

AN ECOCRITICAL APPROACH TO THE SOUTHERN NOVELS OF
CORMAC MCCARTHY

by

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(Under the Direction of Hugh Ruppersburg)

ABSTRACT

Using the three streams of radical environmental philosophy—deep ecology, ecofeminism, and social ecology—this study highlights the subtle and complex environmental ethic in Cormac McCarthy’s southern novels. It also reassesses the critical consensus that these works are expressions of existentialist or nihilistic philosophy. By delineating the different relationships that McCarthy’s heroes and anti-heroes have with nonhuman nature, an ecocritical analysis views their alienation as the effect of their separation from nonhuman nature. At the root of this alienation is an anthropocentric and mechanistic mode of thinking that is dominant in Western philosophy and that this study defines as Cartesian. While McCarthy’s environmentalist heroes are persecuted by Cartesian institutions and displaced from the land on which they have defined themselves and made meaning, his Cartesian anti-heroes represent extreme manifestations of Cartesian thinking. McCarthy’s environmentalism is as much a critique and indictment of Cartesian thinking as it is a portrayal of the value of a life lived in close contact with nonhuman nature.

INDEX WORDS: Cormac McCarthy, The Orchard Keeper, Child of God, Outer Dark, Suttree, ecocriticism, deep ecology, ecofeminism, social ecology, Cartesian thinking, environmental literature

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For Erica and Zachary

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Preface

While describing Cormac McCarthy's "hostility to the literary world" in his 1992 New York Times article, Richard Woodward also reveals McCarthy's personal interest in the natural world:

At the MacArthur [Foundation] reunions [McCarthy] spends his time with scientists, like physicist Murray Gell-Mann and whale biologist Roger Payne, rather than other writers. One of the few [writers] he acknowledges having known at all was novelist and ecological crusader Edward Abbey. Shortly before Abbey's death in 1989, they discussed a covert operation to reintroduce the wolf to southern Arizona. (Woodward 30)

Such facts only confirm what any reader of McCarthy's fiction knows—that nature matters. Nature is as much a character in his books as any human. William Schafer argues, "One of McCarthy's astonishing talents is the intensely evocative quality of his landscapes and dramas of animal life. Fully as important as the human actions in the story are animals which emerge as more than symbolic—they are an analogical extension of the story of man in the landscape" (108). Closer to naturalism than Romanticism, McCarthy's novels include exacting descriptions not only of animals but also of forests, caves, rivers, swamps, and deserts. In addition to his knowledge of the natural world, however, is an environmental ethic suggested by his conversation with Edward Abbey. Given the story of Billy Parham and she-wolf in The Crossing (1994), one can assume that McCarthy would favor the reintroduction of wolves to an ecosystem altered by humans for anthropocentric purposes. The value of such an operation, as

Abbey certainly would have known, goes far beyond restoring an ancient predator to its hunting ground. The goal would be to rebalance a number of aspects of the Arizona landscape. Wolves would thin the overpopulation of herbivores, thereby protecting native vegetation from overgrazing, thereby minimizing soil erosion caused by wind and rain. While holistically beneficial to the environment, such a program has negative economic and public safety implications as well; wolves will kill domesticated livestock and endanger human lives. The difference between advocates of predator reintroduction and those against such a program is a difference between what this dissertation defines as environmental thinking and Cartesian thinking. Whereas the environmentalists consider the health of the whole ecosystem, the Cartesian is interested in how nature benefits humankind. It is precisely this conflict between environmentalist and Cartesian, holism and atomism, ecocentrism and anthropocentrism that characterizes my ecocritical approach to the southern novels of Cormac McCarthy.

That McCarthy would share Abbey's desire to reintroduce the wolf is also supported by another fact—his unpublished screenplay entitled "Whales and Men." James Lilley describes it as overtly environmental.¹ It tells the story of an Irish aristocrat, Peter Gregory, who "takes his seat in the House of Lords in order to save the whales" (Lilley 150):

Peter and the crew of his friend's ship, the *Farfetched*, have their lives "changed forever" when they watch a group of whales swim to their slaughter—an event that leads them to question their own relationship to the environment and that eventually propels Peter into environmental activism and causes John Western, a wealthy doctor, to give up his practice in the United States and volunteer his services to a war-torn "third world country." (Lilley 155)

Probably written between Blood Meridian (1985) and All the Pretty Horses (1992), “Whales and Men” is an antidote to the anthropocentrism of Blood Meridian’s Judge Holden. The screenplay attacks “the inherent destructiveness of the judge’s mode of vision, his method of writing history, and his grotesque anthropocentrism and instead celebrates the heterogeneity and autonomy of the natural world” (Lilly 155-56). Of course, it is impossible to escape anthropocentrism completely because our conceptions of nature and the language that we use to describe it are human constructs. Still, as Lawrence Buell argues, the attempt to “relinquish” the ego moves humans nearer to “feeling the environment to be at least as worthy of attention as oneself and of experiencing oneself as situated among many interacting presences” (178). What Buell describes and what McCarthy portrays is an expansion of an individual’s sense of self to include the wider world. In McCarthy’s attempts to shift from egocentrism to ecocentrism, he shows that the interaction between humans and nature is a relationship between “fluid, coterminous, coextensive systems” (Lilley 152). While Lilley and Buell focus on the role of language in this relationship between humans and nonhuman nature, I apply deep ecology, ecofeminism, and social ecology—the three streams of radical environmental philosophy—to investigate how characters’ different philosophical orientations affect their conceptions of self, the world, and their relationships with nature.

This study originates from my abiding interest in McCarthy. Other than William Faulkner’s novels, no author’s body of work has so captivated my imagination. Unlike Faulkner studies, however, McCarthy criticism still provides ample critical space to explore. When I began to study the criticism, however, I discovered a critical consensus that viewed McCarthy as either an existentialist or a nihilistic writer. Starting with Vereen Bell’s The Achievement of Cormac McCarthy (1988), the first full-length study of his novels, McCarthy criticism seemed

content to view the novels as “gothic and nihilistic” (1).² As Mark Winchell writes, “I am not convinced that Cormac McCarthy believes there is meaning in life or that the search for it is a worthwhile endeavor” (300). Though there are certainly exceptions, such as Edwin Arnold and K. Wesley Berry, the bulk of McCarthy criticism has adopted Bell’s thesis. When I interviewed Dr. Bell at Vanderbilt on June 21, 2002, he maintained his existentialist/nihilistic reading, but also revealed an environmental ethic that helped explain that reading: “If nature wasn’t cruel,” he said, “it wouldn’t work. You have to have a predatory eye.” At the same time, he admitted that McCarthy reminded him of a “gothic, grown-up Wordsworth.” He also acknowledged the importance of nature in the lives of his characters and encouraged me to pursue my ecocritical project.

My dissertation reflects an environmentalism that views nature and the role of humans in the world differently than Bell does. Like Arne Naess, the founder of deep ecology, I acknowledge the necessity of predators and of killing but also recognize “the importance of togetherness and cooperation in the plant and animal world” that has been emphasized by modern ecology (Naess 170).³ Though my environmentalism originated outside of the field of English studies, it has been developed through the novels of Cormac McCarthy and my own study of ecocriticism. When I stumbled upon The Ecocriticism Reader, I discovered a range of ideas that excited me about doing literary criticism in a way my previous research never had. When I returned to McCarthy with an ecocritical perspective, the dissertation topic was clear.

Some fundamental environmental ideas inform my ecocritical approach. One of the most primary is that because of human population growth and technological development in the last few hundred years, the speed and scale of environmental change is unprecedented and unsustainable. While the phenomena of erosion, species extinction, and climate change occurred

before humans existed, never before have such changes been attributable to the actions of one species. Throughout natural history, ecosystems have imposed limits on individual species in order to sustain natural diversity and equilibrium. Changes occurred over long stretches of time as a result of a multitude of environmental factors. Now humans transform entire biomes in a matter of years. While nature has adapted so far, as E.O. Wilson argues in The Future of Life, it is not keeping up with human demands. Radical environmentalists see a resolution of this problem not in further technological advancements but in a fundamental shift in how humans see themselves as part of nature. Instead of viewing ourselves as separate from and superior to the rest of nature, we must see ourselves as part of a vast system. In doing so, the needs of the broader environment must be acknowledged and considered as seriously as the political, economic, and technological needs of human society. As Naess concludes, “*Homo sapiens* may be capable, in suitable circumstances, and upon the basis of a wide perspective, of *recommending its own withdrawal* as the dominant living being on earth” (original italics) (169). While McCarthy seems to agree that humans are simply a species among many, he is pessimistic about the prospect of human society realizing that fact and acting accordingly.

Despite McCarthy’s pessimism, his fiction reflects five ontologies important to a radical environmental perspective. Like ecology itself, these ontologies are not discrete but build and interrelate with one another. They are (a) a skepticism of anthropocentrism that is central to modern thought, (b) an elevation of non-human to the same level of importance as human beings, (c) a skepticism of the institutions of modern society, (d) a skepticism of technology, and (e) an emphasis on the importance of marginal geographies and populations. From these ontologies, this study builds an ecocritical approach that helps to illustrate the environmental sensibility in McCarthy’s works. Such a sensibility in his southern novels is not as obvious as it

is in “Whales and Men.” Whereas the crew of the *Farfetched* voice their environmentalism openly, “the majority of McCarthy’s texts engage issues of ecology and environmentalism in much more subtle ways” (Lilley 158). In order to adequately appreciate McCarthy’s complex environmental ethic, it is important to understand his affinities with radical environmental philosophy and to understand their common critique of the dominant Western worldview that I describe as Cartesian.

Chapter one establishes my ecocritical approach to the southern novels of Cormac McCarthy. Because ecocriticism is relatively new, the chapter includes a general introduction that provides a context for my specific approach. It also contextualizes ecocriticism and McCarthy’s novels within the tradition of American literary history. Focusing then on how environmental philosophy’s critique of Cartesian thinking informs my particular ecocritical approach, this chapter ends by justifying an ecocritical reevaluation of McCarthy’s works. The remaining chapters apply different radical environmental philosophies to specific McCarthy novels. Chapter two discusses how The Orchard Keeper and Child of God lend themselves to a deep ecological analysis while establishing a pattern of environmentalist heroes and Cartesian anti-heroes. Chapter three applies ecofeminism to Child of God and Outer Dark to argue that besides understanding humans’ inextricable interconnectedness with the nonhuman world, McCarthy’s novels reveal an understanding of the related domination between, in Karen Warren’s words, “nature, women, and other human Others” (2). In chapter four, deep and social ecology are combined to show how McCarthy’s urban novel, Suttree, is also an indictment of Cartesian thinking and society. I conclude with a brief examination of McCarthy’s southwestern fiction to show that the environmental sensibility that undergirds McCarthy’s southern fiction is not only present but amplified in his later work.

CHAPTER ONE

Approaching an Ecocritical Reading of Cormac McCarthy

An Introduction to Ecocriticism

Ecocriticism is a general term for literary analysis informed by an ecological or environmental awareness (Marshall). It studies the relationship between literature and nature through a range of approaches having little in common other than a shared concern with the environment (Glotfelty xix). Combining traditional literary methodologies with ecological perspectives, ecocriticism

is most appropriately applied to a work in which the landscape itself is a dominant character, when a significant interaction occurs between author and place, character(s) and place. Landscape by definition includes the non-human elements of place—rocks, soil, trees, plants, rivers, animals, air—as well as human perceptions and modifications. (Scheese)

By examining the language and metaphors used to describe nature, ecocriticism investigates the terms by which we relate to nature. Adopting Barry Commoner's first law of ecosystem ecology that "everything is connected to everything else," ecocritics presuppose that human culture, specifically its literature, is connected to the physical world, affecting nature as nature affects culture (Glotfelty ASLE). The important influence of literature on our conception of nature is made clear by Roderick Nash who argues in Wilderness and the American Mind that "civilization created wilderness" (xiii). As a cultural product itself, literature reveals the human relationship to the natural world (Dean), not only exposing conventional attitudes but also providing alternative models for conceptualizing nature and its relation to human society. Beneath all ecocriticism, however, is an environmental awareness of the overwhelming effect of

human activity on all aspects of the environment. As Bill McKibben argues in The End of Nature, for the first time in history,

human beings [have] become so large that they [have] altered everything around us. That we [have] ended nature as an independent force, that our appetites and habits and desires [can] now be read in every cubic meter of air, in every increment on the thermometer (sic). (xix)

Ecocritic Cheryll Glotfelty recognizes this profoundly different new relationship that humans have developed with the rest of the natural world, stating, “we have reached the age of environmental limits, a time when the consequences of human actions are damaging the planet’s basic life support systems” (ASLE). It is through an engagement with literary, ecological, philosophical, and political environmentalism that ecocritical practice distinguishes itself from Romanticism of the nineteenth century (Mazel 137). Though significantly influenced by the spiritual, philosophical, and aesthetic appreciation of nature that comes from pre-ecology Romanticism, ecocriticism is also informed by ecology and the contemporary environmental crisis. Transforming all of those influences to the study of literature, one of ecocriticism’s main goals is to identify and analyze “our own attitudes toward nature and to engender a sense of accountability for the havoc the culture’s left hand wreaks on its right hand through shortsighted technological practices” (Arnold “Forum” 1090). As such, ecocriticism is more accurately described as a form of literary environmentalism.

While not yet fully engaging the science of ecology, this literary environmentalism applies philosophy and theory to nature-centered literature. As Stephanie Sarver has noted, ecocriticism does not constitute a new critical field, but has relied heavily on Marxist, post-structuralist, psychoanalytic, and historicist theories. Its greatest challenge—to fully engage the biological sciences—has yet to be met. English studies has long integrated “soft” disciplines of

history, philosophy, and anthropology in order to examine literature but has found it more challenging to engage the “hard” disciplines, “partly because of the difficulties involved in acquiring adequate grounding in the sciences to follow multidisciplinary arguments” (McDowell 372). Sarver fears that until such literary engagement with the biological sciences occurs, ecocriticism risks becoming just another jargon-filled critical literary field—another “-ism” in literary studies.

At the same time, Sarver and many ecocritical scholars recognize the need for literary criticism to address the pressing environmental issues of today. One way to do so is to refocus our study of literature on texts in which nature plays a dominant role: “our profession must soon direct its attention to that literature which recognizes and dramatizes the integration of human with natural cycles of life” (Love 235). Many ecocritics view current literary criticism as overly specialized, inaccessible even to some within the discipline, and generally irrelevant to the larger issues confronting the modern world; for those scholars, ecological literary criticism is an attempt to escape “from the esoteric abstractness that afflicts current theorizing about literature, seiz[ing] opportunities offered by recent biological research to make humanistic studies more socially responsible” (Kroeber 1). As William Rueckert explains, in literary study there “must be a shift in our locus of motivation from newness, or theoretical elegance, or even coherence, to a principle of relevance” (107). Others have also identified the need for literary criticism to “recognize . . . our discipline’s limited humanistic vision, our narrowly anthropocentric view of what’s consequential in life” (Love 229). As a result of that recognition, in the early 1970s Rueckert began to experiment “with the application of ecology and ecological concepts to the study of literature, because ecology (as a science, as a discipline, as the basis for a human vision) has the greatest relevance to the present and future of the world we all live in of anything that I

have studied in recent years” (107). The shift in literary study, as these critics perceive it, is from ego-consciousness to eco-consciousness (Love 230).

Ecocriticism as a specifically named critical approach to literature is an outgrowth of the environmental movement of the 1960s. Along with the feminist and civil rights movements, the modern environmental movement questioned the established power structures as well as the cultural assumptions and stereotypes of the dominant culture. Due in part to an awakened environmental awareness spawned by books such as Rachel Carson’s Silent Spring, the modern environmental movement came to identify and criticize the increasingly rapid and all-pervasive effect of human activity on the global environment. During the 1960s, the literary interest in nature, while always a central topic in American literature and criticism, increased due to the awareness of humans’ ability to make the earth unlivable. Though taking longer than the feminist and civil rights movements to find its way in to the literature classroom, environmentalism slowly began to influence a new literary ecology. Though William Rueckert coined the term “ecocriticism” in his 1978 essay “Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism,” Cheryll Glotfelty and Glen Love more formally introduced it at the 1989 meeting of the Western Literature Association, calling for “the diffuse critical field that heretofore had been known as ‘the study of nature writing’” (ASLE “Introduction”). Seven years later, Harold Fromm collaborated with Glotfelty to co-edit the first anthology of ecocriticism, The Ecocritical Reader: Landmarks in Ecological Literary Criticism; in doing so, they expanded the range of ecocriticism beyond the analysis of nature writing to the “scrutiny of ecological implications and human-nature relationships in any literary texts, even texts that seem (at first glance) oblivious of the nonhuman world” (Slovic). Since then, the ecocritical movement has slowly coalesced into an international network of scholars working to define the width and breadth of ecocriticism and

to discuss what contributions it can make to the study of literature. Despite these efforts, it has taken longer for ecocriticism to gain the legitimacy of feminism and multiculturalism, mainly because, as McDowell explains, "trees and stones and squirrels don't talk, much less write and publish their responses to the many things we say about them" (372). In the last ten years, however, the ecocritical movement has gained momentum. Early in the twenty-first century, its legitimacy seems secure as several English programs now offer a concentration in ecological literary study and as several universities have established professorships for ecocriticism.⁴

Ecocriticism's growth can also be shown in scholarly production. In addition to The Association for the Study of Literature and the Environment (ASLE) and its journal, The Interdisciplinary Study of Literature and the Environment (ISLE), ecocriticism maintains a persistent presence at major literary conferences.

Ecocriticism describes a range of approaches to literature, and this diversity is one of its strengths. Though sometimes perceived as amorphous, the wide range of critical approaches within ecocriticism reflects the multiple fields within ecology itself. An acceptance of different critical approaches leads not to a competition among ecocritics but to an appreciation of the centrality of ecology within literary texts. Few ecocritics advocate for a consistency of viewpoints in order to provide the ecocritical movement with an apparent legitimacy in the academy. Just as Arne Naess, the founder of deep ecology, called for a range of ecological philosophies or "ecosophies" in order to address the environmental problems facing the modern world, so ecocriticism calls for a range of approaches that share a common concern for the relationship between human and the non-human (Sarver). Lawrence Buell argues that ecocriticism "takes its energy not from a central methodological paradigm of inquiry but from a pluriform commitment to the urgency of rehabilitating that which has been effectively

marginalized by mainstream societal assumptions” (Arnold “Forum” 1091). The diversity of ecocritical practice stresses that such criticism should not focus just on trees and rivers that inhabit texts but also should focus on the "nature inherent in humans and in settings in which humans figure prominently: in dooryards, in cities, and in farms" (Sarver). Defined as such, ecocriticism is an appropriate critical approach to the novels of Cormac McCarthy not only because of the overwhelming presence of non-human nature throughout his work but also because of the important influence that non-human nature has on the thoughts and actions of his human characters.

The definition of nature for the purposes of this discussion relies on Aldo Leopold’s definition of land in his essay “The Land Ethic” (239, 253). It is a holistic definition that includes not only the non-human elements—both organic and inorganic—but also humans, their perceptions, and their modifications of the landscape. When I refer to nature, I mean an ecosystem in which humans are not the dominant species or force of environmental change. Nature, therefore, does not mean wilderness per se, though wilderness can be considered its most pristine manifestation and one that historically dominated the thinking and imagination of European explorers, colonists, and American citizens. In contrast to nature is the built environment that exhibits significant alteration by humans or by the presence of a high concentration of humans. Alterations can include clear-cutting of vegetation, large-scale grading, paving, significant road building of any kind—either paved or unpaved, and the presence of structures that overwhelm or distort the natural topography because of their placement, scale, number, or concentration. Regardless of how distorted the indigenous environment is by human alteration, elements of the non-human natural world, of course, are always present—if only in the form of vegetation pushing through cracks in the sidewalk.

However, ecology has taught us that intense human population densities and human manipulation of the physical environment disrupt important ecological systems that are only sustainable in the presence of significant biodiversity. While the definition of nature for the purposes of this study includes the presence and manipulation of humans in the environment, a natural setting is one in which human population and activity are not so great as to disrupt the sustained functioning of many non-human communities.

