the boys battle for survival in this hellish world: "In an egalitarian absolute every man was judged by a single standard and that was his readiness to kill" (182). John Grady responds to the test, "I intend to make em kill me. I wont take nothin less. They either got to kill us or let us be. There aint no middle ground" (183). Rawlins, on the other hand, walks into the fray, sacrificing himself to end the battle. When the man attacks him, he "leaped three times backward with his shoulders hunched and his arms outflung like a man referencing his own bloodletting" (189). When attacked, John Grady fights to his attacker's death. Rawlins does not adapt as well to the new, harsher environment: "I never knowed there was such a place as this" (184). He could have freed himself while in the prison hospital, but he would not leave John Grady behind: "I could of run off from where they had me. It was just a hospital ward. Why didnt you?… I wouldnt of left you… Yeah. I know you wouldnt" (McCarthy, *All the Pretty Horses* 210). Rawlins will not abandon his buddy even to escape hell.

Rawlins's reasonings are usually correct and would have kept the boys out of trouble had they followed his direction, but he is also motivated by love's green-eyed monster. Sullivan points out Billy's jealousy of his brother Boyd's romantic relationship in *The Crossing* and later John Grady's love for Magdalena in *Cities of the Plain*, but

Rawlins is also jealous, first of Blevins and later of Alejandra. John Grady's attraction to Jimmy Blevins is as puzzling as Suttree's attraction to Gene in the earlier novel. Rawlins is more than puzzled; he is angered by it. Blevins is very much a Gene-like character, and like Suttree and Gene, John Grady and Blevins do not make a likely pair. However, the explanation is simple; Blevins, although ragged and possibly insane, is "ardenhearted," and John Grady identifies with that quality. Rawlins says, "I knowed when I first seen him the son of a bitch had a loose wingnut... It was writ all over him" (71), but so is his ardenheartedness. Rawlins sees instability and danger while John Grady sees passion. Even Rawlins recognizes Blevins's passion: "I'll say one thing about him… The little son of a bitch wouldn't stand still for nobody high-jackin his horse" (88). John Grady is attracted to Blevins for the same reason he is later attracted to Alejandra. Rawlins attempts to warn John Grady away from her in the same way he did with Blevins: "What I see is you fixin to get us fired and run off the place" (139). John Grady repeatedly tells Rawlins he can go back to the "house," and Rawlins eventually does return home, never to appear in the trilogy again. The trip to Mexico was John Grady's idea, and Rawlins returns to domestic security and comfort while John Grady heads out for new territories. Fiedler calls the buddy relationships "infantile" ("Come Back" 530), and "not adult" (531). They mark a development past the need for parental influence but are still not a part of adulthood. John Grady must move on without Rawlins. His buddy, brother, has served him well, but McCarthy will teach his protagonists self-reliance. Rawlins can be domesticated and live in the modernized world, but John Grady cannot.

John Grady eventually accepts the new order, but he will not live in it. John Grady rides conventionally off into the sunset at the end of *All the Pretty Horses*. The ending reproduces the end of *Huckleberry Finn*, John Grady heading out for yet another territory, searching for "my country" (299). Mosle describes the end of McCarthy's novel as "a cross between *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* and 'My Friend Flicka'" (16), not a very flattering comparison. The "bloodred sunset" and "bloodred dust" that "coppered" John Grady's face and the "red wind" (McCarthy, *All the Pretty Horses* 302*)* that blew are foreshadowing that our hero is not likely to live happily ever after. This unhappy future plays out in *Cities of the Plain* in which John Grady is stabbed in a knife fight with Magdalena's pimp Eduardo and slowly bleeds to death in a shed in the arms of Billy Parham.

A critical controversy regarding *All the Pretty Horses* is whether John Grady is changed by these experiences, whether he has learned anything. This debate is the same as that about Huckleberry Finn, whether he learns and is wiser at the end of his trip on the river. Fiedler says, "After all, if he is young enough to believe he will find in the territory whatever he is looking for, surely he is still young enough to change. Or is he?" (*Love and Death* 101). For over a century, readers and scholars have wondered how deep Huck's understanding of Jim's humanity goes and what that understanding will mean for his future behavior. Jarrett suggests that, like the kid of *Blood Meridian*, John Grady has failed. He is unable to adapt "to the moral complexities of love, of modern existence, or of his own life" (ix). John Grady may have had a quest and direction when he set out to cross the border into Mexico, but when he heads out again at the end of the first novel, he is "wandering with no destination" (102). Both he and Billy are unable to reclaim the

myth of the Old West (100); his cowboy code has failed him (102). They lose not just their innocence but their identity as well (105). If anything, John Grady learns that he does not have the freedom to define his own identity (110). Jarrett, believing that "Billy Parham nevertheless becomes aware of [his quest's] absurdity," suggests that "Parham is a more self-conscious and postmodern hero than Cole" (102). Shaw thinks John Grady does not learn anything in either book (266).

Kisor maintains, however, that John Grady "returns to his home and his century wise beyond his years" (1). James Lilley also claims John Grady does learn something. He is trying to go back in time and erase what has happened, reverse history when he goes back for the horses; he tries to "rewind the novel" and correct his mistakes (282), which implies that he understands them. Linda Townley Woodson, too, believes John Grady has learned something very valuable on his journey: he has learned "the truth about 'truth'" (152), "to value what is true above what is useful," as Alfonsa tells him (McCarthy, *All the Pretty Horses* 240). Luce believes that for John Grady the lesson has been about the conquering of illusions and that at the end, he has faced reality and left his fantasies of the world behind ("When you Wake" 162). As Luce asserts:

> Many reviewers have compared this novel to *Huckleberry Finn*. Unlike Huck, however, John Grady finally knows he cannot escape evil by "lighting out for the territory." His wandering at the end of the novel is less escapist than his flight into Mexico at the beginning, and he has progressed in wisdom far more than the rather persistently uncomprehending Huck. ("When You Wake" 166)

John Grady does not appear to have progressed in wisdom, though, when he makes the same mistakes in *Cities of the Plain*. He becomes involved in an even more

doomed relationship with Magdalena, the Mexican prostitute. Morrison says John Grady "left a boy and returns a man, but it is a poignant and sobering rite of passage that leaves him still adrift in time and space" (179), a "naïf no longer, but a man considerably deepened and enriched by the experience" (191). Morrison's assessment implies John Grady has learned a valuable lesson but that it has not done him much practical good. Perhaps, no lessons learned can do him much good because his fate is not in his own hands.