The Tradition of Literary Ecology in American Writing

Given the fact that nature is one of the primary themes of American writing, ecocriticism is certainly not a theoretical approach to literature that has emerged *ex nihilo*. Because the North American landscape has always been at the core of the American imagination, ecocriticism can be seen as both a product of the modern environmental movement and an outgrowth of an intellectual and aesthetic tradition. However, ecocriticism also signifies an evolution of environmental thinking that completely reverses the original conceptions of nature that early settlers—religious separatists and economic speculators alike—imported from Europe. For early European settlers, the New World represented a chance for religious freedom and economic prosperity, but it was also a wilderness. For some it was the residence of evil—a place of temptation, travail, and death; for others it was a seemingly endless supply of resources that would fuel westward expansion, Manifest Destiny, and both personal and national wealth. For the religious separatists, especially the Puritans, the New World was both a wilderness and a promised land. Conceiving of their quest in Biblical terms, the Puritans viewed themselves as a chosen people traversing a wilderness—an ocean this time, not a desert—to arrive at the land of milk and honey. As John Winthrop preached on the *Arbella* heading from England to Massachusetts, the task before them was to build “a city upon a hill,” a New Jerusalem that

would be a beacon for the rest of the world (49). At the same time, they understood that this city would have to be carved out of a wilderness that seemed willfully intent on destroying their community. Their conception of the New World as both a promised land and a wilderness demonstrates that—along with their language, religion, philosophy, and customs—they imported the European cultural beliefs about nature.

While their idea of a New Jerusalem was a vision, the wilderness that they encountered was very real. For them and for many Europeans to come, the New World was more a wilderness than a garden, a place of wild beasts where humans were likely to become “bewildered” or otherwise tested by the devil.⁷ Regardless of their particular environmental sensibility, “there was too much wilderness for appreciation” (Nash xii). Given the theological and philosophical tradition that they came from, the early religious settlers viewed nature as situated in direct opposition to civilization, the city, and even the presence of God; nature, they believed, needed to be subdued, tamed, and ordered.

As colonial settlements survived and grew, and as the number of immigrants increased, the dominant view of nature shifted from the purely religious to the economic. Nature was seen as a vast warehouse of natural resources that represented raw materials for commercial use; this view is amply portrayed in the early promotional tracts and in Thomas Jefferson's Notes on the State of Virginia. The economic view that nature existed primarily as the stockpile for modern industry and civilization is continued today by a society that views natural resources, in Martin Heidegger's words, as “a standing reserve” (17). From this purely anthropocentric perspective, a forest of trees is valued not for what it contributes to biodiversity or to increased air and water quality but for the products that can be manufactured from them.

Though the predominant early American views of nature were either religious or commercial, there were eighteenth-century and early nineteenth-century American writers who expressed proto-ecological views. Three writers in particular, William Bartram, Alexander Wilson, and John James Audubon, shared “a poignant sense of the impending loss of biodiversity that attended settlement of the frontier” and introduced an environmentalist sensibility that would later inform the genre of nature writing (Branch 297). Exceptional for their time, these early nature writers eventually came to influence the Transcendentalists—traditionally, the first group of American writers viewed as grounded in an environmental sensibility. The Transcendentalists Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau combined the ideas of European Romanticism, Native American culture, and Eastern Philosophy to reconsider the relationship that humans had with the rest of the environment. For them, nature was more than a howling wilderness meant to test their faith, and it was more than a stockpile of resources. As with European Romanticism, American Romanticism saw the intellectual and spiritual value of being in intimate contact with one’s immediate natural environment. Writers such as Emerson and Thoreau were influenced by the writings of Bartram, Wilson, and Audubon, and they continued to embrace North American ecology as worthy of intellectual and imaginative scrutiny on its own terms.

Besides an appreciation of nature, the work of the Transcendentalists rang “with rhapsody as well—a belief that nature is an expression of God” (Hoagland 5). One of the primary values of nature, from their perspective, was its ability to help inform the identity and essence of the Divine. Nature acted as an intermediary, a conduit, through which humans could communicate with God. In America, as in England, the Romantic perspective argued that “nature should be preserved for the spiritual regeneration of city dwellers” (Sheldrake 62). For

Thoreau, the only way to apprehend God was by “the perpetual instilling and drenching of the reality that surrounds us” (350). Juxtaposed to the Puritans, who viewed Earth as a fallen world—a world of sin and depravity that stood as an obstacle to human salvation—Emerson and Thoreau believed that nature contained a divine spark that, if accessed, could help individuals understand the universe and unite them with the divine. The differing views of nature held by the Puritans and the Transcendentalists have tremendous implications for how human society perceives and uses nature. For the Puritans in particular but for Christians in general, the earthly world is temporary and corrupt; the Christian’s task is to imitate the life of Christ in order to transcend death as well as this fallen world and to be joined with the Father in a perfect, eternal world. The natural world is the arena in which the individual tests and proves his faith in God; otherwise, nature communicates little about the essence of God. Certainly, there are Christians who view nature differently, especially St. Francis of Assisi, but in general the Christian view sees nature as a gift from God that humans have corrupted by sin. Nevertheless, God has ordained that humans have dominion over the world and all things contained within.

The Transcendentalist sees the world much differently; immersion in nature is the best way to establish a vital link with the divine as well as to develop an authentic sense of one’s self that is otherwise hampered by the conforming influences of human society. As Richard Ruland and Malcolm Bradbury explain, in Nature Emerson asserted that “God had made material nature not as a mere commodity but as a hieroglyph of His spiritual world” (119); elsewhere in Nature Emerson writes, “. . . nature is already, in its forms and tendencies, describing its own design. Let us interrogate the great apparition that shines so peacefully around us. Let us inquire, to what end is nature?” (Nature 22). Among the ends of nature for Emerson is the origin of and inspiration for language. As such, nature is a scriptural and poetic text that humans translate

poorly: “poems are a corrupt version of some text in nature with which they ought to be made to tally” (The Poet 233).

While valuable in transforming the way Americans view nature as more than a storehouse of natural resources existing for the benefit of commerce and industry, Emerson and Thoreau spoke less emphatically of preserving nature or tempering human development of wild areas for the sake of nature itself than they spoke of valuing nature for the spiritual or philosophical enrichment of the individual human. Their “new taste for the wild was a sophisticated response, inspired to a large extent by literary and artistic models” (Sheldrake 63). As Bill McKibben has noted, Thoreau “went to the woods to redeem man, not nature. . . . [Walden] is an intensely anthropocentric account—man’s desecration of nature worried him less than man’s desecration of himself” (175).⁹ Emerson’s and Thoreau’s valuation of nature is based upon its ability to benefit humans, stressing that humans benefit directly from an immersion in and study of nature. The differences between the Transcendentalist thinking of Emerson and Thoreau and the later thinking of contemporary environmental writers show how ecology, environmentalism, and the environmental crisis changed the act of writing about nature: what was “an aesthetic choice [for them] is for us a practical one” (McKibben 186). Though Thoreau’s writing is used today to persuade people to protect the remaining wild places, his valuation of nature differs significantly from the nature writers of the second half of the nineteenth century and all of the twentieth century. This dichotomy between the two major Transcendentalists and contemporary writers of the environment is understandable given that in the first half of the nineteenth century, the very idea that wilderness could be exhausted must have seemed impossible (Sheldrake 64, Oelschlaeger 3). Only with the massive migration of settlers and citizens did a more conservation-oriented literature evolve, as seen in John Muir’s

late-nineteenth-century appeals to protect portions of the Sierra Mountains from private ownership, settlement, and resource extraction. The Transcendentalists, of course, did not have the benefit of scientific knowledge accrued over the last 170 years from different disciplines and that has only recently been integrated into the field of ecology. Transcendentalists also had no way of predicting the rapid growth and development of the United States or the long-term effects of such growth on North American ecosystems.¹⁰ Their limited knowledge of the human potential to affect the environment is illustrated in Thoreau's belief that even though logging would force "every man . . . to grow whiskers to hide his nakedness, [at least], thank God, the sky was safe" (qtd. in Muir "American Forests"). As contemporary American writer Don DeLillo portrays in White Noise (1985), the sky is hardly immune from environmental destruction caused by human activity.

It would not be until after the Civil War that nature writers would take the next step in developing a philosophy that would evolve into deep ecology—a philosophy based on "the idea that the rest of creation mattered for its own sake, and that man didn't matter that much" (McKibben 176). Writers such as John Burroughs, George Perkins Marsh, Mary Austin, and, perhaps most importantly, John Muir were prophetic environmental voices who predicted the need for conservation because they understood that humans had the power to alter inexorably what had been thought to be impervious to human influence. Throughout his 1868 account of his walking tour of the American South, A Thousand-Mile Walk to the Gulf, Muir describes the equal importance of even the most seemingly insignificant or lethal element of non-human nature.

How narrow we selfish, conceited creatures are in our sympathies! How blind to the rights of all the rest of creation! With what dismal irreverence we speak of our fellow

mortals! Though alligators, snakes, etc., naturally repel us, they are not mysterious evils. They dwell happily in these flowery wilds . . . cared for with the same species of tenderness and love as is bestowed on angels in heaven and saints on earth. (98-99)

Muir's appreciation of reptiles stands in stark contrast to the dominant culture's blindness to the intrinsic value of non-human nature that is caused by its anthropocentric belief that all of nature is for human consumption. In A Thousand-Mile Walk to the Gulf, Muir clearly associates this privileged position with a conventional belief that God created the world for human benefit:

"The world, we are told, was made especially for man—a presumption not supported by all the facts" (136). Such people believe that the sole reason for sheep is to provide humans with wool, that whales exist as storehouses of oil, iron for "hammers and ploughs" (138). When such people are confronted with seemingly useless or even noxious natural elements, they rationalize that such phenomena represent "unresolvable difficulties connected with Eden's apple and the Devil" (138). In response to these conventional views of nature informed by traditional Christianity, Muir explains,

Now, it never seems to occur to these farseeing teachers that Nature's object in making animals and plants might possibly be first of all the happiness of each of them, not the creation of all for the happiness of one. (138-39)

Throughout his travelogue, Muir criticizes this anthropocentric paradigm of conventional society, mocking those who view humans as "Lord Man" (122, 133, 157). Muir's prescient affinity with deep ecological thinking is acknowledged by Arne Naess who specifically identifies Muir as a forerunner of the deep ecology movement (33). The conflict between Muir and the people he meets on his journey, this study will show, is repeated throughout McCarthy's fiction. While Thoreau's and Emerson's more aesthetic and theological Transcendentalism represents a

great departure from earlier theological and economic views of nature, it is Muir's proto-ecological writing that is more important both to ecocritical practice and to an appreciation of McCarthy as an environmental writer.

In the first half of the twentieth century, the growing realization of the effect of human activities on nonhuman nature continued to be articulated by the writers of vastly different standpoints. In 1930, *The Nashville Agrarians*, primarily concerned with the cost of industrialism and materialism to human well-being, argued that the contemporary "American way of life" (as opposed to the Southern) separated humans from nature. The Agrarians—a group of twelve Southerners including John Crowe Ransom, Allen Tate, and Robert Penn Warren—argued against the "acquisitive, essentially materialistic compulsions of a society that from the outset was very much engaged in seeking wealth, power, and plenty on a continent whose prolific natural resources and vast acres of usable land, forests, and rivers were there for the taking" (Rubin xv). Besides their desire to preserve "a Southern way of life," the Agrarians "were concerned with articulating a workable philosophy rooted in a love of land and the concomitant values that emerge from such stewardship" (Forkner and Samway 5). The introductory "Statement of Principles" in their anthology *I'll Take My Stand* states,

All the articles bear in the same sense upon the book's title-subject: all tend to support a Southern way of life against what may be called the American or prevailing way; and all as much as agree that the best terms in which to represent the distinction are contained in the phrase, *Agrarian versus Industrial*. (original italics) (xxxvii)

Though humanistically focused and only tangentially ecological, an underlying premise of the Agrarian viewpoint was that industrialization had transformed the way that humans interacted

with the non-human world. As Ransom notes in his essay, “Reconstructed but Unregenerate,” “the latter-day societies have been seized—none quite so violently as our American one—with the strange idea that the human destiny is not to secure an honorable peace with nature, but to wage an unrelenting war on nature” (7). Both Ransom and Lyle Lanier criticize the materialistically focused “gospel of Progress” that is counter to their promotion of “social stability through attachment, in one form or another to land” (Lanier 131). Though appropriately criticized for their conservative views on race, the Agrarians as a group were prescient in connecting rampant industrial and commercial development with environmental degradation and social disintegration. In particular, their argument that technology not only distanced humans but also alienated them from nature is a point that Naess develops in his own ecological philosophy. As a link in the chain of environmental writing in American literature, the Agrarians supply an often overlooked contribution to the evolving relationship that Americans have with their native environment. Unlike William Faulkner, the writer McCarthy is most often compared to, the Agrarians represent an unlikely Southern influence on McCarthy’s fiction.¹¹

After World War II, Muir’s idea that elements in nature mattered regardless of their economic value or utility to humans reemerged in Aldo Leopold’s “The Land Ethic.” Included in a 1949 collection of essays entitled A Sand County Almanac, “The Land Ethic” calls for the extension of ethical consideration to include the “land,” which for Leopold “is not merely soil; it is a fountain of energy flowing through a circuit of soils, plants, and animals” (253). Arguing that “all ethics so far evolved rest upon a single premise: that the individual is a member of a *community* of interdependent parts” (239), Leopold shows how human society throughout history has extended ethical consideration to a wider and wider range of humanity. For Leopold, a forester and game management expert, the need to extend ethical consideration to nature comes

from the scientific recognition that humans are inextricably interconnected not only to all other humans but also to the rest of nature. Ecology, he argued, has revealed that humans are not the top of either the food chain or the chain of being; instead, humans reside at an intermediary level “with the bears, raccoons, and squirrels which eat both meat and vegetables” (252).¹² As a species that relies on the complex web of nonhuman nature for its survival, we are obligated to extend ethical consideration to the rest of nature. In order to sustain life on the planet, humans must balance economic considerations with an ethical consideration of the effect of human actions on the rest of the biotic community. Leopold’s thinking culminates in a Land Ethic requiring human society to

examine each question in terms of what is ethically and aesthetically right, as well as what is economically expedient. A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community. (262)

“The Land Ethic” is an important link in the evolution of American writing from the anthropocentrism of Emerson and Thoreau to the ecocentrism of environmental philosophers and nature writers in contemporary American writing. After two decades of relative obscurity, “The Land Ethic” was rediscovered by American writers in the 1970s, and it has been influential ever since. While the ideas it presents influenced the development of deep ecology, it is also apparent in the Endangered Species Act of 1973, which extended ethical consideration to non-human animals and plants through the power of law.

While Leopold’s influence is considerable, Rachel Carson is more directly responsible for sparking an emboldened environmental movement in the 1960s that eventually led to environmental legislation of the 1970s. In her 1962 book Silent Spring, Carson detailed the

systematic contamination of all of nature through modern society's use of pesticides; throughout the history of life on earth, Carson writes,

the physical form and the habits of the earth's vegetation and its animal life have been molded by the environment Only within the moment of time represented by the present century has one species—man—acquired significant power to alter the nature of his world. (5)

Naess refers to Carson as a writer whose use of both scientific and “mythic forms” reflects the importance of intuition in deep ecology: “She felt,” Naess writes, “that mankind did not have *the right* to devastate nature and found it unjustifiable that we, mere ‘drops in the stream of life,’ should permit ourselves to do whatever we please with ‘the work of God’” (165). Her influence is so great that Naess credits Silent Spring as the beginning of the international, long-range ecological movement (210). In the 60s, the non-commercial valuation of nature that was first voiced by the American Transcendentalists, developed by Leopold, and given powerfully expression by Carson led to a wider understanding that Western (and especially American) society's relationship with the natural world was dangerously distorted and ultimately unsustainable. Since then, ecology has had an impact on a wide range of academic disciplines and artistic genres. In the humanities, besides the development of ecological philosophy and ecological literary criticism, there has been a growth in creative non-fiction about nature; combining Transcendentalism's anthropocentric appreciation of nature and ecology's understanding of the interconnectedness of all phenomena, a new generation of nature writers has emerged that includes Rick Bass, Wendell Berry, Annie Dillard, Barry Lopez, Janisse Raye, and Gary Snyder.

Perhaps the most outspoken of these contemporary environmental writers is Edward Abbey—“one of the many heirs to the philosophical tradition started by Muir” (McKibben 176). In Desert Solitaire, his 1968 classic, Abbey writes: “In its simplicity and order [the desert] suggests the classical, except that the desert is a realm beyond the human and in the classicist view only the human is regarded as significant or even recognized as real” (240). The very “idea of ‘a realm beyond the human’ but still on this earth is at odds with our deepest notions, our sense of all creation as our private domain” (McKibben 177), yet it is the very foundation of deep ecology.

In addition to non-fiction writers, many American fiction writers have begun to produce work that reflects the contemporary environmental crisis and that questions the thinking of conventional American society. Such a magnified concern for the environment among novelists has led to the rise of a “toxic consciousness in fiction” (Deitering). This dissertation argues that among the contemporary American writers of and about nature, Cormac McCarthy is one whose work is steeped in the philosophical conflict between conventional Western thinking, which I will define as Cartesian thinking, and the radical environmental thinking of deep ecology and other environmental philosophies. Like deep ecology, one of the principle concerns of the novels of Cormac McCarthy is the interrogation of that Cartesian society and its institutions.

Because radical environmental philosophy is different from mainstream environmentalism, which is concerned with how environmental degradation adversely affects humans, it has only recently been used to help explain the complex and elusive environmental sensibility in McCarthy’s fiction. A close reading grounded in the main ideas of deep ecology, ecofeminism, and social ecology identifies McCarthy’s environmentalism in patterns of character development and conflict. These patterns illustrate the destructiveness of Cartesian

thinking to both humans and nonhumans. As such, his novels accomplish in a naturalistic way what radical environmental philosophy proposes: illustrating the intricate systems and interrelationships between all natural phenomena while juxtaposing that reality with the assumptions and beliefs of Cartesian society.

Cartesian Thinking: The Foil for Environmental Ethics

Related to how McCarthy's southern novels fit within a tradition of American writing about the environment is the specific ecological sensibility that unfolds in his work. Though his environmentalism is influenced by an American literary tradition, it is best understood and appreciated in terms of ecological philosophy. Unlike the obvious environmentalism of Edward Abbey, the environmentalism of Cormac McCarthy is more subtle and elusive. A detailed analysis of his southern novels, however, shows that beneath the seemingly existentialist surface of his fiction is a form of environmental philosophy that illustrates different aspects of deep ecology, social ecology, and ecofeminism—the three streams of “radical environmental ethics” (Warren 77).¹³ Despite the differences between these different philosophical perspectives, what they share with McCarthy's environmentalism is a critique of Western philosophy's role in the contemporary environmental crisis. Through the context of radical environmental philosophy, McCarthy's narratives indict Western society for its persecution and destruction of both human and nonhuman communities.

Western philosophy, or “the dominant worldview” (Mathews 197) are the basic beliefs and assumptions that inform contemporary American society and its institutions. No single term adequately describes this worldview. While Fritjof Capra has alternately identified such a philosophical perspectives as Enlightenment, Cartesian, and Newtonian forms of thinking, Betty

Jean Craige has described it as hierarchical, atomistic, and dualistic (Ladder 4). In truth, all of these terms describe aspects of Western philosophy that have led to the contemporary environmental crisis. In ecological philosophy it is generally accepted that Western society is based upon an anthropocentric, patriarchal, hierarchical, and mechanistic paradigm derived from the Judeo-Christian, Greek, Roman, and Enlightenment eras. It is sometimes called Enlightenment thinking because the set of beliefs reached a level of stability during the late-eighteenth century. More specifically, the evolution of the mechanistic view of the world that became the dominant metaphor of the modern era is the culmination of the writings of Copernicus, Galileo, Newton, Bacon, and René Descartes. Because Descartes developed the “analytic method of reasoning” implicit in mechanistic thinking (Capra Turning Point 54), many ecophilosophers call this dominant Western philosophy Cartesian (Naess, 39; Sheldrake 49; Oelschlaeger 85; Evernden Ecocritical Reader 98; et al). My ecocritical analysis of McCarthy’s southern novels will employ this term as well.