The only real comfort and guidance seem to come from nature, and his attempts to sustain this connection may be a lost cause. Horses in *All the Pretty Horses*, like dogs in *The Orchard Keeper*, are a connection between man and nature (Jarrett 107). John Grady has a union with horses: "He found he was breathing in rhythm with the horse as if some part of the horse were within him breathing and then he descended into some deeper collusion for which he had not even a name" (McCarthy, *All the Pretty Horses* 266). The loss of his grandfather's ranch is the beginning of the end of John Grady's life as a cowboy. Twain, likewise, worries in *Huckleberry Finn* about man's loss of connection with nature, a concern clearly evidenced by his juxtaposing of the river and the shore. Suttree tries to get back to nature through his trip into the mountains. John Grady goes hunting for it in Mexico. At the end of *All the Pretty Horses*, John Grady says, "I don't know where my country is" (240). He is searching for a place he belongs. He belongs on the frontier: that is his country. He is a man who needs a connection with nature, and all doors to it are being closed. Horses offer comfort and connection; the she-wolf offers both as well as an opportunity for Billy to test his manhood, his ability to save nature. But it is too late. Owens claims, "The return of the wolf is an act of redemption

for the sins of mankind for the eradication of wolves everywhere, and for the turning of wilderness into ranches" (79). But returning the pregnant wolf is too little too late.

The Border Trilogy presents the vanishing natural world, man's loss of connection with nature. By the time we get to *Cities of the Plain,* nature has a greatly diminished significance. It is now simply a backdrop. Civilization has lessened nature's threats as well as its gifts. The connection is gone despite man's attempts to hold on. The modern world which has replaced nature is unsubstantial and offers nothing. The search for the father, for God, for love are all attempts to replace what the protagonists have naturally lost. Buddies offer comfort. Still, while Rawlins understands, he ultimately decides not to fight the good fight. Billy understands but becomes too broken to continue. Owens remarks that in the third novel, Billy takes on the role of "pragmatic older brother" to John Grady and "joins the ranks of reason and caution"; he "no longer yearns for adventure or love" (100). Superior men, individualists, will not accept the false connections within modernity. The boys of McCarthy's Western novels are asking, "Where do we turn?"

Jarrett says McCarthy's protagonists are "visionary cowboys who flee from a modern urbanized twentieth-century America in search of a 'last, good country' to the South" (ix). They are searching for something real, something significant and sustaining. McCarthy's protagonists have romanticized ideas of Mexico, and "those idealized notions" cause their troubles (Carson 160). John Grady and Rawlins learn about the Mexicans what Huck and Tom learn about the Indians: story book Mexicans and real Mexicans are not the same. The last work of the trilogy minimizes this journey motif; the boys stay in civilization. They make only brief trips out on the range, and all they see of

Mexico is the corrupt border town of Juarez. The cowboy frontier has vanished almost completely. John Grady rides in cabs and sells his horse and his gun to finance Magdalena's escape and to set up housekeeping.

According to Douglas Canfield, "the trilogy is set in a wasteland in the American southwest, where modern technology and weaponry have corrupted the pastoral frontier that is already slipping through the hands of John Grady after the death of his grandfather in *All the Pretty Horses*" (256). The slipping frontier in *Blood Meridian* is completely gone at the end of *Cities of the Plain*. The white man killed off the Indian to build the ranches, but now civilization and a higher level of technology, especially oil companies, are taking it from them. The encroachment of twentieth-century technology has, as Jarrett says, made the cowboy obsolete. By the 1890s the cowboy and the rancher were already "outmoded" (Jarrett 99).

The violence of McCarthy's novels is rage against the loss of this way of life. To use Dylan Thomas's words, McCarthy's characters "do not go gentle into that good night." According to Mosle:

> McCarthy testifies to the passing not only of individual cowboys but an entire way of life. And if his characters sometimes seem drawn to violence, that may be because it's all that seems ineluctable and real in our appearances-driven world. His men are never more alive than when confronted with death. (16)

Violence, then, is motivated by societal situations, not by an inherent darkness in man's soul. John Grady's father tells him: "People dont feel safe no more, he said. We're like the Comanches was two hundred years ago. We dont know what's goin to show up here come daylight. We dont even know what color they'll be" (McCarthy, *All the Pretty*

Horses 25-26). The Indians' fate has become the cowboys'. They have nowhere left to live as they want. They are becoming increasingly boxed in, and as John Grady's father says, they do not know what the future holds. A resounding message in McCarthy's fiction is that man cannot ever really know anything. Character after character voices this sentiment. Alfonsa tells John Grady, "I think there is little that can be truly known" (*All the Pretty Horses* 238). The protagonists' searches are in pursuit of what John Keats called "negative capability": "when a man is capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason" (72). So far, none of McCarthy's protagonists has found this peace.