Perhaps the oldest and most fundamental characteristic of Cartesian thinking is anthropocentrism, a worldview that assumes that humans are separate from and superior to nature. From this viewpoint, a world without humans would cease to have a reason to be. Francis Bacon illustrates this belief in his 1620 volume Novum Organum: “Man, if we look to final causes may be regarded as the centre of the world; inasmuch that if man were taken away from the world, the rest would seem to be all astray, without aim or purpose” (vi: 747).¹⁵ One implication of such reasoning is that the earth’s resources, both organic and inorganic, are meant solely for human consumption. The idea that ethical consideration should be extended to nonhuman phenomenon, a basic premise of ecological philosophy, is unimaginable for the anthropocentric mind because only humans have value.

While Bacon reflects the anthropocentrism that still predominates in Western culture, anthropocentrism originates in ancient Greece and Israel and develops through the rest of recorded history. This pattern of philosophical evolution is repeated for all the other major characteristics of Cartesian thinking. Perhaps the earliest articulation of anthropocentrism in the Western tradition can be found in Aristotle's Politics, where the philosopher argues that plants exist for the sake of animals

and animals for the sake of man, the tame for use and for, the wild, if not all, at least the great part of them, for food, and for the provision of clothing and various instruments. Now if nature makes nothing incomplete and nothing in vain, the inference must be that she has made all animals for the sake of man. (2: 1993-94)

Though Aristotle's statement certainly reflects the anthropocentric worldview of ancient Greece (Sheldrake 35), the Judeo-Christian creation story best exemplifies the human-centeredness of contemporary society. The story of Adam and Eve is a primary cultural narrative in Western society, and its influence on Western society's relationship to nonhuman nature is so pervasive that its assumptions have rarely been examined, much less challenged (Gabel et al. 103).

According to the story, the world was created by God for the use of humans. When God instructs Adam to name all of the animals, Adam is

establishing his dominance over them. God planned all of this explicitly for man's benefit and rule: no item in the physical creation had any purpose save to serve man's purposes. And, although man's body is made of clay, he is not simply part of nature; he is made in God's image. (White 9).

Adam and Eve's expulsion from Eden is also tacitly anthropocentric; because of the actions of two humans, this world is a fallen place designed to inflict pain, suffering, and death on humans

as punishment for their disobedience to God. Nature, in essence, is punishment for sin (Oelschlaeger 67):

And to the man he said, “Because you have listened to the voice of your wife, and have eaten of the tree about which I commanded you, ‘You shall not eat of it,’ cursed is the ground because of you; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field.” (Genesis 3:17-18)

Later in Genesis, the story of the flood describes the destruction of the world in order to punish human wickedness and represents another narrative that reinforces the cultural belief that humans are the most important creation on earth.¹⁶ For Christians, these powerful stories are the foundation on which the rest of the Old and New Testaments are built. Adding to the Hebrew ideas of linear time and a fallen world, Christianity stressed the relative unimportance of this world in comparison to the eternal new world that would accompany Christ’s second coming (Oelschlaeger 63). For ecological philosophers, examples like these validate Lynn White’s claim that “Christianity is the most anthropocentric religion the world has seen” (9). White points out that one of the first tasks of the early Christian church was to vanquish the paganism of the Greco-Roman world, a belief system in which every element of nature had its own *genius loci*, its own guardian spirit (10). In Christianity’s triumph over paganism, animism was destroyed and replaced by a cultural assumption that nature was “inanimate and neuter” (Sheldrake 4). This “de-animation” of nature only exacerbated the separation between humans and the rest of nature, enhancing the West’s anthropocentric orientation and leading to a mechanistic theory of nature advanced by Enlightenment-era scientists. In short, the scriptures

of Judaism and Christianity transformed the relationship that Western culture had with the nonhuman environment:

to the degree that our dominant Judeo-Christian tradition is seen as anything about nature, it is usually seen as anti-environmentalist, as elevating man above all others. The Genesis story, with its emphasis upon domination . . . appears [to provide] the perfect rationale for cutting down forests, running roads through every wild place, killing off snail darters. The biblical tradition, Joseph Campbell says, is the “socially-oriented mythology” of a mobile people, as opposed to the nature-oriented mythology of an earth-cultivating society. (McKibben 74)

Judeo-Christian anthropocentrism, White concludes, bears “an immense burden of guilt” for the ecological crisis.¹⁷

For William Rueckert, anthropocentrism is the human species’ tragic flaw and it thus links literature to ecology:

[Given] that the basic postulate of ecology and tragedy is that humans precipitate tragic consequences by acting either in ignorance or without properly understanding the true consequences of their actions, we are violating the laws of nature, and the retribution from the biosphere will be more terrible than any inflicted on humans by the gods. (113)

Throughout The Ecocritical Reader, writers identify the many ways in which anthropocentrism is at the root of the contemporary environmental crisis (White, Manes, Rueckert et al.). Likewise, throughout his southern novels, McCarthy illustrates many instances where the fulfillment of human needs, both vital and peripheral, come at the expense of the natural environment.

Related to anthropocentrism and following the same trajectory through history are the dualistic and hierarchical worldviews that have been widely attributed to ancient Greece. While such ideas certainly preceded ancient Greece, the works of Plato and Aristotle are often cited as pivotal in the development of Western philosophy generally and Cartesian thinking specifically.

Platonic dualism and the Aristotelian scale of ascent contributed to the belief that humans are completely separate from and superior to the rest of the natural world. As Betty Jean Craige explains in Laying the Ladder Down, Plato's separation of the world into two realms—the realm of ideas and the realm of their appearances in nature—constituted a split between spirit and matter, stasis and flux, mind and body, self and world, and culture and nature. Aristotle expounded upon Plato's ideas, accepting the dualism between spirit or soul and matter, and ascribing greater value to those species that exhibited a greater proportion of soul or spirit. This scale of ascent is inherently a model of domination that sees difference as distinguishing rank or value (Craige Ladder 9).

The dualistic and hierarchical thinking of Plato and Aristotle had an important influence on Christianity, the scientific thinking of René Descartes, and the evolution of Western philosophy. Because the Apostle Paul, along with a number of other “patristic fathers,” is largely responsible for the theological basis of Christianity, his ideas concerning “humanity and nature . . . [have] ruled the West for nearly two thousand years” (Oelschlaeger 33). Paul not only adapted the dialectical argument found in Platonic dialogue to write his epistles but also employed Platonic dualism. By “baptizing Greek philosophy,” Paul further “dichotomized the world” into the supernatural/natural, sacred/profane, transcendent-eternal/corporeal-evanescent (Oelschlaeger 64-66). Descartes shared Plato's and Paul's dualistic thinking about the separation

between body and mind. For Descartes, reality was divided into *res cogitans* and *res extensa*—a thinking human and the extended thing:

the latter category included all nature, everything but God and the human mind, or soul. The mind, according to Descartes, is indivisible and therefore greatly different from the body, which being part of nature, is divisible; nature functions like a machine, and so does the body, in which the soul resides. (Craig Ladder 98)

What distinguished humans from the rest of the material universe was the soul, the consciousness that was not of this world. His famous maxim, “I am thinking, therefore I exist,” succinctly states his belief that the mind is wholly detached from the body and the rest of the world (Sheldrake 56). This strict duality at the core of Cartesian thinking, introduced by Plato and developed by Paul and Descartes, separated reality “between self and world between spirit and matter, between mind and body” (Craig Reconnection 4). Over the centuries, Platonic dualism and Aristotelian hierarchy has also “justified the exploitation by those high on the ladder of those beneath them; it made the exploitation of women, nonwhite races, technologically unsophisticated societies, animals, and the earth itself appear to be ‘natural’”(Craig Ladder 9). Likewise, throughout McCarthy’s southern novels, Cartesian characters justify the persecution and destruction of marginal human populations and nonhuman nature through the belief that humans are superior to nonhumans, men are superior to women, and whites are superior to nonwhites.

Inextricably bound to the ideas of anthropocentrism, dualism, and hierarchy that developed throughout antiquity is the idea that the universe is a machine, a concept that originated in the sixteenth-century. While Francis Bacon and Isaac Newton play important roles

is the development of the mechanistic worldview that ecological philosophers blame for much of the environmental degradation in the contemporary world, the most important figure in its development was Descartes. Around the time Descartes lived, there was a general fascination with the mechanical functioning of clocks (Craig Ladder 98). Its design quickly became a dominant metaphor for how the world functioned—as an enormous timepiece that continued to spin through the movements of individual parts. The effect of this metaphor, however, was the de-animation of the natural world: “the living cosmos [was] replaced by the universe as a machine” (Sheldrake 49). Along with his ideas that the soul was separate from the rest of material existence, Descartes’s mechanical model of the world exacerbated the anthropocentrism and hierarchical thinking he inherited from the Western philosophical tradition.

Like Newton, Descartes was a mathematician who devoted his career to explaining that “everything in the material universe worked entirely mechanically according to mathematical necessities” (Sheldrake 49). He eventually applied this new mechanical way of thinking to everything, including plants, animals, and humans. Animals had only a shell of a body without the spirit. As such they were automata like clocks, capable of complex behaviors but lacking souls that enabled them to think. Such a view of animals as mere machines “furthered his explicit aim of making men ‘lord and possessors of nature’” (Sheldrake 53). As such, Descartes thought that animals were not only incapable of thought but unable to feel pain (Garber 16). Their screams during laboratory testing were considered simply “the noise of a little spring that had been touched” (Regan 29). Though the vitalists of his day objected to Descartes’s view of animals as mere machines, his mechanistic theory achieved supremacy within academic biology in the 1920s (Sheldrake 53). This detachment of the mind from the body or from emotions led to the notion of “scientific detachment” that has become so pervasive and privileged in

contemporary Western thinking. The myth of scientific detachment or objectivity remains strong both inside and outside of the academy:

it is not confined to the ranks of professional scientists and technocrats; it has an all-pervasive influence on modern society, deepening the divisions between man and nature, mind and body, head and heart, objectivity and subjectivity, quantity and quality. (Sheldrake 56)

This mechanism found in Newtonian physics and advanced by Cartesian philosophy and scientific method has become so pervasive in western society that to question it is to question the very foundation of modern civilization: “The mechanistic theory of nature has acquired such prestige through the successes of science and technology that it now seems less like a theory than a proven fact” (74). Furthermore, the influence of the mechanistic paradigm is not limited to the western world; the advocates of mechanistic progress have spread it “to all the nations of the world, superimposing it on more traditional, animistic attitudes” (Sheldrake 4).

Atomism is the last feature of McCarthy’s environmental critique of Cartesian thinking. As defined in the OED, “atomism” is the theory in modern philosophy “that all statements, propositions, situations, etc., are composed of mutually independent, simple, primary, and irreducible elements.” As a secondary definition, the OED identifies “atomism” as “an ancient theory of Democritus, Epicurus, and Lucretius, according to which simple, indivisible, and indestructible atoms are the basic components of the entire universe.” Though pre-Socratic Greeks are credited for the idea that the world is composed of homogeneous particles (Oelschlaeger 55), the Enlightenment philosophers and scientists used the idea of the atom to decode the mysteries of the natural world. While Bacon illustrates atomistic thinking when describing his utopian view of a research university in The New Atlantis (32-38), Descartes is

the philosopher who developed a new scientific method based upon dividing “each of the difficulties” he examined “into as many parts as possible” and reducing them to their “simplest and most easily known” elements (Discourse on the Method 35). Viewing nature as a machine with component parts that have only one function, the atomistic thinker studies phenomenon in isolation, unaware of the multiple functions each element plays within a complex system. Combined with anthropocentrism, dualism, and hierarchical thinking, the power of atomism thinking cannot be underestimated. Throughout the “various streams of Western culture,” there is

the belief in the scientific method as the only valid approach to knowledge; the view of the universe as a mechanical system composed of elementary material building block [atomism]; the view of life in society as a competitive struggle for existence; and the belief in unlimited material progress to be achieved through economic and technological growth. During the past decades all these ideas and values have been found severely limited and in need of radical revision. (Capra Turning Point 31)

The shortcoming of atomistic thinking, as opposed to holistic ecological thinking, is that it fails to appreciate fully the interrelationship between discrete elements. By viewing the environment as a system of elements that functions only as a whole, the ecosystem ecologist more accurately identifies and understands the characteristics of individual phenomenon. This holistic, ecological model that—first made popular by Charles Darwin—unifies the myriad of environmental ethical theories.

Though the holistic model finds the roots of our environmental crisis in Cartesian thinking, it is important to remember that such criticism does not view Cartesian thinking as

sinister or invalid. To a certain extent, the traits of Cartesian thinking are responsible for important scientific and technological discoveries. Certainly, Cartesian thinking considers the interactions between one object in nature with another, but by trying to understand a phenomenon by isolating to its “simplest and most easily known elements,” it often fail to recognize that identity and character is determined by all of the relationships that phenomenon has in its natural environment. Though useful in many ways, atomistic thinking is counter to ecological understanding that the identity and function can only be understood in context. Ecological philosophy, while appreciating the scientific discoveries made possible through Cartesian thinking, argues that the strict atomism developed over the centuries has led to an inability to think more holistically and has led to the failure to value relationships between phenomena that define identity and character. Such an inability to see holistically has had catastrophic environmental implications. The problem with modern society, Frijof Capra argues in The Turning Point, is that it has disproportionately favored Cartesian thinking almost to the exclusion of holistic thinking. What ecology in general and radical environmental philosophy in particular argue is that a holistic ethic is more consistent with how nature functions and can serve as a guide for environmental sustainability of the widest possible biodiversity. It is this conflict between Cartesian/atomistic thinking and ecological/holistic thinking that serves as the starting point for radical environmental ethics. Writers such as Capra and Craige have acknowledged such a conflict and have argued that Cartesian thinking is slowly being supplanted by a scientifically based holistic paradigm that balances competition and cooperation and that stresses the importance of sustainability for the health of humans and nonhumans alike.

Holism to Deep Ecology

Opposed to Cartesian thinking is a biocentric holism that has evolved from the modern physical and biological sciences and that is most clearly practiced in the discipline of ecology.

“Holism” is

The theory that whole entities, as fundamental and determining components of reality, have an existence other than as the mere sum of their parts [It is a] theory that the universe and especially living nature is correctly seen in terms of interacting wholes. (*Webster’s New Collegiate Dictionary* qtd. in Craige 4)

When holism is applied to the study of nature, holistic approaches and attitudes “privilege study of a system over the analysis of its part” (Craige Ladder 5).

The most significant figure responsible for the shift from the dualistic system of Cartesian thinking to holistic thinking is Charles Darwin, who “turned the Romantic vision of the creative power of nature into a scientific theory” (Sheldrake 70). Darwin “invited our cultures to face the facts that in the observation of nature there exists not one scrap of evidence that humans are superior to or even more interesting than, say, lichen” (Manes 22). His book “The Origin of Species showed that humankind did not stand above the natural world but was part of the web of life” (Oelschlaeger 282). In the conclusion of The Origin of Species, Darwin described evolution as a “entangled bank” (174) and challenged “the theological distinction between soul and body” (Craige Reconnection 8). By discrediting the “typological species concept,” he replaced the vertical hierarchy of Cartesian thinking with a model of nature in which no one species or system has dominance over the others. All of the systems within a large ecosystem are inextricably bound and reliant on one another for survival (Craige Ladder 14). Darwin’s theories produced biocentrism—an environmental ethic that views all life as equally important

(Oelschlaeger 293).²¹ It would take another century and writers like Muir, Leopold, and Naess to realize the important role of the inorganic in the functioning of ecosystems, a realization that would lead from biocentrism to ecocentrism to deep ecology.

In 1973, Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess introduced the principles of deep ecology that he would later develop into his own ecological philosophy or “Ecosophy T.” Deep ecology reiterates ecocentrism’s belief in the intrinsic value of both organic and inorganic phenomenon, but it also includes a “pervasive critique of advanced industrial culture” (Oelschlaeger 301). As David Rothenberg explains in the Introduction to Naess’s Ecology, Community, and Lifestyle, deep ecology can, among other things, “be an opening to the full scale critique of our civilization, seeking out false conceptions of reality at the core” (4). Such a critique is at the heart of an ecocritical analysis of McCarthy’s southern novels.

Naess distinguishes between shallow ecology, an environmentalism focused on the “fight against pollution and resource depletion” for “the health and affluence of people in developed countries,” and deep ecology, an environmentalism that values all forms of the environment for their own intrinsic value and right to evolve into ever-greater diversity and complexity (95). Shallow ecology’s anthropocentrism is apparent not only in its view of nature as a “standing reserve” but also in its confidence that human technical advancement will provide solutions to pollution and resource depletion. By focusing on technical solutions to environmental problems, shallow ecology “neglects to consider fundamental changes in consciousness or economic systems” (Naess 96). Shallow ecology views environmental problems atomistically—as separate from other problems such as the developing world’s overpopulation and debt, and the increase in ethnic and tribal violence. It also adheres to the mechanistic view of reality. As a type of Cartesian thinking, shallow ecology is “the child of Western history, reflecting the intense

homocentrism of Judeo-Christianity and the alchemy of Modernism” that ultimately places all elements of nature “into categories of utility” (Oelschlaeger 286). Naess argues that viewing nature’s value as only relative “to mankind is a form of anthropocentrism which is not philosophically tenable” (177). Anthropocentrism is destructive and contrary not only to what ecology teaches but also to the philosophies of the majority of human cultures: the conclusion “that humans should ‘conquer the world’ and complete the job of creating one great human habitat of all the habitable parts of the Earth . . . [is] characteristic of only a fraction of human cultures” (Naess 169-70). As such, for Naess and a number of other environmental philosophers, anthropocentrism is a cultural aberration that has gained acceptance precisely because of its skewed view of the role of humans on the planet.

The first step in deep ecology’s quest to change fundamentally the relation between human society and nonhuman nature is to resolve the schism caused by the human/nature-mind/body split that defines anthropocentrism that began in antiquity (Mathews 200). In response to Western society’s “silencing of nature” (White), deep ecology ambitiously and idealistically attempts to make “the partitioned world whole again” by advocating for equal rights of all beings to exist and propagate. It justifies this “biocentric egalitarianism” (Naess 28) by recognizing that biodiversity is intrinsically valuable, independent of its usefulness to human purposes, and by arguing that despite our “culturally acquired alienation from the natural world” humans can gradually identify ourselves “with wider and wider circles of being” (Mathews 199). In The Web of Life Fritjof Capra explains, “Deep ecological awareness recognizes the fundamental interdependence of all phenomena and the fact that, as individuals and societies, we are all embedded in (and ultimately dependent on) the cyclical processes of nature” (6). A philosophical outlook influenced and related to ecology, deep ecology investigates how

perception, values, and ethics influence our ideas about humans in relation to the rest of the environment.

Deep ecology is not monolithic environmental philosophy. Like postmodernism, it refers “to a diffuse sentiment rather than to any common set of doctrines—the sentiment that humanity can and must go beyond the modern” (Oelschlaeger 305). Like ecocriticism, deep ecology’s methodological openness is both its greatest weakness and its greatest strength, empowering its practitioners to “achieve a theoretical posture adequate to the rapidly changing picture of life on earth by grappling with the very categories that define the modern mind and then transcending the anomalies of that worldview” (Oelschlaeger 308). Despite this openness, Naess—along with George Sessions—has formulated eight principles that generally describe the deep ecological viewpoint. The principles build on one another in syllogistic fashion but all tend toward the holistic, non-mechanistic viewpoint of McCarthy’s environmentalist characters.