In *All the Pretty Horses* particularly and in his trilogy in general, McCarthy backs off from what had become a characteristic violence and nihilism. That is not to say the trilogy is not violent and dark, but it is much less so than this writer's first Western. This work, as Morrison has pointed out, has more of a fairy-tale feel. McCarthy, in effect, reverses the tessera. Instead of believing his fathers have not dared enough and going on to complete them, McCarthy steps back (Josyph 182) from what he dared in earlier works such as *Blood Meridian*. James Lilly thinks *All the Pretty Horses* presents a "surprisingly benign landscape -- as if *Blood Meridian* has exhausted and incinerated all the available blood" (273), as if possibly *Blood Meridian* has bled McCarthy and everyone else dry. Despite this kinder, gentler tone, however, *All the Pretty Horses* manifests the consequences of the societal attitude presented in *Blood Meridian*. It reveals what *Blood Meridian's* message warns us of, the loss of the frontier and the individualist way of life represented by the cowboy. Ultimately, the last cowboy standing at the end of *Cities of the Plain* is 78 year-old Billy Parham: we find him with no horse, no frontier, and no

home. The naïve hope Huck Finn felt for the frontier has vanished. Twain ends his story with an active, alive Huck Finn setting out on the road toward the frontier; McCarthy ends the trilogy with a passive, defeated Billy Parham at the end of the road.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION – HUCK EVERLASTING

At the end of *Cities of the Plain*, McCarthy has an unnamed character tell Billy Parham, "The world of our fathers resides within us. Ten thousand generations and more. A form without a history has no power to perpetuate itself. What has no past can have no future. At the core of our life is the history of which it is composed" (281). The same character lectures Billy about the proper method of composing stories and the importance of telling them: he tells Billy that "each man is the bard of his own existence" (283). For novelist Cormac McCarthy, the story or novel is surely one of those "forms," and for his own literary pursuit one integral human and formal history is clearly the Huck Finn Tradition.

At the end of *Huckleberry Finn*, Huck is still a boy. He is "a rugged Peter Pan who lives eternally" (William Van O'Connor 8). Although Twain envisioned him grown and even old, he never published that sequel. We know only that Twain viewed Huck's end as somewhat pathetic, if not tragic. Writers in the Huck Finn Tradition show us possible alternatives for Huck's future. They in essence find a home for Huck. He does live on, not only as himself but as numerous other fictional characters. The story is so good, the character so captivating that we do not want to give him up. But more than likeable, Huck is real. As Trilling says, Twain "is the master of style that escapes the fixity of the printed page, that sounds in our ears with the immediacy of the heard voice,

the very voice of unpretentious truth" (xviii). Twain's creation so reveals the human condition that he engenders character after character. Eliot says, Huck "has no beginning or end" ("Introduction" 202).

Huck is one of the fundamental building blocks of American literature. The influence of the Huck Finn mythology, a distinctive American myth, underlies these later characters and stories, and some writers have made something impressively new out of what they discovered in and through *Huckleberry Finn*. For no one is this truer than McCarthy. Through tessera, McCarthy does carry Twain further; he updates for a new time and a changed terrain. The mythology that still lies beneath seems just as deeply and freshly essential. And again a new and distinctive prose style is the medium.

Twain and McCarthy write about the same thing: man's struggle to understand himself and his place in the world, his battle against the outside forces that would ask him to deny self and go against what he knows to be right in order to fit in, to perpetuate the status quo, to succumb to the great societal machine (which McCarthy describes in *Blood Meridian*) that would put human pegs in their designated holes despite their true shape. Huck's conflict, although it appears to be man vs. society, is really a struggle with self. He strains over accepting a self that is different from what society would have it be. He believes that he is wrong, not society. McCarthy notably recreates Huck and his struggle in his characters Suttree, John Wesley Rattner, the kid, John Grady Cole, and Billy Parham. John Wesley shows us Huck, the boy, in a hundred years – in the twentieth century. Suttree is Huck grown in to a man. The kid, John Grady, and Billy continue Huck's journey west.

Huck and McCarthy's young men experience the pain that must be endured for a square peg to be forced into a round hole, their stories dealing with the big lie, the lie that we can ever be free of society's control. They, and readers of these novels, are on a journey to understand their place in the world. We see their pursuit of identity, selfhood, and freedom. Huck and the characters he engenders must escape from limiting forces: religion, domestication, and society's various other traps. Huck will not become "society's creature" (Powers 84). Attempting to escape leads to civil disobedience or the characters' "I'll go to Hell" moments: Suttree's sacrifice for Ab, John Grady's for Blevins, or the kid's rejection of the judge.

Through the struggle for individual identity and personal place, Twain and McCarthy reveal the isolation that is inevitably felt: parents cannot help, friends cannot help, society cannot help. That is why Huck and McCarthy's Huck-like characters are orphaned, symbolizing the need for self-reliance. They experience the loneliness that results from refusing to toe the line. Huck finds few individuals who can be role models, few nonconformists who can guide him on this singular quest. Sometimes, however, unlikely outsiders, like Jim, who are self aware and share the struggle, offer guidance. McCarthy reproduces Jim through characters such as Ab Jones, Arthur Ownby, and Marion Sylder. Extending the king and the duke, McCarthy also echoes the distraction of negative influences through Legwater, Gifford, Toadville, Tobin, Perez, and most strikingly the judge of *Blood Meridian*, who McCarthy, through "the language of

taboos," takes far beyond anything Twain envisioned. (The judge may be the most despicable character in American literature.)

Through the judge and other characters like him, McCarthy escalates and emphasizes, even highlights, the violence Twain often treats comically in *Huckleberry Finn*. To paraphrase Perez: violence, evil, and death become "true things" in McCarthy's fiction. McCarthy also extends Tom and Huck's relationship through his brother pairs: Suttree and Gene, John Wesley and Warn, and the more fully-developed relationships of John Grady and Rawlins and John Grady and Billy. Because they are older, McCarthy's characters experience fully-realized romantic relationships, something Twain only lightly touches on. Even though McCarthy's characters, unlike Huck, have lovers, these women are of little comfort. Erotic/heterosexual love does not sustain any more than brotherhood does.

In this lonely void, nature is the supreme comfort. Man's configurations of God are empty. Nature provides a transcendence that makes life bearable. For brief moments, the individual feels whole, and these moments sustain him in the fight. He turns from the fake forms to something that is real. The only real thing is nature: rivers, creeks, forests, deserts, prairies, mountains, horses, wolves. Yet, beyond Twain's fear that we are losing our connection with life-affirming nature is the greater fear that we are losing nature itself to modernization. McCarthy presents such loss.