As already mentioned, the first principle affirms an ecocentric ethic: “The flourishing of human and non-human life on Earth has intrinsic value. The value of non-human life forms is independent of the usefulness these have for narrow human purposes” (Naess 28). This principle derives from an ecological understanding of the natural world as a network of interconnected systems. In both physics and biology, the importance of relationships between phenomena has increasingly displaced the belief that phenomena can be understood as discrete entities. While ecology has supplied innumerable examples of the essential role that relationships play in the properties and functioning of a phenomenon, it is Heisenberg’s uncertainty principle that most strikingly illustrates the inability of humans to extricate themselves from nature. By arguing that the observer of natural process (e.g. a scientist) necessarily affects that process being observed,

the uncertainty principle challenges the idea of objective scientific inquiry assumed in Descartes's method; Heisenberg discovered

that the unquestioned *realism* of classical physics was untenable, since all measurement necessitates human choice of a measuring device (itself a construction), and thus any description of reality is contingent upon the result of that selection. (Oelschlaeger 324)

The fact that no thing is independent of its environment—not even humans studying the environment—has important implications; nothing, for instance, can be understood completely as a single entity. As a consequence of this fact, a phenomenon's identity is necessarily bound up in its relationships with other phenomena in the environment, which necessarily extends value to those other things.²³ What modern ecology, as well as other branches of modern science, has shown us is that the level of complexity of these relationships is far greater than we ever anticipated. From the recognition of this complexity comes the necessity of acknowledging the rights of all life to flourish: "The right of all forms to live is a universal right which cannot be quantified. No single species of living being has more of this particular right to live and unfold than any other species" (Naess 166). In his *Ecosophy-T*, the ecological philosophy he developed as an example of deep ecological thinking, Naess understands that killing is a fact of nature and that the flourishing of one species means death for others, but the necessity of killing should always be a matter of vital need.²⁴

As an extension of the first principle of deep ecology, the second principle states that "the richness and diversity of life forms are values in themselves and contribute to the flourishing of humans and non-human life on Earth" (Naess 28). Much broader than the zoological preservation of a limited number of species, Naess emphasizes that richness in numbers is just as

important as diversity. The wide range of life must be accompanied with a plentiful supply of that range in order to preserve the complex network of interactions that comprise a healthy, sustainable ecosystem and that enable nature to evolve toward ever-greater complexity. The decline of biological diversity through accelerated species extinction caused by human alteration of the environment not only denies the intrinsic rights of nonhumans to flourish, but it also destroys the genetic variety necessary for future evolution. In order for nature's ever-increasing complexity to continue, humans must strive to preserve both the diversity and richness of species on the planet.

In order to ensure a richness and diversity of life forms and to sustain the complex interplay between systems, the third principle dictates that human beings should restrict their alteration of the environment to activities that satisfy "vital needs" instead of satisfying ever-expanding peripheral ones (Naess 171). Naess acknowledges that this principle conflicts with late consumer capitalism's belief in perpetual economic growth and increased profits, and he admits that this principle is worded strongly; it is intentionally amorphous, he confesses, to allow "considerable latitude in considering what a 'vital need' is" (30). He fully admits that differences in climate and the structures of different societies need to be fully considered when defining vital needs. At the same time, he stresses that western society has largely confused "wants" and "needs." Later, in principle seven, Naess emphasizes that the deep ecological perspective values *quality of life* (including the quality of personal experience) over *standard of living* (which is just the accumulation of material possessions). From an environmental ethics standpoint, the case for satisfying only vital needs comes from the fact that if the rest of the world attains the standard of living of the people in the West, "such attainment would mean environmental catastrophe" (100).²⁵ From a strictly human ethical standpoint, the question

Naess asks is “Shouldn’t we choose a level of standard of living such that it is conceivable that all humans can reach that same level if they want?” (100).

The third principle’s emphasis on the need for humans to satisfy only vital needs greatly affects modern ideas of technological advancement. A belief in human genius and innovation has led to the confidence that any environmental problem can be solved by technological invention; deep ecologists suggest another path: instead of creating new technology to ameliorate environmental problems caused by old technology, humans should consider adopting a more humble existence in order to provide for all of humanity’s vital needs.²⁶ Naess’s other criticism of technology in general is that

modern industrial technology is a centralizing factor, it tends towards bigness, it decreases the area within which one can say ‘self-made is well-made,’ it attaches us to big markets, and forces us to seek an ever increasing income. (92)

Naess does not reject technology outright but argues that new technology should be evaluated for what it does in a more holistic sense: “New technology is not inherently unecological but it must be evaluated in terms of how it satisfies the vital needs in the diverse local communities” (102).²⁷ Besides looking at how a technology will affect the environment, there is another important consideration: how, Naess asks, does new technology distance the user from the elements in nature?

When a technique is replaced by another which requires more attention, education, and is otherwise more self-engaging and detached, the contact with the medium or milieu in which the technique acts is diminished. To the extent that this medium is *nature*, the engagement in nature is reduced in favor of engagement in the technology. The degree of inattentiveness or apathy increases

and thus our awareness of the changes in nature caused by the technique decreases. (103)

Technology, then, can cause a distancing of humans from non-humans that makes the separation between the two seem complete and total, reinforcing the Cartesian belief that humans are not only apart from but also superior to nature. As Naess argues, certain kinds of technology reduce “everything to mere objects of manipulation,” resulting not only in human alienation from nature but in a de-animation and commodification of nature. (172).²⁸ Cartesian society’s ability to conquer nature has been “vastly increased in power by technology and amplified by the belief in unlimited progress” (Sheldrake 60). Antecedents to deep ecology’s identification of the relationship between technology, human alienation, and the destruction of nature can be found in Heidegger and Leopold: “both argue that nature has been exploited through technology in the name of social progress and that fundamental changes in human behavior and ideology are needed” (Oelschlaeger 304). This relationship between technology, human alienation, and the destruction of nature is also a consistent theme in McCarthy’s books. The automobile is the most potent example of technology in McCarthy that both alienates humans and damages the environment. McCarthy’s Cartesian characters—those who think with the mechanistic, hierarchical, atomistic, and anthropocentric perspective—are the users of technology and the abusers of nature. Partly because their dependence on technology distances them from nature, these characters lack sympathy and compassion for McCarthy’s environmentalist characters.

Naess develops his deep ecological philosophy further by stating that excessive human interference with the non-human world has led to the reduction of richness and diversity of life (principle four). The solution to this problem is a smaller human population (principle five). Viewing the advanced cognitive abilities of humans as a responsibility instead of a privilege,

Naess argues that “*Homo Sapiens* may be capable, in suitable circumstances, and upon the basis of a wide perspective, of *recommending its own withdrawal* as the dominant living being on earth” (original italics) (169). The decline in global biodiversity has only accelerated since Naess composed his deep ecological principles; in his “Letter to Thoreau”—the *Prologue* to The Future of Life—Edward O. Wilson writes,

Species of plants and animals are disappearing a hundred or more times faster than before the coming of humanity, and as many as half may be gone by the end of the century. An Armageddon is approaching at the beginning of the third millennium. (xxiii)

The loss of such diversity, including the loss of unidentified species, is akin to “tearing pages out of an unread book written in a language humans hardly know how to read, about a place where they live” (Oelschlaeger 288). The fifth principle calling for population decreases is most often used to charge deep ecology with misanthropy or “green bigotry.”²⁹ However, only by decreasing the number of humans on the planet will nature’s richness and diversity be preserved. Naess acknowledges that such a task will take time and will not happen soon enough to “save diversity of non-humans” (30).

Principle six is a direct critique of western capitalism. Naess argues that “significant change in life conditions for the better require change in policies. These affect basic economic, technological, and ideological structures” (29). The idea of continual economic growth as “conceived and implemented today by the industrial states is incompatible with points one through five” (31). Besides the problems of the present ideology that places market value on things that are scarce as well as on the prestige of vast consumption and waste, late consumer capitalism relies on continual market and profit growth that is not sustainable nor ecological

(31). Perhaps the best expression of this principle is the construction of the freeway in Suttree, a form of development that perpetuates the cycle of capital, human, and environmental resource use while further distancing humans from nature.

Last, the eighth principle calls upon individuals subscribing to these fundamentals of deep ecology to promote sociocultural change. (Naess 29, Oelschlaeger 303). It is important to remember, however, that “actions do not need to be uniform or unilateral. There is ample room for different opinions about priorities. . . Different opinions in these matters should not exclude vigorous cooperation” (31). As always, Naess provides a caveat to all of these eight principles:

You are not expected to agree with all of [Ecosophy T's] values and paths of derivation, but to learn the means for developing your own systems or guides, say, Ecosophies, X, Y, and Z. Saying ‘your own’ does not imply that the ecosophy is in any way an original creation by yourself. (36)

McCarthy’s environmental heroes do not actively pursue sociocultural change as Naess’s Ecosophy-T instructs. In general, they are characters whose activism is limited to a desire and a struggle to maintain an ecologically sustainable life amidst the challenge of Cartesian society. Through their stories, however, McCarthy is critiquing Cartesian society, and in that critique he develops his own Ecosophy that incorporates many of the ideas of deep ecology but that also reflects ideas from the other radical environmental philosophies of social ecology and ecofeminism. Though not as obviously environmental as Naess’s Ecosophy and not as optimistic as Capra’s and Craige’s argument that the holistic paradigm is replacing the Cartesian worldview, McCarthy’s ecological sensibility is unique in that it illustrates individuals engaging in the struggle to live a life in close contact with nature.

Besides the eight principles discussed above, two important terms in Naess's Ecosophy T that are relevant to an ecological reading of McCarthy's southern novels are "identification" and "Self-realization." Identification refers to the understanding that an individual's identity is inextricably bound to the myriad of relationships and interconnections that one has not just with other humans but with the nonhuman world. The effect of such a worldview is that no longer is the identity of an element in nature contained within itself; rather, its identity is largely determined by its relationship to other elements in the environment. From a personal standpoint, such a recognition leads to extension of the boundaries of self beyond the individual, his or her family, tribe, country, or humanity itself. The boundaries of the self extend to the whole world. As a result of this expansion of self, the impulse to care and nurture those new elements of self becomes a natural extension of one's impulse to care for one's self or one's family. It is this expansion of the boundaries of the self that ultimately leads to "Self-realization"—a transcendental understanding of one's inextricable interconnectedness with the rest of the world. It is just such a deep ecological Self-realization that distinguishes McCarthy's environmental heroes from his Cartesian characters and anti-heroes.

A Deep Ecological Approach to the Southern Novels of Cormac McCarthy

Through the perspective of deep ecology and related environmental ethics, this dissertation contends that what I have defined as Cartesian thinking is responsible not only for the environmental degradation evident throughout McCarthy's novels but also for the alienation of his human characters, including his environmental heroes. More generally, Cartesian thinking dominates McCarthy criticism and is responsible for the generally anthropocentric judgment of McCarthy as an existentialist or nihilist. Such literary critical thinking, therefore, is a reflection

of the general Cartesian society that is responsible for the contemporary environmental crisis.³⁰ As such, the shortcomings of McCarthy criticism are specific examples of the failure of literary criticism in general to recognize the prevalence of environmental issues central to much contemporary writing (Deitering).³¹ As opposed to Cartesian thinking, both ecocriticism and the novels of Cormac McCarthy view landscape and setting as more than just landscape and setting. Rather than limiting nature's role as the stage on which the human drama occurs, ecocriticism and McCarthy's novels emphasize the centrality of nature in the actions of individual characters. By applying ecocritical ideas to his novels, this study reveals how McCarthy uses character to show the interconnectedness of humans with their environment.

Because of the centrality of nature in the novels of Cormac McCarthy, an ecocritical reading of his work seems not only appropriate but inevitable. By melding the environmental philosophies of deep ecology and ecofeminism, this study represents a unique form of ecocriticism as well as a challenge to conventional literary criticism about McCarthy. The complexity of my ecocritical approach, however, is only a reflection of the complexity of McCarthy's works. As I continue to read and re-read McCarthy, I find multiple ways to integrate a range of ecocritical tools by which to discuss his characters' relationships with nature. In essence, all of the chapters point to the same conflict between the Cartesian and ecological worldviews described by Craige, McKibben, Oelschlaeger, Nash, Capra, Sheldrake, Naess, and others. By delineating a complex pattern of conflict between characters who think dualistically, atomistically, and hierarchically and characters who think holistically and environmentally, this study argues that McCarthy is a writer with a complex environmental sensibility—a stance that necessitates a reevaluation of the critical consensus that McCarthy's work is primarily either existentialist or nihilist in nature.

Critical acknowledgement of McCarthy's skill in describing natural phenomenon is exemplified by Robert Jarrett's statement that "McCarthy may own the most accomplished eye and vocabulary for natural description in contemporary American fiction" (40). Critics have also noted McCarthy's practice of leveling the relative importance of nature and humans; Dana Phillips argues that for McCarthy humans and nature are "parts of the same continuum and are consistently described by [him] as such" (447). Phillips uses McCarthy's own term of "optical democracy" to explain the effect of this leveling of nature and humans (Phillips 444, McCarthy Blood Meridian 247). This optical democracy is identical to the biocentric egalitarianism described by deep ecology. Despite this critical attention to McCarthy's use of landscape and the relative importance of humans in the landscape, few critics have connected his characters' actions with their relationship with nature. Instead, most scholarship focusing on McCarthy's use of landscape has relegated nature to one of two non-ecological categories: nature as separate from human concerns and nature as mimetic device. In the first category, the discreteness of nature and humans has been interpreted to signify God's distance from human life (Daughtery). This distance has justified existentialist and nihilistic readings in which the isolation of McCarthy heroes corresponds "with the ultimate solitude of dwelling in an ungregarious universe, lost, as it were, in the stars" (Bell 29). In terms of nature's mimetic function, natural surroundings are often seen to "highlight, reinforce, and counterpoint the novels' characterization and ideological concerns" (Jarrett 40). Both anthropocentric categories limit nature's role in literature as a foil for the human drama.

The majority of McCarthy scholars have seen these books and all of McCarthy's subsequent work in existentialist or nihilistic terms, but they arrive at these conclusions after conceding that the novels defy literary, critical, or philosophical categories. Perhaps the most

important contribution in the establishment of this critical assessment came with the first full-length volume dedicated to the McCarthy's work—Vereen Bell's The Achievement of Cormac McCarthy. While much has been written since Bell's seminal work of 1988, the critical consensus agrees with his assessment that the prevailing mood in all of McCarthy's novels is “gothic and nihilistic” (2). Even though Bell distances himself from a thesis—“this study of McCarthy's work has no thesis other than that which issues from the cryptic intelligibility of the novels themselves when they are patiently and attentively considered” (xiii)—his conclusions lean heavily toward existentialism and nihilism. The title of an article that preceded his book by five years also summarizes his judgment of McCarthy work: “The Ambiguous Nihilism of Cormac McCarthy.”³² Since the publication of Achievement, no scholarship has challenged this fundamental reading of the McCarthy canon.

The importance of Bell's book on McCarthy criticism is highlighted in Edwin Arnold's comment that

certain critical ‘truths’ have become established about [McCarthy's]work, in large part because they have been so effectively set forth by the author of the single book thus far published on McCarthy. Foremost among the reading found in Vereen Bell's The Achievement of Cormac McCarthy is the idea that McCarthy's books are essentially nihilistic, devoid of conventional plot, theme, or moral reference. (“Naming” 43).

In Bell's assessment, McCarthy's work comes to “unaccommodating resolution” where the “thematic implications have been left suspended, deepened but never clarified” (1). For him, “McCarthy has an antimetaphysical bias . . . [that] binds us to the phenomenal world” (2). In McCarthy's work, there are “no first principles, no fundamental truth, Heraclitus without logos,”

philosophy without subject (9).³³ In the end, Bell concludes that “one strength of McCarthy’s novels is that they resist the imposition of theses from the outside, especially conventional ones, and they seem finally to call all theses into question” (xiii).

While Bell argues that McCarthy’s work resists claims of meaning and easy categorization, he continually comments on the role of nature in his work. Bell credits McCarthy for having a comprehensive knowledge of nature:

McCarthy gets the speech, manners, and values of the area’s people, the climate, the nature of the land, its animals living their own separate life—the specific whole ecology and spirit of a region. When the scene shifts in Blood Meridian to Mexico and the American Southwest, it is as if this exotic desert region had been his home for the whole of his natural life: We are reminded again that experience is primarily not universal but particular, that we live not in an outline but in a place. (4)

While arguing that McCarthy’s plots defy logic and frustrate the reader’s expectations, Bell says that in McCarthy’s work, there is “a high level of seemingly unassimilated raw material [that] represents for us the ascendancy of the world-in-itself, the natural world, outside the jurisdiction of human forms”; for the three protagonists in The Orchard Keeper—Sylder, Ownby, and John Wesley Rattner—“it is an exhilarating, chosen habitat” (13). These assessments of McCarthy, if taken out of Bell’s larger argument, could very well be seen as an ecocritical reading. Besides containing words such as “ecology” and “habitat,” the quotations hint at the primacy of specific natural ecosystems in McCarthy’s work. However, Bell’s inherent anthropocentrism blinds him to the overwhelming importance of the relationship McCarthy’s environmentalist characters have with the nonhuman world throughout the novels. This myopia comes from the fact that

traditional literary criticism views literature as solely about humans. Such a view unnecessarily separates humans from the rest of nature and leads to Bell's assessment of McCarthy as nihilistic. For Bell and others, the fact that humans are separate from the rest of nonhuman nature means that the natural world is, at least, the stage upon which McCarthy's characters play, or, at worst, a malevolent force that threatens human survival. Such a reading fails to consider how McCarthy's novels can be read if humans are viewed as *part* of nature, a contention that is fundamental to most ecocriticism and essential to deep ecology.

By making humans and nonhumans part of the same system of life on the planet, McCarthy portrays human and nonhuman as ontologically equal. Humans are diminished from their status as the sole beings of articulation, consciousness, thought, and emotion, while nonhuman nature is elevated to the status of characters in McCarthy's novels. By extending the definition of character to include the nonhuman, the human characters can be framed in terms other than existentialist or nihilistic. By examining not only human-to-human relationships but also human-to-nonhuman relationships, an ecocritical reading identifies a pattern of environmentalist protagonists who are in conflict with Cartesian antagonists. This pattern shows that far from having no first principles or fundamental truths, McCarthy can be seen as an environmentalist who privileges characters whose understanding of nature's interconnectedness instills meaning in their lives. Though these environmentalist characters are usually persecuted and often killed, they represent, for McCarthy, a type of character and a type of thinking that offers an alternative to the Cartesian thinking responsible for, in Bill McKibben's words, "the end of nature."

A consequence of Bell's anthropocentric perspective that separates humans from the rest of nature is the perception that all of McCarthy's characters suffer from isolation and alienation:

One reason that meaning does not prevail over narrative and texture is that the characters whose experience we share are for the most part solitary and unsocialized; they are therefore wholly indifferent to discourse and have no interest in ideas about how societies are sustained and kept coherent [McCarthy's characters] exhibit a characteristic rural fatalism about issues of cause and effect: existence is no more explicable to them than climate, or nature itself; and not a fruitful subject of meditation. They are not thrust into the future. (5)

What Bell does not take into account in his assessment of the “meaning” in McCarthy’s work is that many of his characters are indifferent to discourse and society because they are actively engaged in the nonhuman natural world. Because Bell sees all of McCarthy’s characters fundamentally as separate from nonhuman nature, he sees each individual alone in the world. Contrary to this perspective, deep ecology stresses the absolute interconnectedness of all nature that is constantly affecting and being affected by the surrounding elements. Because humans are a part of and inseparable from nature, they are never solitary or unsocialized; rather, they are constantly engaged with the rest of their surroundings and constantly “socializing” with their surroundings. In contrast to McCarthy’s environmentalists characters, Cartesian characters lack the understanding of that connectedness and are, consequently, isolated and alone. They are examples of existentialism or nihilism. His environmentalist characters, while often living without the benefit of much human society, are intensely and intimately engaged with all that is around them. Bell is correct that these characters are isolated and alienated from society but not from nature. It is this relationship with nonhumans that separates the environmentalist characters

from the Cartesian characters and that provides the environmentalist characters' lives with meaning.

Another aspect of Bell's assessment of McCarthy's characters that an ecocritical reading reevaluates is the significance of the characters' seeming lack of consciousness or volition. As opposed to Bell's anthropocentric view, this lack of consciousness can be seen as an additional way that McCarthy emphasizes the relative equality between humans and nonhumans in the novels. Just as critics have acknowledged McCarthy's keen ability to describe nature, so they have noticed the relatively diminished role of humans in the natural world of his novels. Besides the "optical democracy" that Phillips has noted, Berry calls this leveling of human and nonhuman a form of "inhumanism," which describes

the collapse of human structures in light of the American literary-philosophical tradition. It signals a shifting of emphasis and significance from man to not-man; the rejection of human solipsism and recognition of the transhuman magnificence. . . . [As Dana Phillips has argued,] in McCarthy's work, there are, "unguessed kinships' between objects as diverse as goat turds, the sun, the men, and gods." This kinship, however, neither ennobles the turds nor debases the gods, but merely makes them equal in that both are putatively factual. (68)

The result of perceiving humans at the same ecological level of existence as nonhumans is a leveling of the hierarchy of being, what Craige calls "Laying the Ladder Down."