This dissertation has not looked at all of McCarthy's fiction, but sampled his major novels from 1964 to 1998. Twain and Huck are no less present in the early Tennessee novels *Outer Dark* (1968) and *Child of God* (1973) than in his latest two, *No*

Country for Old Men (2005) and *The Road* (2006). The latter continue to offer fertile ground for seeing the Huck Finn Tradition in McCarthy's work.

In *No Country for Old Men*, the narrator, the "old man" of the title, is not a settled individual, and the novel's world of the 1980s is even more modernized and corrupt. It is a contained country. However, young men are still trying to get to Mexico. With its bleak perspective, *No Country for Old Men* is still a novel of acceptance, and hope. Situations the individualist cannot change or control or run away from, as previous protagonists have, Sheriff Bell accepts. He is the first truly grown man – an old man. Through him, McCarthy has created a somewhat more favorable adulthood for Huck. Bell, no longer the idle wanderer found in McCarthy's earlier protagonists, has become an astute observer. Bell understands himself and joins the human world.

Bell, unlike younger men, accepts his limitations and life's limitations. In accepting those limitations, he is able to accept what comfort life does still provide. God cannot help us: "the world I've seen has not made me a spiritual person" (McCarthy, *No Country for Old Men* 303), but unlike McCarthy's earlier protagonists, Bell has learned to have a relationship with a woman and find comfort there. Bell is happily married, and his relationship with his wife is the most important relationship in his life; it is a very stabilizing and comforting force. "I wish I had her ease about things… I reckon I thought that because I was older and the man that she would learn from me and in many respects she has. But I know where the debt lies" (303). "If I didn't have her I dont know what I would have" (305). Bell also chooses law enforcement as a profession,

possibly in an attempt to control the chaos, but he is ultimately unsuccessful. At the end of the novel, the narrator retires. He takes himself out of the game.

Unlike the kid, who refuses the role of mentor late in *Blood Meridian*, Bell tries to guide a younger man. He watches Llewelyn Moss, who still struggles, and he wishes to help him. For the first time in a McCarthy novel, we see from the father's perspective. A main character's status as an orphan is no longer an issue. He is the father. The father-figure is trying to help a character like Huck, John Wesley, John Grady, or Billy Parham, but this time the youth is trying to rescue money, not a runaway slave, a horse, a she-wolf or even a girl. His pursuit shows just how far the modern world has fallen. Moss rejects his wife and Sheriff Bell's guidance, and battles true evil, the mass-murderer Chigurh. His struggles are for no great cause; he dies for money. He heads to Mexico as promise once again, but he is so distant from nature that he cannot get at it any more. He does not even know to try. He is the most hopeless of McCarthy's Hucks.

No Country for Old Men sounds like a conclusion to Twain's and McCarthy's frontier theme. Bell says, "I think I know where we're headed" (303). "Dope" is the new territory. The frontier is gone, but drugs are far deadlier than the Old West or Mexico. Bell is a modern man, but he looks to the past and his father for answers. His father sounds like the young men of the Border Trilogy: "He went on the road tradin horses when he was not much more than a boy," and "he knew about horses and he was good with em" (308). *No Country for Old Men* ends with a dream of this long-dead cowboy father, ambiguous maybe but arguably a hopeful dream. Bell wishes for "some sort of

promise in his heart" (308) and remembers the dream. In it, he meets his father on the road, as so many of McCarthy's characters have met and passed each other:

> Goin through this pass in the mountains. It was cold and there was snow on the ground and he rode past me and kept on goin. Never said nothing. He just rode on past and he had this blanket wrapped around him and he had his head down and when he rode past I seen he was carryin fire in a horn the way people used to do and I could see the hour from the light inside of it. About the color of the moon. And in the dream I knew that he was goin on ahead and that he was fixin to make a fire somewhere out there in all that dark and all that cold and I knew that whenever I got there he would be there. And then I woke up. (309)

Bell's father sounds like the protagonist of *The Road*, a blanketed figure carrying fire, searching the snowy wilderness to find a safe place for his son. McCarthy's most recent novel both moves into the future and rewinds to the past. He creates a new frontier in its post-apocalyptic setting. All modern civilization is lost, and father and son attempt to escape cannibalistic gangs as the pair search for food and shelter, a place to be warm and safe. This father and son relationship is the center of the story, and they are very much like Jim and Huck, surviving together, contending with the forces of nature and with what is left of civilization. The protagonist of *The Road* ends McCarthy's search for the father by becoming one. McCarthy's warnings in previous novels have come to fruition. The novel does not tell what has happened to the earth to devastate all that mankind has built and much of nature as well, but it implies that we have destroyed ourselves. As John Grady's father prophesized in *All the Pretty Horses*, what has "shown

up" is far more horrific than Comanches and cowboys. The unnamed father's quest is to save his boy from a world gone mad, yet another echo of Jim and Huck. Only in this world, Jim won't just be returned to slavery and Huck to civilization; the man and his boy are likely to be devoured. At the end of *The Road*, the father dies, forcing his son to go off in the world without him, much the way Huck must light out for the territory. He, and we, are not without hope, but the boy will face a much more frightening and uncertain world than Huck's West.

Cormac McCarthy has repeatedly drawn on the Huck Finn Tradition and given it new life. He has kept Twain's achievement in the realm of art. Woodward has said McCarthy is "on a mission to continue the tradition of great literature" ("Cormac County" 104). Daniel Woodrell maintains that McCarthy

> has absorbed Shakespeare, Faulkner, Hemingway, the King James Bible and who knows what else, and invented a prose style of such power that any writer might be seduced at least for a while. The slavish imitators will be blown away in short order, as were similar imitators of Hemingway, Faulkner or Carver, while the true artists who have been inspired by and learned from McCarthy will take a touch here, tip the cap there but move on and develop styles of their own. (TO5)

A vital legatee of Mark Twain, McCarthy now is creating his own legacy.