Through a deep ecological approach augmented by the major ideas of ecofeminism and social ecology, this study connects the actions of characters with their perspectives on nature. In doing so, it places McCarthy's characters along an ecological continuum according to their

lifestyles—their work, use of technology, institutional affiliation, and concomitant treatment of other human beings. Environmentally aware characters are those who are integrated into their natural environment; their lifestyles reflect an implicit understanding of natural systems and of the relatively small role that humans play in the healthy maintenance of those systems. They view the world as a system of complementary networks, not as a hierarchy of individual species with humans either at the apex or as separate from nature. Because of this understanding of natural systems, McCarthy's environmentalist characters live more in harmony with other beings than his Cartesian characters. With regard to human relationships, this mutualism manifests itself in compassion and as a willingness to work in cooperation with others. More generally, the actions of environmentalist characters show a compassion and sense of connectedness to the wider world that distinguishes them from the gratuitous violence committed by and the profound alienation found in hierarchical characters throughout McCarthy's novels.

Within the general pattern of environmentalist heroes and Cartesian antagonists is an aesthetic complexity. In the case of Child of God, for instance, the protagonist—Lester Ballard—is both a victim of Cartesian society and a Cartesian victimizer. He also lives as deeply in nature as any of McCarthy's characters. As Lester Ballard shows, not all of the characters that McCarthy places in the wilderness are necessarily environmentalist characters. In fact, Ballard can be seen as a perverse extreme of the atomistic society that shuns him, therefore explaining McCarthy's address to the reader that Ballard is “[a] child of God much like yourself perhaps” (4). However, Ballard is not the only character who is misplaced. If Ballard is a Cartesian character in nature, then Cornelius Suttree is an environmentalist character in the city. Other examples of McCarthy's complicated pattern of Cartesian characters and environmentalist characters are Rinthy and Culla Holme in Outer Dark. In chapter three, I will use an ecofeminist

approach to explain why Rinty's journey through the novel is marked by the compassion of others while Culla's is marked by hostility and violence. In the conclusion of this study, I will consider McCarthy's southwestern novels as a whole, emphasizing the presence of the same themes there that are found in his southern novels. Perhaps the most important example of the presence of Cartesian thinking in the wilderness is Blood Meridian; by viewing Judge Holden as the logical end of Enlightenment philosophy, as Vereen Bell does, an ecocritical reading can link him to the atomistic, mechanistic, hierarchical, and institutional thinking that undergirded western expansion, Manifest Destiny, and the persecution of Native Americans. Clearly, McCarthy does not simply insert the same individualistic characters into each of his books; however, a thorough ecocritical examination of the novels will show that all of McCarthy's characters can be placed in an ecological continuum.

With this environmentalist perspective, the violence and alienation in McCarthy's fiction emerges not as the nihilistic reflection of how the world is, as most critics have argued, but is rather as a reflection of how the Cartesian paradigm has made the world. The violence and alienation in McCarthy, therefore, can be attributed to humans' increasing ignorance of and separation from natural systems. Likewise, the tendency of critics to focus on the violence and alienation in McCarthy narratives is a reflection of their inability to see the world holistically. No other criticism on McCarthy has identified this pattern.

McCarthy is not as optimistic as Capra and Craige that there is a shift in the contemporary world away from Cartesian thinking and toward holistic thinking, and he does not share Naess's confidence that political action or social engagement can ameliorate modern civilization's fractured relationship with the rest of nature. His environmental theme is the difficulty of maintaining an environmental life in the contemporary world. Ultimately,

McCarthy practices a negative environmentalism that portrays an American culture increasingly anthropocentric, mechanized, and, consequently, increasingly alienated from the rest of nature. This alienation of Cartesian characters from nature, however, is distinguished from the isolation of his environmental characters from the rest of human society. In distinguishing between environmental and Cartesian characters, my ecocritical analysis reassesses the majority of McCarthy criticism that views the plight of all of his characters as either existentialist or nihilistic. Contrary to the existentialist perspective that sees his characters as “not being at home in the world” (Prather 3), this study argues that McCarthy’s environmentalist characters feel at home only when they immerse themselves in the nonhuman world. It is because of their knowledge of and appreciation for nature and their place in nature that they find their identities and find value in their lives. They provide a deep ecological alternative for living in the contemporary world. Arthur Ownby, John Wesley Rattner, Cornelius Suttree in the southern novels, and John Grady Cole and Billy Parham in the southwestern novels constitute an array of environmental sensibilities that contradict the increasingly anthropocentric, mechanized, hierarchical, and environmentally destructive characteristics of Cartesian society. As such they represent, along with McCarthy’s narrative voice, a critique of Cartesian society. McCarthy’s environmentalism is neither overt nor shallow, but once uncovered it reveals a consistent pattern throughout his novels. Regardless of the absurdity of human society, individuals can still find meaning in their relationships not only with other humans but also with nonhuman nature.

CHAPTER TWO

The Orchard Keeper and Child of God as Environmentalist Critiques of Cartesian Thinking

Cormac McCarthy's first novel, The Orchard Keeper, begins outside a cemetery:

The tree was down and cut to lengths, the sections spread and jumbled over the grass. There was a stocky man with three fingers bound up in a dirty bandage with a splint. With him were a Negro and a young man, the three of them gathered about the butt of the tree. The stocky man laid aside the saw and he and the Negro took hold of a piece of fence and strained and grunted until they got the log turned over. (3)³⁵

In the first three sentences of his first novel, McCarthy describes humans in conflict with nonhuman nature, and neither side has come away unscathed. While Matthew Horton has argued that the jumbled sections of tree trunk strewn about the grass provide a metaphor for “the disintegration of historical continuity” (285) and anticipate “the fractured surface and disordered sequence of the narrative to follow” (286), the sections are also the remains of an old elm that has been destroyed in order to repair an iron fence around a graveyard. From an ecocritical standpoint, this scene describes the sacrifice of a nonhuman living organism for the benefit of dead humans. Through the images of the downed tree and the bandaged fingers of the workmen, the scene illustrates an ecological lesson that is repeated throughout McCarthy's fiction: with the degradation of nonhuman nature, humans are degraded themselves.

The rest of this initial italicized section continues to illustrate the Cartesian characters' view of the natural world and the human place in it. As the stocky man and the Negro struggle to extract the fence piece absorbed by the tree, angling the saw different ways in an attempt to liberate the iron, John Wesley Rattner watches their efforts:

Here, said the man, look sideways here. See? He looked. All the way up here? He said. Yep, the man said. He took hold of the twisted wrought-iron, the mangled fragment of the fence, and shook it. It didn't shake. It's growed all through the tree, the man said. We cain't cut no more on it. Damned old elum's [sic] bad enough on the saw.

The Negro was nodding his head. Yessa, he said. It most sholy has.

Growed all up in that tree. (3)

Concerned only with the extraction of the iron and with the wear on their saw, the men reveal a way of thinking that is contrary to what they must know—that trees are alive and iron fences are inanimate. Nevertheless, both the stocky man and the Negro insist that the iron has “growed all through the tree.” As Vereen Bell has noted, this image reveals “an odd instance of human vanity as well as ignorance” (22). While decidedly odd, it is also highly suggestive of the Cartesian worldview that is responsible for the destruction of the natural environment and for the persecution of environmental characters throughout McCarthy's southern novels. The workmen's anthropocentrism is clear; their actions and words indicate that they value their work and even their tools over the life of the elm. But by attributing growth to the fence instead of the tree, they are privileging the iron with vitality while denying that the tree is living organism. In ecocritical terms, their words reveal an anthropocentric bias that de-animates (Sheldrake 4) and silences nature as an articulate subject (Manes 15). Symbolically, their determination to separate

the iron from the wood reflects the atomism of Cartesian thinking and contrasts diametrically from how the tree has adapted.

Unlike the workmen who strive to separate inorganic from organic, the tree absorbs the fence and in doing so changes its own identity. In ecological terms, it has adapted to its proximity to the fence and has grown and thrived in coexistence with the fence. The tree's incorporation of the fence illustrates not only Darwin's idea of nature as a "tangled bank," but it also signals the deep ecological idea that one's identity is inextricably bound to the human and nonhuman phenomenon that surrounds you. Instead of practicing the atomism of the Cartesian workmen, the tree exhibits the holism that ecology has determined is the paradigm on which the natural world functions. Such a view of the tree, as a character as well as a symbol of nature, differentiates my ecocritical approach from more traditional, more anthropocentric criticism. It acknowledges elements of nature as characters with which humans can communicate and interact. It views the tree as an articulate subject instead of an inanimate object. As such, the opening scene of The Orchard Keeper introduces the conflict between Cartesian and environmental subjects that reappears throughout McCarthy's southern novels. While the remaining environmental subjects identified in this study are humans, it is important to emphasize that the initial scene in McCarthy's fiction portrays the devastating effect of Cartesian thinking on nature.

The critical attention paid to this opening scene reveals the need for a more thorough ecocritical examination of McCarthy's fiction. More traditional literary criticism looks at the elm, the iron, and the humans in symbolic terms that reflect only human concerns, eschewing what is actually happening in the scene. Such an analysis is typified by Bell's statement that as "a merely human story, [The Orchard Keeper] is about the fencelike stubbornness and

independence of the men who are its central adult figures” (22), referring to Marion Sylder and Arthur Ownby. Such a reading ignores the more literal but no less important ecological implications illustrated in this scene. Even though Bell acknowledges the importance of nature elsewhere in McCarthy’s books, his reading remains focused on the aesthetic and humanistic aspects of the novel, keeping nonhuman nature largely separate from or subordinate to human characters. It is because of this anthropocentric bias that he fails to see McCarthy’s preoccupation with humans’ relationship with nonhuman nature. Even the more ecologically sympathetic readings of this opening scene view nature as only a mimetic device, as a literary tool that develops human characterization. David Ragan argues that the elm tree “reminds the reader that John Wesley must adapt himself, like a living tree, to the iron will of the expanding new order” (24). As an example of shallow ecocriticism, this view of the elm reveals literary criticism’s tendency to see nature in literature only as it relates to human characters. My ecocritical approach to McCarthy’s first and third novels stresses that the demise of nonhuman nature is not merely symbolic of the human struggle nor is it of lesser importance. The implications of Cartesian thinking in the modern world affect the nonhuman and human in equally devastating and tragic ways. This chapter identifies and defines the characteristics of McCarthy’s environmentalist characters in The Orchard Keeper while exploring the pervasive influence of Cartesian thinking, what Ragan calls “the expanding new order,” in both The Orchard Keeper and Child of God. In doing so, this chapter introduces the conflict between environmentalist characters and Cartesian society but focuses on the negative effect of Cartesian thinking on both human and nonhuman nature.

This ecocritical examination of The Orchard Keeper and Child of God explores how characters' perspectives on nature reflect and inform their actions. Pairing these two novels is logical because of their identical setting, Southern Appalachia in the 1920s and 30s. By examining how a character's perspective on nature corresponds to his actions, this chapter places the characters in these two books along an ecological continuum. While a pattern of conflict between Cartesian characters working for societal institutions and environmentalist protagonists can be found in other McCarthy novels, it is most apparent in The Orchard Keeper, where Arthur Ownby and John Wesley Rattner are the environmentalist characters who struggle against Cartesian institutions and their representatives: the courthouse clerk, the A.T.U. agent, and the social worker. Ownby is McCarthy's ideal environmentalist character because of his ability to balance the self-assertive and integrative values central to deep ecology (Capra Web 3-13), while John Wesley Rattner evolves from a Cartesian character to an environmentalist character through his contact with Ownby. Opposed to the environmentalist characters are the institutional characters who represent Cartesian thinking and whose lack of compassion toward humans corresponds to their complicity in the ecological degradation described throughout the novel.

The Orchard Keeper is an elegy for the demise of the Southern wilderness and the yeoman farmer that came because of institutional and industrial development that subsequently led to a homogenization of both the region's landscape and culture. From a literary standpoint, the novel describes the degradation of a Southern ecosystem mainly through the intrusions of government institutions, but it reflects the concerns of the Nashville Agrarians who in 1930 argued against the South's willingness to "join up behind the common or American industrial ideal" ("Introduction" xxxviii). The Agrarians' resistance to the "Americanization" of the region is shared by deep ecology, which views such homogeneity as an indication of economic and

political globalization that hinders diversity and that leads to the exploitation of human and nonhuman nature. Instead, deep ecology values the self-determination of local economies, specifically in terms of agriculture (Naess 31). From a deep ecological standpoint, The Orchard Keeper describes an agrarianism as Wendell Berry uses the word—as a philosophy that emphasizes “the ecological importance of small-scale sustainable farming” (Berry 64). For Berry, agrarian means

agricultural practices that sustain the ecological integrity of place. [The agrarian] is a supporter of sustainable forestry and of the ability of a people to live “independently”—that is, not dependent upon out-of-region and foreign imports of fossil fuels, food, textiles, and so forth. (Berry 63-64)

In addition, The Orchard Keeper shows not only the environmentalist thinking that leads to ecologically sustainable living but also the effect of Cartesian thinking on both the environment and the people who are the best stewards of the environment. As a result of Cartesian thinking, Arthur Ownby and John Wesley Rattner are displaced from their habitats as are the mink, panther, and bobcat. To the “strange race that now dwells there,” not only are Ownby and John Wesley “myth, legend, dust” (246) but so are these nonhuman species. The destruction of Appalachia—its land, animals, plants, and humans—means the demise of the ecological complexity and diversity essential to its short-term and long-term environmental health and sustainability. At the same time that ecological complexity and diversity are destroyed, so too are the ecological lessons that such complexity and diversity teach. The removal of Ownby and John Wesley means the disappearance of environmental characters who provide examples of alternative ways to live as part of a natural ecosystem. Without these models of environmental

thinking and living, the “strange race” that lives in their place will continue to destroy important aspects of the complex ecosystem that define the Appalachian region.

In stark contrast to The Orchard Keeper, Child of God depicts a world devoid of the Arthur Ownbys and John Wesley Rattners. Principal among these Cartesian characters in Child of God is Lester Ballard—McCarthy’s first Cartesian protagonist whose story is an early variation of the pattern of environmentalist protagonists in conflict with Cartesian society. In ecocritical terms, however, Ballard’s story reveals the environmental effect of Cartesian thinking on both human and nonhuman nature as clearly as does The Orchard Keeper. Ballard lacks both the self-sufficiency and the environmental sensibility that enables Ownby to find meaning in ecologically sustainable living. At the same time, he is, like Ownby, a victim of the institutional Cartesian thinking that is atomistic, dualistic, hierarchical, and mechanistic.

McCarthy’s third novel chronicles the downward spiral of Ballard because of his conflict with conventional citizens of Sevier County and the institutional functionaries that serve that citizenry. This ecological reading of Lester Ballard builds on Vereen Bell’s statement that Lester's "whole state of being is one of loss . . . of isolation from the ecological coherence of his environment, both human and unhuman"(64). Ballard’s loss of being is the result of two interrelated conditions: his inability to connect with either human society or nature, and society’s failure to recognize his emotional and intellectual disability. Ballard is shunned despite his efforts to integrate socially, spiritually, and commercially in the society of Sevier County. In each case, the citizens fail to integrate the various stories that are told about him and that, if viewed holistically, describe a person incapable of functioning within their society as an independent adult. They lack a holistic vision of Ballard that could have prevented him from committing his crimes. Because of their inability to recognize his emotional and intellectual

disability, they drive him not only to retreat to the wilderness but to commit his horrible acts of rape, murder, and necrophilia. While this chapter argues that Lester Ballard is a Cartesian character who is also a victim of Cartesian society, chapter three will examine in ecofeminist terms how his relationship with nature affects his relationship with women. In both examinations of Lester as a Cartesian character, I argue that though Ballard is intellectually and emotionally handicapped, he is capable of absorbing society's view of nature and the way that society views the relationship between the sexes. Perceiving society's values through what Bell calls his "ambiguous innocence," Lester Ballard mimics the actions of those around him in Cartesian society. As such, he represents a dark parody of conventional social thinking that helps explain the narrator's direct address to the reader that Ballard is "A child of God much like yourself perhaps" (4).

Arthur Ownby and Lester Ballard are men of very different values systems: Ownby is an environmentalist and Ballard, ultimately, is the empty shell of a Cartesian. Regardless of their placement along an ecological continuum, their respective demises are strikingly similar. They both end up in government institutions for the insane. These shared demises have a common cause—the Cartesian thinking that is responsible not only for Ownby's and Ballard's actions but also for the environmental degradation described in The Orchard Keeper and Child of God. As such, these two novels represent McCarthy's early preoccupation with the environmental impact of twentieth-century industrial, technological, and institutional development.

The Orchard Keeper

In the first chapter of The Achievement of Cormac McCarthy, Vereen Bell established the widely accepted critical assessment of The Orchard Keeper—it is a book infused with

meaninglessness. He argues that the aimlessness and chosen isolation of McCarthy's three heroes—John Wesley, Sylder, and Ownby—correspond "with the ultimate solitude of dwelling in an ungregarious universe, lost, as it were, in the stars" (29). Bell sees these three characters as disconnected from the rest of human society because of the "unbridgeable separation in human lives" (31) and because of their preoccupation with death, which he characterizes as "the ultimate form of isolation" (30).

At the same time that Bell emphasizes the separateness of humans from nature, he acknowledges the three heroes's connectedness with their environment by pointing out McCarthy's practice of erasing the distinctions between the human and the nonhuman, one of the fundamental principles of deep ecology. This leveling is especially evident in The Orchard Keeper due to the novel's Appalachian setting; McCarthy writes about the "unsocialized people of east Tennessee but also about the 'altogether unhuman' environment they inhabit" (Bell 11). The lives of these rural characters in the mountains are characterized by greater contact with nonhuman nature and a distance from conventional human society. Bell argues, "Between these characters and the unmetaphoric setting is played out a strong and believing representation of how the human and the emphatically not-human productively intersect" (13-14). Once again echoing a deep ecological perspective, Bell observes that "the human story is set in an animal context rather than vice versa" (14). Because he finally separates humans from the rest of nature, however, he fails to see the interconnectedness of the two. In fact, Bell makes the same mistake that the Cartesian characters in The Orchard Keeper make: his belief in the separation between humans and nonhumans keeps him from seeing the essential interconnectedness of human and nonhuman that distinguishes the action in the book. In his reading, he sees Arthur Ownby's condition as the same as all the other characters, when exactly the opposite is the case. Arthur

Ownby, along with an ecologically enlightened John Wesley Rattner, finds meaning and identity precisely because he understands the ecosystem in which he lives. Ownby understands that he is only one aspect of the larger environment, and he embraces that role. In fact, his assault on the government tank is a defense not just of his own lifestyle but also of the ecosystem of which he is a part. On the other hand, the Cartesian characters—those characters who have lost their sense of connectedness with the rest of nature—are those who have a disregard for both the environment and for the environmentalist characters.

Of all the articles written on The Orchard Keeper, only one focuses on the centrality of landscape. In “The Lay of the Land in Cormac McCarthy’s The Orchard Keeper and Child of God,” K. Wesley Berry examines “the ecological undertones of landscape representation” and argues:

By focusing on details of the land—the surface features and landforms, the vegetation covering it, and the human structures built on it—one better understands McCarthy’s subtle critiques of the forces that have laid waste and continue to lay waste to the mountain wilderness and the inhabitants who dwell there. (61)

Berry links the environmental devastation that McCarthy includes throughout The Orchard Keeper to the actual economic and ecologic conditions of the time and place. The novel is set during the years when small farms were being replaced by large industry and agribusiness—specifically mining and timber interests—following World War I. The orchard in the book has been abandoned for twenty years because of falling agricultural prices, resulting from a post-war drop in demand (Berry 63).³⁶ But even this earlier agricultural use is not environmentally benign, as evidenced by the murky insecticide pit where Kenneth Rattner’s body decays

throughout the course of the novel. As Berry notes, agricultural enterprises were using insecticides and fertilizers as early as 1920 to boost production on land not particularly well suited for row crops. The radical shift in property ownership that occurred before the action of this novel also explains the fate of Marion Sylder whose work in the fertilizer plant represents the “industrial farming, mining, and heavy industry reflected in the scarred landscape” (Berry 64). Berry also points out that the soil erosion described throughout the novel comes not only from poor farming practices but also from the logging of Appalachia by timber companies that snatched up land previously used communally for hunting and fishing. Berry argues that McCarthy shows a comprehensive knowledge of the Appalachian forests and that McCarthy uses that knowledge in crafting an environmentalist novel. Whereas Berry takes a historical look at The Orchard Keeper in examining the ecological degradation associated with the decline of yeoman farming and the increase in heavy industry and agribusiness, I am focusing on the philosophical underpinnings of such historical degradation. While the roots of the environmental damage—including Ownby’s loss of habitat and freedom—are historically verifiable, they are also rooted in the institutional and societal thinking that continue today.

Principle among the environmentalist characters in The Orchard Keeper and in all of McCarthy’s novels is Arthur Ownby, who lives a sustainable existence that includes an abiding respect and concern for the value and importance of nonhuman elements of the landscape. His “survival depends upon his acceptance and appreciation of the timeless power and mystery of the natural world” (Grant 21). He is agrarian in the sense that his way of living sustains “the ecological integrity of a place” (Berry 64). Ownby is aware of the environmental degradation that has resulted from the shift in land ownership away from small-scale independent farmers to absentee landowners such as corporate or government institutions. Ownby perceives species

decline and soil erosion and recognizes in these degradations the role of Cartesian thinking that is mechanistic and hierarchical. His vandalism of the ambiguous “installation” near the abandoned orchard is a deliberate and conscious effort to oppose the encroachment of industry and institutions that threaten not only his personal lifestyle but, more importantly, that destroy the Appalachian ecology that makes such a lifestyle possible. His words and actions manifest an environmental ideology that is in direct conflict with the anthropocentric idea of progress, and they also transform John Wesley Rattner into an environmentalist character, a transformation that defines the novel. Ownby’s understanding of systems and his defiance of Cartesian authority closely align him with deep ecological thinking.

Arthur Ownby is the orchard keeper, but the orchard he keeps extends beyond the abandoned peach trees, the insecticide pit, and the new government installation to include the mountains and the flora and fauna surrounding the orchard. Ownby is an octogenarian who lives with his dog, Scout. Of his past we know little, but the end of his marriage is elliptically referred to in widely spaced flashbacks; Bell explains, “Through his scraps of memory, we piece together a story of a younger Arthur, who took a bride, over the protest of her father, and was eventually rejected by her in favor of a traveling Bible salesman” (23). Besides that, we learn that he worked in railroad and road construction (145, 151). By 1948, when he is institutionalized in a government hospital for the insane, Ownby—by his own reckoning—is either eighty-three or eighty-four years old.

The first time we meet Arthur Ownby, he is sitting in a scraggly peach tree overlooking the newly constructed but ambiguous government tank. From there, he walks past the insecticide pit—where for the past six years he has placed a cedar over the corpse of a man unknown to him, and walks to a “high bald knoll”:

Pines and cedars in a swath of dark green piled down the mountain to the left and ceased again where the road cut through. Beyond that a field and a log hogpen, the shakes spilling down the broken roof, looking like some diminutive settler's cabin in ruins. Through the leaves of the hardwoods he could see the zinc-colored roof of a church And far in the distance the long purple welts of the Great Smokies.

If I was a younger man, he told himself, I would move to them mountains. I would find me a Clearwater branch and build me a log house with a fireplace. And my bees would make black mountain honey. And I wouldn't care for no man.

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

This walk from orchard to mountain top illustrates Ownby's dilemma: with the encroachment of industry and institutions, the life that he has known and that has brought him meaning is increasingly threatened if not doomed because of industrial encroachment. The sustainable yeoman existence that was Ownby's distant past, as symbolized by the ruined hogpen, has been made obsolete by the creep of development into the mountains, as seen in the road which is associated with both development and erosion throughout the novel. Ownby's only choice, if he wishes to continue to live as he has, is to fight or to retreat deeper into the wilderness that remains—into the Smokies. What he discovers, however, is that even in the depth of the wilderness known as Hurraykin, he cannot escape the cruelty of humans who kill nonhumans for non-vital, purely economic reasons.

Throughout the book and throughout all of the novels, McCarthy alternately describes nature in naturalistic terms and then in almost romantic ones. The difference can be explained by identifying the eyes through which the reader is viewing nature. Environmentalist characters view nature differently from Cartesian characters. In The Orchard Keeper, McCarthy's most reverent descriptions of nonhuman nature occur when we are watching Ownby move through the natural world or are seeing the world through his eyes. As Bell has observed, "Most of the wonderfully exact and rich descriptive sections in the book are presented from Ownby's point of view, expressions of his patient attention to and knowledge of his chosen world" (23). Examples of this favorable view of nonhuman nature from Ownby's perspective can be seen throughout the book:

In the early quiet all sounds were clear and equidistant—a dog barking out in the valley, high thin whistle of a soaring hawk, a lizard scuttling dead leaves at the roadside. A sumac would turn and dip in sudden wind with a faint whish, in the woods a thrust, water-voiced. (54-55)

The wind had died and the night woods in their faintly breathing quietude held no sound but the kind rainfall, track of waterbeads on a branch—their measured fall in a leaf-pool. With grass in his mouth the man sat up and peered about him, heard the rain mendicant-voiced, soft chanting in that dark gramarye that summons the earth to bridehood (original italics) (184).³⁷

At the foot of the mountain the old man found himself in a broad glade grown thick with rushes, a small stream looping placidly over shallow sands stippled

with dace shadows, the six-pointed stars of skating waterspiders drifting like bright frail medusas. . . . The old man drank and then leaned back against the sledge. The glade hummed softly. A woodhen called from the timber on the mountain and to that sound of all summer days of seclusion and peace the old man slept (195).³⁸

The world as Ownby sees it is one of beauty and harmony that brings him peace, though it is not without violence and destruction. This appreciation of nature is not consistent or even prevalent throughout McCarthy's work, but changes as different characters' perceive nature from their different perspectives. How Ownby views the rest of the natural world is consistent with how he interacts with it. That McCarthy endows his environmentalist protagonists with a more lyrical, aesthetic, and holistic perspective of nature than his Cartesian antagonists further suggests that he can be viewed as an environmentalist writer.

In addition to Ownby's appreciation for his natural surroundings, his environmentalism is evident in three aspects of his character: his knowledge of disparate elements in nature, his stories that reflect an environmentalist perspective, and his radical action against the government installation. His knowledge of nature consists not only of local flora and fauna but also of macro-ecologic forces like seasons and weather. His actions throughout the novel, especially his move deeper in the Smokies, illustrate his environmental knowledge, enabling him to survive in a traditional Appalachian lifestyle of subsistence farming, hunting, and trading. His way of life is self-sufficient and sustainable. As Huffaker tells the A.T.U. agent, "He's a right funny old feller, don't have no money at all I don't reckon" (197). Besides beekeeping (55), he barter's sang, ginseng roots, goldenseal, and animal hides at Huffaker's store, living largely independent of modern modes of economic exchange (197). It is at Huffaker's store that Ownby exhibits his

knowledge of the local fauna when he teases idlers who do not know the difference between an owl's call and a panther cub's cry (148-49). In addition to the knowledge he exhibits in his actions, the stories he tells John Wesley Rattner about species decline and the intelligence of animals reveal his thorough knowledge of elements in the local environment.

Ownby also understands nature as a larger system: "the old man is a living agricultural barometer, observing weather patterns and reading the changing seasons by natural signs" (Grant 62). This is most clearly seen when Ownby is incarcerated in the asylum. In his conversation with John Wesley, Ownby discourses on seven-year cycles. While this passage explains his ritual of covering Kenneth Rattner's corpse with a cut cedar tree for seven consecutive years, it also communicates an implicit understanding of the ebb and flow of life that is part of all ecosystems. During what could be seen as Ownby's last ecological lesson to John Wesley, Ownby explains:

They's a good warm spell comin on. Won't nothing make, won't nothing keep. A seventh year is what it is. . . . Get older . . . you don't need to count. You can read the signs. You can feel it in your ownself. Knowed a blind man oncet could tell lots of things afore they happent. But it'll be hot and dry. Late frost is one sign if you don't know nothing else. So they won't but very little make because folks thinks that stuff grows by seasons and it don't. It goes by weather. Game too, and folks themselves if they knowed it. (225)

His explanation that weather determines the growth not only of plants and animals but of humans as well reflects Ownby's perspective that all life develops the same way, according to the same forces, as part of a complex system. This understanding reflects the biocentric egalitarianism of deep ecology. His criticism of people who believe "stuff grows by season" reveals Ownby's

belief that people have become increasingly ignorant of natural processes and can explain his desire to pass on knowledge to John Wesley through stories. When John Wesley asks him to explain what he means by a seventh year, Ownby tells him that “there was a lean year and a year of plenty every seven years” (226). When John Wesley comments that it could be called a fourteen-year cycle, Ownby replies, “. . . depends on how you count I reckon. If’n you count jest the lean and not the plenty or the other way around, I reckon some folks might figure that-away. I call it the seventh my ownself” (226). This exchange, like so many of the exchanges between Ownby and John Wesley, is elliptical and difficult to parse, but indicates that Ownby, through close observation of his environment, he has extrapolated a natural seven-year cycle. His reluctance to value years of plenty over years of want indicates his belief that such terms are secondary to the cycle itself. It is the seven-year cycle, not the anthropocentrically biased valuation of a year as lean or fat, that is important. Such life-long study of and engagement with nature suggests a deep ecological perspective of biological egalitarianism, identification, and Self-realization.

Ownby’s understanding of nature as a circular system marked by ebb and flow is emphasized in his acknowledgement of his own imminent death. At 83 or 84 years old, he is approaching the end of his twelfth seven-year cycle. As he sits in his cell, “the old man felt the circle of years closing, the final increment of the curve returning him again to the inchoate, the prismatic flux of sound and color wherein he had drifted once before and now beyond the world of men” (222). Ownby’s conception of death is ecological. Like the decomposition of matter described throughout the novel, especially the rotting of Ken Rattner’s body, Ownby feels himself, both his body and his spirit, migrating from wholeness to inchoateness as he approaches death. It is a cycle that he has experienced “once before,” suggesting a belief in reincarnation.

For Ownby, both matter and spirit break down to be reabsorbed by living beings later. Unlike Descartes's distinction that the spirit or mind is separate from the body or matter, Ownby's metaphysics joins them as part of the same natural cycle of death and rebirth; what happens to his body is the same thing that happens to his spirit. Neither ceases to exist upon death. This ecologically informed metaphysics, though not demonstrable by Descartes's scientific method, is based on experience and intuition, a combination that is highly valued in deep ecology (Capra Turning Point 38-39, Naess 28). It is a metaphysics derived from a life lived immersed in nature.³⁹

Ownby's most important ecological lessons occur when John Wesley visits Ownby's cabin. The stories that constitute John Wesley's environmental education provide the boy with an environmentalist perspective he will embrace by the end of the novel (Orchard Keeper 145-57). The stories describe the decline of raccoons, panthers, and minks due to over-hunting and development. Ownby tells of discovering a panther cub whose den was unearthed when the road crew he worked on dynamited a mountainside. The deep ecological lesson of the story emerges from his attempt to raise the cub and its mother's efforts to get her cub back. After rescuing the sole surviving cub from its blasted den and taking it back to his farm, Ownby discovers that his hogs are disappearing one by one. He eventually discovers that the cub's mother, through her systematic and persistent efforts, is attacking his hogs in order to persuade Ownby to release her cub. When he frees the cub, the she-panther stops killing his hogs. This story illustrates his realization that animals are intelligent beings who can think and strategize and who love their offspring; such a belief endows animals with a mental and emotional life usually attributed only to humans.⁴⁰ Such an identification by Ownby reveals an affinity to deep ecological thinking that extends ethical consideration to nonhumans. In essence, the story tells of Ownby's own

ecological transformation. Such acknowledgement of nonhuman intelligence drastically changes the way Ownby relates to and interacts with nonhuman animals. Though not explicitly didactic, Ownby's stories result in the philosophical transformation of John Wesley from a boy similar to those around him to a young man who can see the environmental damage done by institutions and their policies. As a result of Ownby's environmental education, John Wesley will eventually reject Cartesian society's anthropocentric bias. In this way, Ownby unknowingly is a surrogate father and philosophical mentor for John Wesley Rattner.⁴¹

As a result of his experience with the panther and a lifetime of interaction with nonhuman nature, Ownby's relationship with his dog, Scout, also has aspects of deep ecological thinking in which humans and non-humans are capable of meaningful, life-long relationships. On several occasions, McCarthy makes a point of describing Ownby and Scout in equal terms: as the pair walk toward Huffaker's store, McCarthy describes them synecdochically: "Brogan and cane and cracked pad clatter and slide on the shelly rocks . . ." (201). Most significantly, however, is Ownby's sense of panic when he realizes that his own arrest means his separation from Scout. Sitting in the A.T.U. agent's car, Ownby becomes anxious about his dog's welfare: "What about him?" Ownby asks in all sincerity. "You don't keer if he rides, do ye? . . . He cain't shift for hisself. . . . He's too old. . . . It wouldn't hurt nothing for him to ride . . . I cain't hardly leave him jest a-standin there." Though Ownby repeats his request, his entreaties are met with hostility and misunderstandings—"What now?", "You're resistin arrest", "You tryin to escape?", "They said you's crazy. Dog's ass, you cain't take no dog. . . . I ain't no dog catcher and this ain't no kennel" (204). Ownby realizes that the A.T.U. does not share his view of dogs as more than pets: ". . . the old man really began to worry"—not about his own fate but about the fate of his companion. He says, "It wouldn't hurt nothin for him to ride, he said. I can't hardly leave him

jest a-standin there” (204). In a poignant scene of parting rare in the unsentimental world of McCarthy, a scene between man and dog unmatched until the end of The Crossing twenty-nine years later, Ownby turns around as the agent drives away, looking:

back at the dog still standing there like some atavistic symbol or brute herald of all questions ever pressed upon humanity and beyond understanding, until the dog raised his head to clear the folds above his milky eyes and set out behind them at a staggering trot. (205)

Nor is this the end of Ownby’s concern for the dog; when John Wesley comes to visit Ownby in the asylum, Ownby’s last request is for the boy to be on the lookout for the old hound:

. . . you ain’t seen my old dog I don’t reckon? . . . Well, ever you’re out thataway might holler for him. I don’t know what to tell ye to do with him. I ain’t got no money to ast nobody to feed him with and I couldn’t shoot him was he too poor to walk, but might could somebody else . . .

I see him I’ll take care of him, [John Wesley] said. I wouldn’t charge you nothing noway. (230)

Though a minor and seemingly insignificant relationship running through the novel, Ownby’s concern for Scout is an example of how a human can not only extend ethical consideration to a nonhuman but love an animal with the same intensity as a human. His abiding commitment to a nonhuman is made significant when juxtaposed to the Humane Officer’s execution of Scout at the end of the novel. The contrast is clear: the environmentalist character extends ethical consideration to nonhumans while the institutional functionary charged with “humane” control of nonhumans is mercenary and unflinchingly anthropocentric. This contrast between Ownby

and the Humane Officer deepens McCarthy's overall pattern of an environmental individualist in conflict with and in opposition to institutional Cartesian characters.

While his knowledge of nature, his ecological lessons, and his relationship with Scout are indications of his environmentalist tendencies, it is Ownby's vandalism of the government "installation" that clearly designates him as an environmentalist defending the last vestige of wilderness from the industrial and institutional. The installation is amorphous and ambiguous, though Natalie Grant conjectures that it may be a "storage facility for the Oak Ridge nuclear laboratory nearby" (63). McCarthy does not explain its function, but its construction is clearly emblematic of industrial intrusion into the mountains. The tank, described as "a great silver ikon, fat and bald and sinister" (93), is surrounded by chain-link fence. The tank is at the end of the orchard road, which is gated far below and through which "only official carriers were permitted access—olive-painted trucks with gold emblems on the doors passing in and out of the gate, the men in drab fatigues locking and unlocking the chain sedulously" (96). McCarthy is deliberately vague in identifying who these men are and what institution they represent. From a writer who is so accurate and precise, "so exact" in his naming of things (Bell xiii), using the generic term "installation" suggests that the structure represents a nonspecific phenomenon, a general manifestation of institutional and industrial development. The installation is a symbol of Cartesian thinking that Ownby actively resists.

McCarthy goes from a terse description of the tank and a vague description of the men and their trucks to an exacting description of the ecological impact of the installation. The trees that had been where the tank now sits:

had been plucked from the ground and not even a weed grew. A barren spot, bright in the moonwash, mercurial and luminescent as a sea, the pits from which

the trees had been wrenched dark on the naked bulb of the mountain as moon
craters. (93)

This description unequivocally associates the construction of the installation with violent environmental degradation. To Ownby, the tank becomes an unavoidable reminder of the industrial and institutional encroachment on his largely wild ecosystem. From his porch, during one of the thunderstorms that he loves (51), he discerns “the domed metal tank on the peak illuminated” (58). The dominance of the tank over the landscape further highlights the intrusion of the industrial into the natural.

Ownby’s vandalism of the installation is an overt act of environmental protest. He meticulously “circumcises” twelve shotgun shells, cutting along the base of each shell, in order to keep the scatter pattern tighter as he shoots “a huge crude X across the face of the tank” (97). While Ownby is never explicit about why he shot the tank, he comes close to explaining why he “rung shell and shot your hootnanny all to hell” when interviewed by the social worker: “I could tell you why—and you stit [sic] wouldn’t know. That’s all right. You can set and ast a bunch of idjit questions. But not knowin a thing ain’t never made it not so” (221). When Ownby says “*your* hootnanny” he includes the social worker in the same institutional system that built the installation. From an ecophilosophical standpoint, Ownby is right: the same thinking that put the installation in the woods without considering the consequences of the construction reflects the atomism inherent in the social worker’s questions. And his indictment of the social worker’s ignorance—“not knowin’ a thing ain’t never made it not so”—suggests that whatever reason Ownby gives, the social worker would fail to understand it because of his complete ignorance of Ownby’s way of life. Later, while John Wesley visits Ownby in the hospital, Ownby reflects to himself:

. . . But I never done it to benefit myself. Shot that thing. Like I kept peace for seven year sake of a man I never knowed nor seen his face and like I seen them fellers 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 knowed what they was up to. But I knowed if they could build it they could build it back and I done it anyway. Every man loves peace and a old man best of all. (229)

Again, Ownby does not divulge why he shot the tank, but he does suggest that, just like his ritual acknowledgement of Kenneth Rattner's corpse, his vandalism of the tank was not for his own benefit. Given that his values are based upon "his vital connection with the natural world" (Ragan 20), Arthur Ownby relinquishes his own peace in order to attempt, however futilely, to regain the peace of his setting, his habitat, his ecosystem. Though his intentions are unclear, his vandalism represents, from an ecocritical perspective, a human acting on behalf of a natural landscape threatened by industrial development.

Ownby's vandalism leads to incarceration, but even though a man in his eighties, he proves difficult to catch. In their two attempts to arrest him, authorities are met with his rifle. Just as he associates the social worker with the installation, so he also associates law enforcement with the installation; in his eyes, the authorities coming to arrest him are indistinguishable from the people who built the tank. Before their third attempt, however, Ownby abandons his cabin, rigging a sledge for his meager belongings which he drags himself and heads deeper into the forest. He moves to a place called Hurrykin, an uninhabited and wild place where, as one character describes, "they was places you could walk fer half a mile thout ever settin foot to the ground—just over laurel hells and down timber, and a rattlesnake to the log . . ." (194). His arduous journey to the last remaining wilds, however, is not far enough to

distance himself from Cartesian thinking. As Ownby and Scout walk through Hurrykin, they come upon a dead snake: “With his cane the old man turns the snake, remarking the dusty carpet pattern of its dull skin, the black clot of blood where the rattles have been cut away” (201). Ownby’s discovery of the mutilated snake illustrates the difference between human presence in and human desecration of wilderness (Berry 67). Like John Wesley’s peers and the Humane Officer, the person responsible for amputating the snake’s rattles reveals a disrespect for nonhuman life, probably severing the rattles for a souvenir or for profit. Just as the crew chops down the elm tree at the cemetery to retrieve iron, so someone has killed a snake to obtain its rattle. In both cases, anthropocentric priorities are responsible for the death of nonhuman species. Not even in the farthest reaches of the last remaining wilderness is Ownby able to retreat from the abuses of Cartesian thinking. Despite Ownby’s successful avoidance of arrest and his retreat to the wilds of Hurrykin, he is unable to escape the pervasiveness and destructiveness of Cartesian society. Eventually, when he comes down to trade at Huffaker’s store, he is arrested.