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APPENDIX

THE LITERARY PRESENCE OF THE LITERARY PAST:

A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF "INFLUENCE" STUDY

According to Will Blythe, “like cigarette packs, the books of certain writers should come with warning labels: Danger! May cause excessive imitation” (13). Likewise, earlier and more seriously, Rene Wellek wrote, “In considering all the influences which operate in the history of literature, the influence of works on works is the main one” (44).

A Handbook for Literature lists influence as a critical literary term, as do most handbooks and dictionaries of literary terminology. C. Hugh Holman and William Harmon’s handbook reports that “early in this [twentieth] century the tracing of *influence* was a major activity of literary historians. Despite much good work, however, the *influence* tracing was often far-fetched, and the method generally fell into disrepute” (247). Having fallen out of favor, however, does not seem to have stopped scholars from doing it. An MLA search for “literary influence” results in 816 hits, and a major research library search in 451. While the assumption might be that these are older studies from when the method was more accepted, 339 of the literary citations, 75 percent, have publication dates of 1990 or later.

The etymology of the word itself may suggest some controversy and divergent extremes. The entry for influence in *Webster’s Dictionary of Word Origins* says “see

DISASTER" (240). The entry for "disaster" includes a discussion of the Italian word "influenza" which is a cognate of the English word "influence." According to *Webster's*, "in the fifteenth century, sudden epidemics whose earthly causes were not apparent were blamed on the *influenza* of the stars. The report of a Roman epidemic that spread through Europe in 1743 brought the word to England" (143). However, the root of the word means merely "to flow" (240). The *OED* defines influence as

> The supposed flowing or streaming from the stars or heavens of an ethereal fluid acting upon the character and destiny of men, and affecting sublunary things generally. In later times gradually viewed less literally, as an exercise of power or "virtue," or of an occult force, and in late use chiefly a poetical or humorous reflex of earlier notions.

As we learn from *Webster's* and the *OED*, originally the word had nothing to do with literary influence; its meaning was much more ethereal. For good or bad, the power of influence was supernal.

Influence in terms of poetic or literary influence was a much later development. Samuel Johnson in 1755 defines influence as being a directing or modifying power from a religious or personal source, but does not mention literary influence (27). The OED cites its first literary use as appearing in 1439; in *Lyfe and Passion of Seint Albon*, John Lydgate writes, "I stande in hope his influence shall shyne My tremblyng penne by grace to enlumyne." However, not until Samuel Taylor Coleridge does the word become part of critical literary terminology (Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence* 27).

In the history of literary influence study, the view of the actual phenomenon as positive or negative oscillates. Ben Jonson saw it as a healthy practice: "to be able to convert the substance or riches of another poet to [a later poet's] own use" is a valuable opportunity (420). Goethe agreed:

> Do not all the achievements of a poet's predecessors and contemporaries rightfully belong to him? Why should he shrink from picking flowers where he finds them? Only by making the riches of the others our own do we bring anything great into being.... There is all this talk about originality, but what does it amount to? As soon as we are born the world begins to influence us, and this goes on till we die. (203)

According to Bloom, Percy Bysshe Shelley also saw the process as a positive and enriching endeavor; he held that "poets of all ages contributed to one Great Poem perpetually in progress" (Bloom 19). However, the power of influence had as many detractors as supporters. According to Bloom, Johnson was not only the greatest literary critic but also "the first great diagnostician of the *malady* of poetic influence" (28). William Blake felt that the poet was inhibited by obsessive comparing of his own works to poets who had come before. Blake believed poetic influence was "a disease of self-consciousness" (qtd. in *The Anxiety of Influence* 29). The eighteen-century poet and dramatist Edward Young expresses similar views: "Illustrious examples … *engross* our attention, and so prevent a due inspection of ourselves; they *prejudice* our judgment in favor of their abilities, and so lesson the sense of our own; and they *intimidate* us with this splendor of their renown" (17-18).

One of the most comprehensive, influential, and favorable discussions of the nature of influence comes from T. S. Eliot. In Eliot's essay on literary theory, "Tradition and the Individual Talent," he sees influence as a positive phenomenon. Eliot criticizes

> our tendency to insist, when we praise a poet, upon those aspects of his work in which he least resembles any one else. In these aspects or parts of his work we pretend to find what is individual, what is the peculiar essence of the man. We dwell with satisfaction upon the poet's difference from his predecessors, especially his immediate predecessors; we endeavor to find something that can be isolated in order to be enjoyed. Whereas if we approach a poet without this prejudice we shall often find that not only the best, but the most individual parts of his work may be those in which the dead poets, his ancestors, assert their immortality most vigorously. (1442)

Eliot believed in the value of tradition in literature, but set forth his own definition of tradition. Tradition is not "following the ways of the immediate generation before us in a blind and timid adherence to its successes" (1442). To Eliot, tradition most importantly includes an "historical sense" which involves

> a perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence; the historical sense compels a man to write not merely with his own generation in his bones, but with a feeling that the whole of the literature of Europe from Homer and within it the whole of the literature of his own country has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order. This historical sense, which is a sense of the timeless as well as of the temporal and of the timeless and of the temporal

> together, is what makes a writer traditional. And it is at the same time what makes a writer most acutely conscious of his place in time, of his own contemporaneity. (1442)

The possession of this quality distinguishes the great writer. Eliot declares that "no poet, no artist of any art, has his complete meaning alone. His significance, his appreciation is the appreciation of his relation to the dead poets and artists. You cannot value him alone; you must set him, for contrast and comparison, among the dead" (1442). The later writer must realize that "the mind of his own country" is more important than his "own private mind," and as the larger mind of the tradition develops, it "abandons nothing *en route*" (1443). To be a great writer, Eliot continues, one "must develop or procure the consciousness of the past" (1444). Later writing is always aware of the past (1443). Literature is "a living whole of all the poetry [or prose] that has ever been written" (1444). It is a combination of what we recognize and what is new, the public and the private mind, tradition and novelty.