From the time of his arrest until his imminent death at the end of the novel, Ownby is institutionalized. Classified as mentally deficient, he is detained in a state asylum. From the state’s viewpoint, he is in need of assistance. Any man who lives in what conventional society sees as abject poverty, outside society, and who willfully and without apparent motivation vandalizes a government installation must surely be, in the words of the social worker, an “anomic type” (222). In Madness and Civilization, Michel Foucault argues that societies have throughout history categorized many people as insane because they espouse ideas that are simply counter to the predominant thinking. As Sueellen Campbell has noted, “From the Middle Ages on, in different ways at different times, we have called mad . . . what we do not want in our society—not just delirium and hallucination, not even just hysteria and criminality, but poverty

and idleness and discontent” (128). In this case, and in many cases throughout McCarthy’s novels, what society does not want is interference with the Cartesian notion of progress. Protest against loss of habitat for the sake of technological and natural resource development constitutes, in Campbell’s words, an opposition to tradition. Campbell explains that there are two ways to oppose tradition: one is to overturn old hierarchies and the second is to question the premises and concepts on which the old hierarchies are built. By shooting an X into the shiny metal skin of the tank jutting above the mountaintop, Ownby is not just questioning but actively defying the premises and concepts of Cartesian society. It is this protest that links Ownby to the deep ecological principle that those wishing to change the Cartesian status quo must participate in direct or indirection action (Naess 29). Though Ownby’s actions may seem futile, he feels an ethical obligation to protect the “orchard” of which he is the keeper. As a result of his action, he is branded insane. In the end, Ownby is institutionalized not only because of his actions but also because of the Cartesian thinking and behavior of characters such as the A.T.U. agent and the social worker.

The other environmentalist character in The Orchard Keeper is John Wesley Rattner. McCarthy confirms John Wesley’s environmental affinity with Ownby through parallel experiences. Like Ownby, he is a keen watcher of nature, using it instead of calendar or clock to mark time: “weathers and seasons were his timepiece now” (65). Their shared fascination with nature is also apparent in the caretaking that each character performs: John Wesley by covering the corpse of the rabbit with lettuce and Ownby by covering the corpse of Rattner with cedar trees (Grant 65). Unlike Ownby, who is a fully realized environmentalist character throughout the book, John Wesley is a dynamic character who shifts from a perspective more akin to that of

the other boys his age in the novel—who are mindless animal abusers—to an environmentalist’s perspective that results from his contact with Arthur Ownby.

John Wesley is the only character in The Orchard Keeper who knows all of the other characters, though none of them ever realizes the extent of their interrelations. He is the son of Kenneth Rattner, a con-man killed by Marion Sylder, and over whose corpse Arthur Ownby annually lays a cut cedar tree. After Ken Rattner’s death, Ownby and Sylder become John Wesley’s surrogate fathers. While Ownby provides John Wesley with an important environmental education, Sylder is more of a literal father-figure to John Wesley—an adult male who gives him a dog and takes him fishing. Together, they enable John Wesley to grow into an independent-thinking young man who distances himself from his previous friends and liberates himself from the strictures of Sevier County’s Cartesian thinking.

At first, John Wesley Rattner is very much like the other boys his age who roam freely across the mountains and have daily contact with their natural surroundings. While this immersion into the natural explains their knowledge of nature, it does not mean that the boys are environmentalist characters. On the contrary, their actions throughout the novel suggest that they are products of Cartesian thinking who believe that nonhumans have no intrinsic rights to live and have extrinsic value only if their capture results in a monetary reward. All three boys in The Orchard Keeper share one striking similarity that makes them foils for John Wesley. They abuse animals. For characters with such fleeting roles, the fact that each of them abuses animals suggests the prevailing attitude of the younger generation toward animals and explains John Wesley’s original status as a Cartesian character. First among John Wesley’s contemporaries is Warn Pullian who keeps a buzzard on a tether, flies him like a kite, and, in order to show him to John Wesley, pulls “*the bird out of the sky by main force, heaving on the cord against the huge*

and ungiving expanse of wing” (134). Warn caught the red-headed Turkey buzzard in a steel trap that permanently maimed the bird: “[T]he buzzard flopped about on its one good leg and came to rest eying them truculently . . .” (134). Trapping is what Warn does throughout the novel, showing John Wesley how to set up traps in a culvert and collecting 18 hides throughout the novel for a payout of \$31. While he has been successful at trapping muskrats, what he wants to catch is mink—a species that has been hunted to extinction. Warn explains, “They’s mink on Stock Creek too. Used to be some on Red Branch but they ain’t anymore is how come I don’t trap it no more” (144). Another acquaintance of John Wesley is Boog, known for his ability to catch bullfrogs “[b]y the ass in a mousetrap” (136) and who performs this feat for a wager of a soft drink. Lastly, there is Johnny Romines; during his brief appearance in the novel, he tells the story of wiring “the transformer of [a toy] train to a dynamite cap stolen from the quarry shack” and burying it in the snow (141). Spreading breadcrumbs over the area, he waited for a flock of birds to land before easing the switch on over and then:

BALOOM! They’s a big hoop of snow jumped up in the yard like when you thow a flat rock in the pond and birds goin ever which way mostly straight up. I remember we run out and you could see pieces of em strung all out in the yard and hangin off the trees. And feathers. God, I never seen the like of feathers.

They was stit fallin next morning.

Lord, whispered Boog, I’d of liked to of seen that. (141).

These are John Wesley’s peers. In their quest for outdoor entertainment, they abuse and kill animals. John Wesley emerges from this peer group, and, with Ownby’s help, becomes a character who extends ethical consideration to nonhumans and who sees the interconnection between the degradation of the environment and the persecution of human Others.

Just like his peers and like environmentalist character Arthur Ownby, John Wesley hunts, acquiring, setting, and checking the traps throughout the novel. While he does not renounce hunting, it is important to remember that Naess acknowledges the necessity of killing in order to satisfy vital needs (171-72). It is also important to remember that unlike the other boys' sadistic pleasure in inflicting suffering and death on animals, John Wesley has an instinctive respect for animals that distinguishes him from his peers. Within three pages of introducing John Wesley Rattner, McCarthy provides a story that hints at the boy's attitude toward animals. One day, John Wesley discovers a "young rabbit in the well" near the house where he and his mother squat, waiting in vain for the return of his father: "He brought green things to it every day and dropped them in and then one day he fluttered a handful of garden lettuce down the hole and he remembered how some of the leaves fell across it and it didn't move" (64). A second story tells of John Wesley finding a "*sparrowhawk on the mountain road, crouched in the dust with one small falcon wing fanned and limp, eying him without malice or fear He carried it home and put it in a box in the loft and fed it meat and grasshoppers for three days and then it died*" (77). In both cases, the animals died despite John Wesley's ministrations, but the incidents stand in stark contrast to those of his peers, indicating that he has an environmental sensibility that distinguishes him from his peers and that foreshadows his environmental awakening.

John Wesley's evolution from a more humane version of his peers to an environmentalist character can be seen in two different scenes that take place at the county courthouse. The first scene depicts John Wesley taking a dead sparrowhawk to collect the one dollar bounty the county is paying for chickenhawks. In this initial courthouse scene, neither John Wesley nor the clerk consider the connections between the government policy on birds of prey and the policy's consequences on the rest of the ecosystem; it is business as usual—one dollar for a dead hawk.

McCarthy's description of the courthouse clerk makes it clear that she is as removed from nature as any character in the book: "*The woman eyed the package with suspicion, then alarm, as the seeping gases reached her nostrils.*" After John Wesley removes the hawk from the bag, McCarthy writes, "*Then she said, not suspiciously or even inquiringly, but only by way of establishing her capacity as official: Is it a chickenhawk?*" (79). Although the county policy is explicit about which kind of hawk is eligible for the bounty, the person in charge of administering the program is incapable of distinguishing between a chickenhawk and a sparrowhawk. The environmental damage caused by such an atomistic policy of singling out one particular species for destruction is exacerbated by an institutional functionary who awards bounty for the wrong kind of hawk.

In the second scene, John Wesley—after visiting Sylder in jail and visiting Ownby in the mental institute—returns to the courthouse to redeem the sparrowhawk by returning the bounty. In this second interaction with the courthouse clerk he reveals the degree of his ecological development: "I was figuring on trading back with ye if you-all don't care," he says to the clerk (232). When she tells him that they burn the hawks turned in for bounty, John Wesley makes explicit the connection between the destruction of hawks and the imprisonment of Ownby and Sylder: ". . . They burn em? . . . And thow people in jail and beat up on em. . . . And old men in the crazy house. . . . Here It's okay. I cain't take no dollar. I made a mistake, he wadn't for sale" (233). John Wesley's ecological growth is clear, as K. Wesley Berry notes,

The gesture . . . suggests that John Wesley has cultivated an ontological appreciation for wild nature, a change from his earlier utilitarian preoccupation with trapping furbearing animals for their hides. John Wesley is a type of American Adam, cast out of Eden and fallen. His returning of the dead hawk is

an admission of complicity, a form of repentance. He knows there will be no reclamation of wilderness in Appalachia—no more abundant mink and muskrat and freedom from bureaucracy—and at the novel's close he accordingly heads westward in search of a new Eden. (67)

The scene dramatizes John Wesley's ecological epiphany. Part of that epiphany is his shattered naiveté concerning the county's animal bounty program that encourages its citizens to kill hawks (specifically chickenhawks but apparently any hawk will do) to help farmers minimize losses caused by birds of prey and thereby increase profits. What the county does not consider is the effect of the loss of predators on the wider environment. The local economy, in short, is more highly valued than the local ecosystem.⁴²

This scene also reveals the depth of John Wesley's new ecological sensibility. Besides denouncing the county's bounty program, John Wesley also expresses an understanding of the interconnection between the domination of nature and humans, which is the fundamental premise of social ecology. Just as Ownby associates the social worker with the A.T.U. agent and the men who built the tank, so John Wesley associates the bounty on hawks with the incarceration of Sylder and Ownby. John Wesley understands that it is the government institutions functioning under the Cartesian paradigm that are responsible for the destruction of nature and the persecution of certain humans.

Juxtaposed to John Wesley environmental transformation is the clerk's persistent. She is unchanged, mechanically performing her job while facilitating the business of species decline for the sake of economic profit. When John Wesley returns to the courthouse to redeem the hawk, the clerk "was at a typewriter, the machine clacking loudly in the empty room" (232). She is an extension of the office machines and furniture: "She still sat, hands poised over the machine. . . .

She lowered her hands into her lap, swiveled the chair about to face him” (232). When he mentions a hawk, she assumes he is there for the bounty. His request, not surprisingly, catches her unprepared: “Trade back? she said. You mean you want to get the hawk back?” When John Wesley makes the connection between the hawk bounty, Sylder’s imprisonment, and Ownby’s institutionalization, she is equally lost: “What? . . . Son, I’m busy, now if there was anything else you wanted . . .” (233). While John Wesley shows disgust at the function of institutions in the domination of humans and nonhumans, she remains unchanged. When she says, “Here! You come back here, you cain’t . . .,” her concern is what to do with a dollar that cannot be accounted for in her daily ledger book.

Along with the courthouse clerk, the other Cartesian characters in The Orchard Keeper are government employees. As societal constructions of Cartesian thinking, government agencies are the mechanisms through which non-ecological thinking is translated into action. In The Orchard Keeper, government functionaries perform their prescribed duties atomistically and mechanically, failing to see their role in the degradation of humans and nonhumans alike. Their actions show a lack of compassion towards humans that is interrelated with their lack of ecological vision. As with the courthouse clerk, the other institutional characters interact with ecological characters in short but significant scenes. Their inability to see the consequences of the performance of their duties is evident in their confusion and misapprehension when talking to environmentalist characters. The courthouse clerk fails to understand John Wesley’s act of returning the dollar bounty: “Here! You come back here, you cain’t . . .” (233). The A.T.U. translates Ownby’s request that Scout come with them as Ownby’s artful obstruction of justice: “You tryin to escape?” (sic) (204). The social worker dismisses Ownby by assigning him a

label: “Definitely an anomic type” (222). In short, Cartesian characters are incapable of understanding the way that environmentalist characters think and act.

The A.T.U. agent’s anthropocentrism and atomism has already been seen in his rejection of the relationship between Ownby and Scout. Additionally, the agent’s inability to appreciate Ownby’s resourcefulness is seen when Huffaker explains that Ownby procures goods from the store by trading: “The man looked puzzled but didn’t ask any more about that” (197). Another way that McCarthy links the A.T.U. agent to Cartesian mechanism is by associating him with the automobile. Modes of transportation are important throughout McCarthy’s novels where Cartesian characters are associated with cars, while the environmentalist characters travel either by horse as in The Border Trilogy, by boat as in Suttree, or by foot as in The Orchard Keeper. The ecological implications of the different modes of transportation will be dealt with in detail in chapter four, but it is important to notice that along with the Constable and the Humane Officer, the A.T.U. agent is closely linked to and identified with his car. This association is most noticeable when he waits for Ownby to come to Huffaker’s store; first, Huffaker steals a look at “a plain black Ford, a late model” parked at the side of the porch (196). Days later, Huffaker notices the agent’s car “parked on the gravel ramp approaching the store . . .” (198). Staking out Huffaker’s shop all day, the agent buys a Coca-Cola and “went back out to his car” (199). The agent’s first command to Ownby is “Get in that car over there” (202). And in an exit reminiscent of the younger Bayard Sartoris driving the senior Sartoris in Faulkner’s Flags in the Dust, the agent speeds away with Ownby: “He cranked the engine and slid the gearshift upward and the old man felt himself rocketed backward violently with a welter of dust boiling and receding before him . . .” (205). While the A.T.U. agent can be seen as “the counterforce to the pastoral idea that [Leo] Marx talks about in The Machine in the Garden” (Berry 67), the car is the actual

machine in the garden. The A.T.U. agent is single-minded. In completing his assigned task, he—like the courthouse clerk—performs his narrowly prescribed duties with no consideration for the consequences of his actions. He is unable to understand the motivation behind what Ownby says and does, always misinterpreting Ownby's behavior as attempts to escape, and the agent's use of the automobile connects him further to the mechanism related to Cartesian thinking.

The inability of institutional functionaries to understand and consequently to sympathize with Ownby is seen again at the state mental hospital where Ownby is being held on “charges ranging from Destruction of Government Property to Assault with Intent to kill” (218). The young social worker, whom the narrator calls “the agent,” is sent to ascertain whether Ownby has any living relatives and to determine “what department or agency he might properly be assigned as ward” (218). When the young man identifies himself to Ownby as a representative of the Welfare Bureau, an agency that helps people, Ownby responds, “I ain’t got nothing. I don’t reckon I can hep yins any” (219). In the narrator’s words, “[t]he agent made a fleeting effort at comprehension,” but continued with the interview. This educated institutional functionary fails to understand that Ownby does not consider himself in need of public assistance. He proceeds to inform Ownby of benefits to which he might be entitled, given that he obviously has been overlooked by the Welfare department. At the very least, he says, the state needs a record. The agent’s sense of superiority over Ownby is clear throughout the interview but is amplified when the agent rejects Ownby’s attempt to engage him:

When was you born? [Ownby asks.]

The agent looked up from his forms. Nineteen-thirteen, he said, but we . . .

What date?

June. The thirteen. Mr. Ownby . . .

The old man tilted his eyes upward in reflection. Hmm. He said. That was a Friday. Kindly a bad start. Was your daddy over twenty-eight when you was born?

No, please, Mr. Ownby. These questions, you see. . . . (220)

Even when Ownby tries to answer his questions, the social worker insists that Ownby comply with the correct form of the information: “But we have to have an address, Mr Ownby.” After Ownby lashes out, challenging the social worker to ask the relevant question about why he shot the “hootnanny,” the social worker tries to calm Ownby: “Mr Ownby, I’m sure you’re upset and I assure you . . . Mr Ownby, there are only a few more questions. . . We at the agency feel . . .” (221). Gathering his forms and tucking them into his briefcase, the social worker leaves, assessing Ownby as “anomic,” or one who lacks purpose or ideals. The state social worker, though well-meaning, is completely ignorant of Ownby’s values and self-sufficiency. In addition to his atomistic questioning, the social worker shows his Cartesian anthropocentrism by ignoring Ownby’s assertion that by living with Scout, his dog, he does not live alone (220-21). The questions the social worker asks are the wrong ones. Instead of recognizing Ownby’s ecological knowledge and complete self-sufficiency, the social worker—functioning within an institution and from the perspective of his education and training—views Ownby as indigent. His job is to interview an old man in order to determine whether he should become a ward of the state. By calling Ownby anomic, the agent confirms Foucault’s contention that society frequently institutionalizes those who espouse ideas counter to the predominant thinking. Far from lacking purpose or ideals, Ownby is arrested and imprisoned not only for his acts of vandalism but also for his principled rejection of the values and purposes of Cartesian society.

The last of the Cartesian characters is Legwater, the Humane Officer of Sevier County, who is a minor but notable character in the novel. Throughout the novel, Legwater inexplicably accompanies Constable Jefferson Gifford. As with the other adult Cartesian characters mentioned above, both Legwater and Gifford work for government institutions. As law enforcement officers, Legwater deals with animals in much the same way that Gifford deals with humans. Legwater's role in the novel is minor, but the irony of this man in the role of Humane Officer is worth notice. As an adult version of Warn, Boog, and John Romines, Legwater's inhumane treatment of animals shows his sadistic sense of superiority over animals.

Most of the old men had been there the day he shot two dogs behind the store with a .22 rifle, 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)

Returning at the end of the book, in a scene reminiscent of Henry Armstid in William Faulkner's The Hamlet, Legwater futilely sifts through the ashes of the insecticide pit looking for the platinum plate that Kenneth Rattner's supposedly had in his head. Finally persuaded by Gifford to give up, the ash-covered Legwater begins to descend the mountain when Scout reappears. Without provocation and as a way to express his frustration, Legwater shoots Scout: "the dog lurch forward, still holding up its head, slew sideways and fold up in the dust of the road" (sic) (242). Both Legwater's association with Gifford and his inhumane treatment of animals make him a caricature of Cartesian thinking. However, in his small way he completes what Gifford and the A.T.U. agent started by capturing Ownby. The law enforcement agents "represent the intrusion of institutional and bureaucratic authority upon age-old lifestyles" (19) and "follow nihilistic and futile policies they don't attempt to understand" (Ragan 24). More than comic

relief, they are serious and lethal agents of Cartesian thinking that aid in the destruction of a sustainable agrarian culture that functions in harmony with the rest of the Appalachian ecology.