Another modern, extremely influential theory on the nature of influence is set forth in Bloom's *The Anxiety of Influence.* Bloom presents a somewhat less positive view of influence than does Eliot, as the titular "anxiety" implies. He sees influence as a legitimate element of literary study, possibly the essential one, but paints the actual experience of it as challenging for the artist. Bloom's basic premise is that "poems rise not so much in response to a present time ... but in response to other poems" (*The Anxiety of Influence* 99). In Bloom's use of the term "poem," he encompasses prose as well. He asserts that "great writing is always at work strongly (or weakly) misreading previous

writing" (xix), and that "one cannot write a novel without remembering another novel" (55). "Latecomers" or "ephebes" (61) read and misread the works of their precursors and then strive to complete what they perceive to be incorrectness or incompleteness in the original. Bloom says these ephebes misread, misinterpret, and misprison earlier writers. Bloom borrows "misprison" from Shakespeare's Sonnet 87 where the word "implied not only a misunderstanding or misreading but tended also to be a punning word-play suggesting unjust imprisonment" (xiii). Through the selection of this term, Bloom implies that later writers are somehow unjustly imprisoned by the influences of earlier ones. He believes these "influence-anxieties are embedded" in all literature (xxiv). The later writer misreads a fault or limitation in the original and sees his or her mission as an attempt to right this wrong, and if successful, he will have carved out a place for himself in literary history. If the poem is a "central poem by an indubitable precursor," the ephebe does not even have to have read the precursor poem; in fact according to Bloom, the latecomer's best misinterpretation may be of poems he has not read (70).

The ephebe's goal is always to create something new and original, to create himself as an artist through this literary process; however, his indebtedness to the precursor causes anxiety, the anxiety of influence. According to Bloom, the anxiety is caused by "the creative mind's desperate insistence upon priority" (13). Because later writers cannot escape the influence of their precursors, they feel indebted to them, then guilt over this indebtedness and eventually anxiety from this guilt. The anxiety of influence is the poet knowing he is derivative (influenced by his precursor) and not truly original. The latecomer must subvert the "double bind" of the precursor's implicit and

paradoxical charge, "Be me but not me" and "Be like me but unlike me" (70). According to Bloom, "distincts" represent qualities that are new and distinct from the precursor, something influenced by the earlier work but at the same time original. Mere repetition does not lead to escape (79), but "discontinuity is freedom" (39), particularly freedom from the anxiety of influence and the fate of being an imitator and nothing more.

Bloom's six "revisionary ratios" are ways poets try to recreate themselves in order to fulfill this charge and escape anxiety. They are named methods by which the ephebe tries to "correct" the precursor: clinamen, tessera, kenosis, daemonization, askesis, and apophrade (14-15). For example, clinamen is "a corrective movement in [the ephebe's] own poem, which implies that the precursor poem went accurately up to a certain point, but then should have swerved, precisely in the direction that the new poem moves" (14). On the other hand, "tessera" is when "a poet antithetically 'complete[s]' his precursor, by so reading the parent-poem as to retain its terms but to mean them in another sense, as though the precursor has failed to go far enough" (14). Bloom believes American writers are prone to "complete their fathers" (68) and "tend to see [their] fathers as not having dared enough" (68). A critic's primary aim should be the study of "reductiveness ... a kind of misprison that is a radical misinterpretation in which the precursor is regarded as an over-idealizer" (69). "As poets swerve downward in time, they deceive themselves into believing they are tougher-minded than their precursors" (69). The reducers insist that they are correcting the excessive idealism of their poetic fathers. To Bloom, this "reductiveness" offers the "largest clues for practical criticism, for the endless quest of 'how to read'" (69). In the study of poetic influence, or "the story of intra-poetic

relationship," one major aim is corrective: "to de-idealize our accepted accounts of how one poet helps to form another" (5). This theory assumes that anxiety is irresistible and cannot be escaped. Bloom acknowledges the dual nature of this controversial experience: "influence is Influenza – an astral disease. If influence were health, who could write a poem? Health is stasis" (95).

Despite the different attitudes toward, varying judgments about, the phenomenon of influence, it appears to be a necessary evil. The anxiety it creates motivates later generations of artists to greater and greater achievements. And according to Bloom, tracing poetic influence is equal to a study of poetic history because the two are indistinguishable. "Strong poets make [poetic] history by misreading one another, so as to clear imaginative space for themselves" (5). Bloom proposes a "new poetics" based on his beliefs about influence anxiety and calls himself "a theorist of poetic influence" (xviii). To Bloom, "criticism is the art of knowing the hidden roads that go from poem to poem" (96). He proposes that critics and scholars learn to read literary works as "the deliberate misinterpretations" of earlier works or of literature in general (43).

Eliot and Bloom reflect the oscillating and sometimes antagonistic nature of the history of literary influence. Another perspective on the phenomenon of influence has recently entered the discussion: "intertextuality." John Fiske in his book *Television Culture* says:

> The theory of intertextuality proposes that any one text is necessarily read in relationship to others and the range of textual knowledge is brought to bear upon it. These relationships do not take the form of specific allusions from one text to

another and there is no reason for readers to be familiar with specific or the same texts to read intertextually. Intertextuality exists rather in the space *between* texts. (108

According to Michael Dunne's *Intertextual Encounters in American Fiction, Film, and Popular Culture*, "intertextual encounters occur whenever an author or the author's text recognizes, references, alludes to, imitates, parodies, or otherwise elicits a reader's familiarity with, other texts" (6). The theory of intertextuality bestows the assignment of influence on the audience or reader rather than the writer (2). Dunne says past theories held that "influence has to do with agency, whereas intertextuality has to do with a much more impersonal field of crossed texts" (4). The experiences of the audience and not the actions of the author determine relationship. In her essay "Word, Dialogue, and Novel," Julia Kristeva asserts that "any text is the absorption and transformation of another" (66). This absorption and transformation involves all the "infinite and open-ended possibilities generated by all the discursive practices of a culture, the entire matrix of communicative utterances within which the artistic text is situated and which reach the text not only through recognizable influences but also through a subtle process of dissemination" (Dunne 15). Ultimately, the intertextual encounter equals shared experience (175). Anthony Lane believes that "works with which we presume ourselves to be familiar are made new, often shockingly so, when viewed and reforged through imaginations more skilled than our own" (77-78). These later writers have made something new of the original, something beyond the average reader's imaginative capabilities. As Eliot affirms, when a mature writer borrows, he makes what he borrows into "something better,

or at least different" (*An American Literature and the American Language* 53). As Kristeva describes, this borrowing involves not only absorption but transformation.

Intertextuality can involve either "covert or overt textual self-consciousness" (Dunne 15), meaning the later writer may either be aware of the earlier text or he may not be and even if he is aware of the earlier text, he may or may not be aware of its relationship to his own work. Bloom says that this lack of awareness sometimes leads to the best ephebean works. A writer does not write in a vacuum, separate from his literary and cultural environment. These influences soak in and are then filtered through, as Eliot says, "his one private mind." His work is then viewed, read, witnessed by an audience that shares that literary and cultural environment and is able to connect the dots, or in other words, draw parallels between earlier and later writers' works.

Edward Quinn in *A Dictionary of Literary and Thematic Terms* outlines two types of intertextuality: citation and presupposition. Citation includes direct quotation, allusions, parody, imitation, literary conventions as well as unconscious sources. Presupposition, on the other hand, "involves assumptions regarding the reader, the situation being referred to, and its context" (167). Citation makes direct, undeniable connections which are placed in the work intentionally by the author; they are absolutes and draw direct lines between texts. Presuppositions, on the other hand, are not only more ambiguous as to authorial intention but also to reader perception. Presuppositions are submerged: they are indirect links which require more interpretive power from the reader than do citations. As Fiske states, intertextuality exists in "the space between texts" (108). Intertextuality proposes a web of images or literary relationships that exist

within the rhetorical community and are passed down from artistic work to artistic work. As Daniel Chandler suggests, rather than art imitating life, "art imitates art" (*Semiotics for Beginners*). These relationships create a chain of influence not unlike Eliot's historical sense that is an essential part of tradition.

Specifically, intertextuality means that scenes, characters, themes, etc. of later works "interact with ideas and stories already constituting part of most readers' experience" (Dunne 1). These later novels are referred to as "intertexts." (For example, the many works said to be reminiscent of *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* would be intertexts.) According to Anne Marie Miraglia in "Texts Engendering Texts: A Quebecois Rewriting of American Novels," "an intertext is [also] defined as the set of texts discovered by the reader in his memory at the reading of a given passage" (54). (Twain's novel would also be an intertext of those that followed.) To the proponents of intertextuality, this area of study emphasizes the cultural significance of literature. Intertextuality creates "an unmistakable and pleasurable sense of community" (Dunne 5). Dunne believes "studying the intertextual dialogue between [new text] and more traditional [old text versions] provides added insight into [the new text] as well as the genre that it both follows and modifies" (15). He asserts that reading narratives in the context of "their predecessors and successors yields gratifying insights" (230).

Not all scholars are supportive of this theory of literary analysis. In William Irwin's strong damnation of intertextuality in "Against Intertextuality," he describes the theory as "unapologetically political in its motivations and implications, seeking to redistribute power" (233), which gives the reader "hedonistic sanction for unfettered

freedom in reading" (233). He explains its foundations in French post-holocaust fear, social pessimism, a mistrust of communication as a power tool of the elite, and Marxism (230). He asks the question why American professors and scholars have given this "French motivated" theory such a "welcome reception" (236) when it is really just a veiled attempt to resurrect old methods of literary study: "at its worst, intertextuality becomes fashionable jargon for traditional notions such as allusion and source study" (229). Instead of, as Heinrick F. Plett says "old wine in new bottles" (qtd. in Irwin 236), literary study has become "old wine" with new labels. As Irwin says, "since the dawn of literature authors have referred and alluded to other texts" (237). He believes this practice is nothing new. The point of scholarly study is the investigation of literature in an attempt to achieve greater understanding. The author has "intentions and design" (240), but the reader brings further significance to those intentions and that design by his recognition of similarities with other texts. As with analogy, comparing text A to text B leads to a better understanding of both.

One possible criticism of any study of influence is that proving direct connections between writers is impossible, unless they are willing to tell us themselves, and with the absence of this information, the critic becomes unduly empowered. This empowerment also reduces the role of the reader and the text in favor of the writer. Literary study becomes about the writer's intentions, not the reader's perceptions. Bloom believes this view led to the denouncing of the "Dead White European Males" of the literary canon and the idea of the canon itself, and this denouncement led to the demise of influence as a legitimate concern of literary scholars (*The Anxiety of Influence* xviii). Detractors of

"tradition" believe the canon implies a hierarchy of writers, major and minor, greater and lesser – distinctions that fly in the face of current critical theories focusing on the investigation of "the other," for both writer and text. Current approaches view all works as equal in literary merit, as expressions of self and culture.

According to Jay Clayton and Eric Rothstein in "Figures in the Corpus: Theories of Influence and Intertextuality," "one may see intertextuality either as the enlargement of a familiar idea or as an entirely new concept to replace the outmoded notion of influence" (3). Intertextuality may seek to retain the idea of influence, but to alleviate the prejudice against it by refocusing attention on the reader's role, empowering the reader over the writer, and questioning the traditional view of tradition, which is historical and in a sense linear, in favor of a more circular view, an investigation of the "space between texts" (Fiske 108) by the community of readers. Again, the crux of this controversy over influence, then, seems to be debate over the focus for literary study: the author, the reader, or the text.

One apparent impression is that influence has to do solely with the author as active agent. For example, Fred Hobson believes many significant current Southern writers have no desire to escape their literary past (753). Within the realm of Southern literature, part of the blame for the misconception that influence study focuses only on the author could possibly be placed on Faulkner or at least the legacy of Faulkner. Hobson, in "Surveryors and Boundaries: Southern Literature and Southern Literary Scholarship After the Mid-Century," asserts that a great number of Southern writers, both willingly and unwillingly, have for half a century been living in Faulkner's "shadow" and

even those who wandered out of this shadow ended up under the slightly smaller shadows of O'Connor or Welty (739). Some writers and critics alike fear that the discussion of these connections only adds to the ranks of imitators and furthers literary mediocrity.

On the contrary, as Bloom and the proponents of intertextuality have observed, the discussion of influence does not hinge on the writer and his/her intentions. It is as much a cultural phenomenon focused on the text and the reader. The reader reads the later text, observes similarities and through comparison and contrast with the earlier text is better able to describe and explain the later and eventually derive a clearer understanding of it on its own terms. According to Harriet Pollack, "knowledge of the text-at-hand is modified by knowledge of a text evoked" (5-6). The process eventually leads to the text's placement within a cultural and literary history. Thus, it can be claimed, the influence study does not focus on one agent exclusively. It motivates consideration of the author, the reader, and the text as well as the context.

Hobson identifies the 1970s and 1980s as the "second wave in the democratizing of American literature in our century" (741), a time when African-American, Native-American, and Chicano literature, as well as works by members of other previously marginalized groups, were admitted into the literary club. The de-emphasis on the literary canon and major writers possibly led to the death of influence, or at least the submergence of the influence study. The reality was not that later writers were no longer influenced by earlier ones nor that readers no longer noticed these similarities. However, the acknowledgment of this phenomenon was now out of favor. The canon and the idea of major vs. minor writers is sometimes considered synonymous with tradition and

conservatism in literary theory and a denial of the more recent opening up of literary scholarship to more contemporary and diverse critical theories. And the influence study was placed under the umbrella of conservatism.

The following two quotations present the battle that has raged between two overarching divergent positions, one represented by Emily Miller Budick and the other by Bloom. In "The Holocaust and the Construction of Modern American Literary Criticism: The Case of Lionel Trilling," Budick says:

> Hardly any conversation in American Literary studies today does not concern the issue of multiculturalism – of how American culture can become truly reflective of its many different ethnic and racial voices, most prominently African American, Native American, and Hispanic. The terms *race*, *gender*, and *class* punctuate conference programs, as well as articles, books, and classroom syllabi. They are the haunting "mantra," as one recent session of the American Studies Association labeled them, of the critical discussion. By chanting these words and thus keeping them at the forefront of our moral sensibilities, we would, as scholars, make our notion of literary culture nonelitist, inclusive, democratic. (127)

Bloom responds to this attitude with strong conviction:

> If any standards of judgment at all are to survive our current cultural reductiveness, then we need to reassert that high literature is exactly that, an aesthetic achievement, and not state propaganda, even if literature can be used, has been used, and doubtless will be used to serve the interests of a state or of a social class, or of a religion, or of men against women, whites against blacks,

> Westerners against Easterners. I know of no more dismal contemporary comedy, either in Great Britain or the United States, than the revolutionary pretenses of our academics, who persuade themselves that they speak for the insulted and injured of the world by denying the aesthetic primacy of Shakespeare, or by insisting that aesthetic eminence of any sort is merely a capitalistic mystification. (*The Anxiety of Influence* xvii)

To Bloom, influence anxiety seems to be the literary equivalent to social anxiety; it comes about as a result of the feelings expressed by Budick and others whose attitude she represents. Roland Francois Lack in "Intertextuality or Influence" describes this situation as "a theatre of cultural war, the critical scene where the combatants are schools of thought and polemical judgments, and the prize is institutional authority" (132).

Roland Barthes in "What is Criticism?" concludes that "criticism is not an 'homage' to the truth of the past or to the truth of 'other' – it is a construction of the intelligibility of our own time" (283). It should not, the claim can be made, serve either combatant in the battle between traditional canon and multiculturalism. The concept of influence can be a unifier; it links genders, generations, races, nationalities, ethnic groups, and cultures. It is not the enemy, but a weapon in the fight against alienation and marginalization. Influence pulls outsiders, the other, away from the margin and into the family of artists. The chain of influence often connects very diverse authors. These connections transverse all boundaries. Undoubtedly, female writers are influenced by earlier female writers and African-American writers are influenced by earlier African-American writers and so on and so on. However, white female writers can also be

influenced by African-American male writers, solely or in addition to other females as well as dead white males. The number of mergings is countless. Likewise, canonical writers are often influenced by non-canonical works.

As Miraglia says, "writing and reading are interdependent acts, and as such the writer is always, a priori, a reader himself" (49-50). Each writer presents his/her view of truth, and each reader, especially if that reader is also a writer, takes from past sources his version of truth and then writes it down to be read by readers/writers who come after. This could be an affirmative act. The previous writer may be influenced negatively, to react against the predecessor, to negate his or her stance. Then the later writer's truth becomes a counter or contrary to the predecessor, but that is still influence.

Clayton and Rothstein believe that the power of influence actually belongs to the younger writer rather than the older. "If one says that X influenced Y it does seem that one is saying that X did something to Y rather than that Y did something to X" (6). They view "Y rather than X as the agent" (6). Influence for the older writer is not an "intentional action," but for the younger, his/her "observation causes an action" (7). Therefore, "the broader sense of influence is more democratic" (7), more in line with the theory of intertextuality. They assert that influence and intertextuality "swim together" (30).

For Bloom, Shakespeare is the most significant example of a writer who has both benefited from influence and influenced others. He has reached the highest level of reductiveness and yet is the most influential of precursors. Shakespeare's influence, more than any other precursor's, is unavoidable. "Shakespeare will not allow you to bury

him, or escape him, or replace him. We have, almost all of us, thoroughly internalized the power of Shakespeare's plays, frequently without having attended them or read them" (xviii). Bloom sees Whitman as an American counterpart. Whitman has been "uncannily resurrected" by the greatest of American poets, especially Wallace Stevens (xxiii). And for American prose fiction, says Bloom, *Adventures of Huckleberry* is an exceptionally "fecund" work.