The last section of The Orchard Keeper completes the novel's frame. Only at the end of the novel does the reader understand the opening scene at the cemetery—that the young man watching the tree being cut down is John Wesley. He has returned to Red Branch after a period of absence and pays “close attention to details of building and landscape [that] recalls [Ownby's] careful observations of the world throughout the episodes devoted to him” (Ragan 24). He has learned Ownby's lessons well. At the graveyard, while standing at his mother's tombstone, his attention is drawn to an intersection:

From across the tall grass and beyond the ruins of the spiked iron fence came the click of the lightbox at the intersection. A car emerged from the trees at his right and rolled to a stop. There were a man and a woman. She looked at [John Wesley] across the man's shoulder, then turned to the man. They both looked. The box clicked. He waved to them and the man turned, saw the green light and pulled away, the white oval of the woman's face still watching him. So he waved again to her just as the car slid from sight behind a hedgerow, the wheels whisking up a fine spray from the road. (246)

The organic world of Arthur Ownby has been supplanted by the Cartesian mechanism of the automated lightbox and the automobile. Enclosed in the car, the couple is separate from the scene, disengaged from their surroundings. Their sense of alienation is underscored by their unwillingness to acknowledge John Wesley's waves. The man, more responsive to the changing light than to the human being outside of his car, moves away from the intersection while the woman, expressionless with her oval face, continues to view John Wesley as simply part of the

scenery. Undeterred, John Wesley waves again. This time, however, he waves not in greeting but in farewell to the “strange race that now dwells there,” to their blindness caused by Cartesian thinking, but also to the region itself, which has been transformed into a place uninhabitable for people wanting to live as Arthur Ownby had. John Wesley is the environmental heir to his surrogate father, Arthur Ownby. However, because of the intrusion of Cartesian thinking and its environmental consequences, John Wesley can no longer exist in this ecosystem as Ownby did. Like the she-wolf in The Crossing, John Wesley is forced to seek a new habitat. With both Sylder and Ownby removed from the wild and securely institutionalized, John Wesley is faced with the task of finding someplace where he can live like Ownby. Like Cornelius Suttree in McCarthy’s fourth novel, John Wesley Rattner turns to the “western road” (246). McCarthy’s elegiac last paragraph declares the demise of the ecological characters of southern Appalachia; like the mink and panther, they are now extinct. McCarthy concludes the novel by proclaiming that the last vestige of such characters is “[o]n the lips of the strange race that now dwells there their names are myth, legend, dust” (246).

Child of God

While The Orchard Keeper establishes a pattern of conflict between environmentalist characters and Cartesian characters that will reemerge throughout McCarthy’s novels, in Child of God there are no environmentalist characters. The conflict in McCarthy’s third novel is between Lester Ballard, a grotesque parody of Cartesian thinking, and the rest of the Cartesian society of Sevier County, Tennessee. Though Child of God departs from the pattern of environmentalist versus Cartesian characters, an ecocritical reading of the novel further examines the effect of Cartesian thinking on the environment and the people who live in it. Because Child of God lacks

an Arthur Ownby or John Wesley Rattner, it does not have their environmentalist perspectives. Predictably, a book that focuses on Cartesian characters not only lacks the lyrical natural passages found in The Orchard Keeper but also lacks the environmentalist sensibility at the heart of McCarthy's first novel. Nonhuman nature, therefore, is more peripheral to Child of God than it is in The Orchard Keeper. While Berry has pointed out that the social and economic conditions depicted in both novels describe the decline of the ecologically sustainable small farm that resulted from the industrial exploitation of the region's natural resources, the focus of each book is vastly different. Whereas The Orchard Keeper shows the plight of two environmentalist characters in conflict with Cartesian society, Child of God shows how Cartesian thinking functions in conventional society and how it is largely responsible for the extreme acts committed by Lester Ballard.

The novel begins with the auction of the Ballard family farm. Encapsulated in this scene are all of the elements of Cartesian thinking that are simultaneously responsible for the decline of the nonhuman environment, the demise of ecologically sustainable farming, and gradual decline of Lester Ballard. Therefore, the scene is a general example of what happened to many small family farms during the Great Depression and a specific example of Cartesian society's role in creating the monster that is Lester Ballard. The auction is described in festival terms. The people came "like a caravan of carnival folks" led by a flatbed truck carrying musicians who will provide entertainment during the auction of the Ballard farm. A lemonade stand is immediately constructed, and the auctioneer urges people to sign-up to be eligible for "ye free silver dollars" (4). He announces over the loudspeaker, "We're fixin to have some music here in just a minute and we want to get everybody registered fore we have the drawins" (5). Behind all of this entertainment is the forced sale of a family farm from the mentally and intellectually deficient

sole survivor of the Ballard family—the unlikable Lester whom we first see “small, unclean, unshaven” urinating in the barn. Throughout the auction there is little consideration for Ballard and no questioning of the fairness of the proceedings. That the people are attracted to such an event and view it as entertainment reveals the atomism that is inherent in Cartesian thinking. They are able to enjoy themselves with little regard for the misfortunes precipitating the auction. Their ability to separate their enjoyment of the event from the implications of the sale is characteristic of Cartesian society’s inability to see its role and complicity in environmental and human degradation. Unlike the economic and social implications of the auction, the environmental repercussions are less obvious, yet the same disregard the crowd and auctioneer show for Ballard’s fate is evident in their attitude toward the Ballard farm.

As the auctioneer begins his sales pitch, emphasizing the economic potential of the land, he points out the “good timber” on the property: “While you’re a laying down in your bed at night this timber is up here growin. . . . They is real future in this property” (5). Real estate, he reiterates, is a guaranteed way to grow wealth. Promising returns of ten to twenty percent, he preaches, “There is no sounder investment than property. Land” (6). Unlike Ownby or the small-scale farmer, the auctioneer considers only the resources that can be extracted from the land with no consideration of the immediate or long-term ecological consequences of such harvesting. To him, the land is not a living thing but is simply a commodity whose value is forever and always “goin up, up, up” (6). Such a belief is the very core of the capitalistic economic system that depends upon perpetually increasing production and profits. It is a paradigm that deep ecology views as unsustainable and as environmentally destructive.

In addition to this baldly commercial view of land, the auctioneer also manifests atomistic thinking by failing to see his role in making Ballard homeless. Separating himself

from all of the legal machinations leading to the auction, the auctioneer sees himself only as doing his job. When Ballard, rifle in hand, confronts him, the auctioneer says, “What you aim to do, Lester, shoot me? I didn’t take your place off of ye. County done that. I was just hired as auctioneer” (7). Just as the courthouse clerk in The Orchard Keeper fails to see her role in implementing the government’s policy of paying for dead raptors, so the auctioneer fails to see his culpability in the liquidation of the farm. By implicating the county, the auctioneer defers responsibility by placing blame on an amorphous institution; with different departments functioning separately, the government is made to seem an unavoidable force beyond the control of individuals. As such, the auctioneer sees his role in the sale of the Ballard farm as inevitable—a “natural” outgrowth of Cartesian public policy. The amorphous county, however, is a human institution created and maintained by individuals such as the clerk and the auctioneer, whose complicity makes human and nonhuman degradation possible.

Because of Lester’s intellectual and emotional limitations, he is incapable of maintaining a small farm. However, the auction that McCarthy describes was a common phenomenon in Appalachia during the 1930’s. Farms such as Lester’s were easy prey for the coal and timber interests who searched property titles, bought mineral rights for a fraction of their value, and increased tax burdens on yeoman farmers; legal maneuverings, however, were not the only tools used to seize land and make traditional farming a thing of the past. Corporate management of the land led to rapid environmental degradation; as seen in The Orchard Keeper, soil erosion caused by clear-cutting and mining resulted in decreased soil fertility, increased water turbidity, and flooding. Through the descriptions of the Ballard farm and the surrounding area, “the absence of large old timber stands is an early hint of the destructive human consumption carried throughout Child of God” (Berry 72). The abandoned quarry, cluttered with the “artifacts” of

industrial and consumer junk (39), is another example of how companies abandoned the region after the resources were depleted or when further extraction proved unprofitable. Corporate exploitation and abandonment of the land and its people in addition to the Great Depression devastated the small farmers, forcing them to sell their land to pay back taxes (Berry 71) or to lose it through government auction.

The effect of industry's arrival and subsequent departure is also evident in the "human structures on the land [that] hint at the decline of subsistence agriculture" (Berry 70). Ballard's shabby farm, Waldrop's ruined shack, and Ruebel's junkyard all point to the decline in small-scale farming during the Great Depression. Along with their structures, the local people are diminished because of the loss of their agrarian lifestyles to industrial development: while Lester loses the Ballard family farm to the county government, Kirby is destroyed by the whisky that he makes while his fields sprout bushes and honeysuckle (11), and Ruebel watches his family disintegrate as he peddles the parts of wrecked cars and industrial trash from his dump (38). The young men and women who previously would have worked family farms are listless, having ample time for casual sexual liaisons and for loitering in town; there is neither a farm nor a company job to employ them. Child of God is set at a time when the effect of industry on the region is readily apparent: the land has been despoiled beyond repair and the people have been severed from their traditional small-farm culture.

Evidence of the influence of industry in the region that led to the demise of the small farm is peppered throughout the novel. The abandoned quarry is the most obvious example of industry that took people away from the land and then departed the region once local resources were depleted, but another factor in the demise of the small farm that makes an appearance in Child of God is large agribusiness, which relies heavily on chemical fertilizers and large farm

machinery. At one point Ballard observes the cornpicker, a large combine, “snarling through the fields” (40). This passing reference to large-scale agribusiness, along with the abandoned structures, signifies the decline of the subsistence farmer and the community that it engendered (Berry 70). It also suggests that mechanized agriculture has led to a human relationship with the land that is mediated through technology, replacing the direct contact between humans and the earth that has characterized farming since the advent of cultivation 10,000 years ago. More prominently, Ruebel’s junkyard is an indicator that the sustainable farming life has given way to consumer culture. Not surprisingly, the most dominant items in Ruebel’s junkyard are automobiles, both idle ones and those driven by the boys who visit the junkman’s daughters. As Lester approaches the junkyard from the abandoned quarry, “two cars lay upturned at either side of the road like wrecked sentinels and he went past great levees of junk and garbage toward the shack at the edge of the dump” (26). The boys who come to visit drive “all manner of degenerate cars, a dissolute carousel of rotting sedans and niggerized convertibles with blue taillamps and chrome horns and foxtails and giant dice or dashboard demons of spurious fur” (27). The automobile “is at the heart of many of the most serious environmental problems” (Brennan 335), and its role in McCarthy’s environmental sensibility reappears throughout his southern and southwestern novels.

The Frog Mountain turnabout is another example of industrial intrusion in the Appalachian wilderness. The turnabout is a dead end in the middle of the forest—a fact that strongly suggests a logging road constructed by the timber industry to gain access to trees growing on steep grades. Only with the proliferation of the automobile are such places convenient for couples to drive to in order to have sexual intercourse. In Child of God, such retreats attract Ballard and others who gather to spy and then stalk copulating couples.⁴³ The

crimes that result from their voyeurism, in turn lead to police patrols of the remote dirt roads (44-45). All of human activity in the middle of the forest is a result of the timber industry's construction of forest roads leading to nowhere.⁴⁴ The quarry, the cornpicker, the junkyard, and even the turnabout are physical manifestations of Cartesian thinking linked to both human and nonhuman degradation.

Though Child of God lacks an environmental character, it depicts the Cartesian thinking that played a significant role in destroying the land and the human culture of the ecologically sustainable small, owner-occupied farm. As the opening scene portrays, the main authorities who represent Cartesian thinking are government functionaries whose presence is both visible, as in the figure of Sheriff Turner, and amorphous, as with the powers that the auctioneer refers to as the County. Besides his participation in the auction, Sheriff Turner is responsible for Lester Ballard's decline into criminality and madness. Turner can relate to Ballard only in terms made available to him by his position as sheriff; to Turner, Ballard is only a criminal. He lacks the holistic perspective to see Ballard as a severely disturbed person whose criminal activity can be seen as a pathological attempt to establish human relationships and to be part of the human community (Bell 59). Though Turner has known Ballard for a long time, both men being lifelong members of the same small community, Turner fails to see Ballard's behavior in the context of his life—a context that is well established by the stories people tell about him throughout the novel. When Turner speaks to Ballard, it is clear that the Sheriff can only see him as a reprobate, guilty until proven innocent. Turner accepts a prostitute's claim that Ballard raped her and jails him without due process, taking her word over his for a crime he did not commit. Upon Ballard's release from custody, Turner asks him,

What sort of meanness have you got laid out for next I figure you ought to give us a clue. Make it more fair. Let's see: failure to comply with a court order, public disturbance, assault and battery, public drunk, rape. I guess murder is next on the list ain't it?"

[To this, Ballard replies,] "I ain't done nothing You just got it in for me. (56)

Clearly, Ballard is no model citizen, but the sheriff's response to his comment shows that Turner is more than the enforcer of laws; he is also the enforcer of community values and standards. As such, he is the final arbiter of Cartesian thinking for this community: "I guess you better get your ass on home. These people here in town won't put up with your shit" (56). Instead of addressing Ballard's inability to function in society and preventing future criminal incidents, Turner simply releases him to do more harm (Bell 59). Because he cannot hold Ballard as a criminal, Turner relinquishes responsibility, not accepting the fact that Ballard, unlike Ownby, needs help in order to stay out of trouble.

Turner can also be seen as a Cartesian character by how he asserts his authority over others, a clear example of his entrenched hierarchical thinking. His dominance over the town is evident in two separate scenes where he emerges from the courthouse overlooking the town. In the first scene, Turner's attitude reflects his belief that the town's order and tranquility is due to his diligence.

The High Sheriff of Sevier County came out through the courthouse doors and stood on the portico surveying the gray lawn below . . . and descended the stairs, a proprietary squint to his eyes as he studied the morning aspect of the small upland county seat. (48)

The title “High Sheriff” suggests a secularization of the Biblical “High Priest” who descends from his civic temple. His attitude of ownership is clear in the “proprietary squint.” In the second scene, the description of Turner emerging from the courthouse is strikingly similar to the first scene despite the fact that in the second scene the town is flooded. Regardless of the chaos this environmental change has created, Turner maintains the same sense of propriety and the same attitude of placid superiority:

The High Sheriff of Sevier County came down the courthouse steps as far as the last stone above the flooded lawn and gazed out over the water where it lay flat and gray and choked with debris. (160)

Bell points out that the Sheriff and the citizens of Sevier County take the flood in stride, adapting to the dramatic environmental changes, “going on in life as though nothing in the world is wrong” (55). This desire for normalcy constitutes “an almost apprehensive overcorrection, as if by some effect of collective auto-hypnosis” (57). The flood represents a challenge to their anthropocentric belief in human supremacy over nature. Their attitude as a group is that humans should somehow be able to control such natural phenomenon, that nature should somehow not be allowed to infringe upon their built, “civilized” environment. Like the workmen at the cemetery in The Orchard Keeper, the townspeople’s reaction to the flood is another instance of human vanity (Bell 22). When a storekeeper asks, “You reckon there are just some places the good lord didn’t intend folks to live in?” Turner answers, “Could be. . . . He’s got a bullheaded bunch to deal with here if it’s so though, ain’t he?” (162-63). While briefly considering that there may be places humans should not inhabit, a deep ecological idea (Naess 169), he contends that anthropocentrism negates such environmental consideration.⁴⁵

Another institution that contributes to Ballard's alienation and ultimate demise is the church. McCarthy often portrays organized religion in a negative light, usually showing the hypocrisy of professed Christians but also illustrating Christianity's inherently dualistic and hierarchical nature. Despite the church's professed desire to accept all people as God's children, the church in Child of God only contributes to Lester's alienation and isolation. One short scene shows Ballard attending a Sunday service. Regardless of his indelicate manners, his presence signifies an attempt to establish ties to an institution whose ostensible objective is to foster the well-being of the less fortunate. However, just as the agents of secular institutions reject Ballard, so do the minister and his congregation. Conformity and a disdain for difference are the values most evident in this scene. Their disapproval of Ballard's very presence is evident not only in how long they stare at Ballard when he enters but in how long the preacher is silent as Ballard settles into the back row. As the service continues, the narrator describes the congregation's contempt for Ballard:

A woodpecker hammered at a drainpipe outside and those strung heads listed and turned to the bird for silence. Ballard had a cold and snuffled loudly through the service but nobody expected he would stop if God himself looked back askance so no one looked. (32)

McCarthy shows the congregation's contempt for Ballard by suggesting that they believe staring at the bird will more likely affect its behavior than it will affect Ballard's sniffing. Their resignation that not even "God himself" could change Ballard's rude behavior, if taken seriously, is a renunciation of the Christian doctrine of grace. In one of his last bids for social acceptance, he is met with scorn, disapproval, and, eventually, invisibility. Such social isolation, as Bell has argued, leads him to a loneliness and desperation that result in his criminal acts.

Besides Turner and the churchgoers, the individual citizens of Sevier County are also responsible for Ballard's alienation from the community. McCarthy supplies the voice of the citizens at large through a series of first-person narratives in part one of the novel. While these accounts supply background explication, they also reveal the values and standards of the community. Their stories show that, despite their knowledge of Ballard's history and his mental illness, they were passive and indifferent to his plight. One first-person community narrator recalls the day Ballard came to a store to report that his father had hanged himself, announcing it "like you'd tell it was rainin out" (21). The community narrator tells how Ballard followed him and another man back to the Ballard barn and watched as they cut his father down from the rafters: "He stood there and watched, never said nothing. He was about nine or ten year old at the time" (21). Abandoned by both parents, his father's suicide was precipitated by his mother's desertion, he is left to fend for himself. The speaker admits, "he never was right after his father killed himself" (21). Other community narrators relate stories of Ballard's childhood violence against other boys and against animals (17-18, 33-34). By the time his farm is being auctioned, the consensus is that Ballard is "crazy" (22), with the auctioneer warning Ballard, "[if] you don't get a grip on yourself they goin to put you in a rubber room" (7). Yet, like the Sheriff, the citizens of Sevier County resolve the problem of Ballard simply by setting him adrift (Bell 59).

Ironically, while the community refuses to accept Ballard within conventional society because of his family and socio-economic background and because of his own mental deficiency, Ballard still reflects their values and standards of behavior. This is most subtly portrayed by the community narrators who speak of Ballard's treatment of animals. In these instances, their stories of Ballard's mistreatment of animals lead to their own stories of animal abuse. After telling of the time Ballard broke a cow's neck in an effort to get it to move, one speaker tells the

story of a boy who, in an effort to motivate a team of oxen, lit a fire under them (36). A second citizen associates the story of Ballard being banned from the shooting gallery at the carnival with the story of a man blowing up pigeons at a fair (58). This same community narrator tells of his own experience of boxing a chained ape (58-60). In all cases, these stories of Ballard lead to stories of more conventional citizens, an association that confirms Bell's assertion that the difference between Ballard and conventional society "is one of degree, not kind" (57). In ecocritical terms, Ballard is only an extreme manifestation of Cartesian society, more like members of the community than anyone would like to admit. He is a version of themselves delineated in parodistic high relief. The stories they tell relate his cruelty to animals to their own. His later acts of murder and perversion, then, are exaggerated examples of hierarchical dualism.⁴⁶

Such a connection between Ballard's and the town's attitudes and actions toward animals gives further resonance to McCarthy's address to the reader that Ballard is "A child of God much like yourself perhaps" (4). In that direct address to the reader, McCarthy indicts not only the Cartesian institutions and individuals who are shown to be responsible for Ballard's demise, but he also indicts the reader who is tempted to consider himself or herself superior to or wholly apart from Ballard. It is McCarthy's ecological statement that the horrors that Ballard commits are not separate from the actions of many of the characters in the book or even of many of the people reading the book.

Ballard's abuse of animals and his inability to connect with humans demonstrate that Ballard's whole state of being, as Bell describes it, "is one of loss, . . . of isolation from the ecological coherence of his environment, both human and unhuman" (Bell 64). One of the most telling examples of Ballard's inability to connect with nature is also one of the only examples of

natural description in Child of God. As Ballard walks through the forest, the narrator describes his thoughts:

A winter dreadful cold it was. He thought before it was over he would look like one of the bitter spruces that grew slant downwind out of the shale and lichens on the hogback. Coming up the mountain through the blue twilight among great boulders and the ruins of giant trees prone in the forest he wondered at such upheaval. Disorder in the woods, trees down, new paths needed. Given charge Ballard would have made things more orderly in the woods and in men's souls.

(136)

The harsh conditions that Ballard observes resemble the same ones Arthur Ownby encounters in The Orchard Keeper; however, how these two contrasting characters react to the conditions reveals the fundamental difference in their environmental perspectives. Whereas Ownby understands and appreciates the disorder of nature, Darwin's "tangled bank," Ballard wishes only to impose order on the wild. Such a desire to establish order, comparable to the townspeople's desire to maintain order in the midst of environmental chaos, reflects the atomism evident in Descartes' scientific method and Bacon's desire to control nature. As such, Ballard's desire for order in the forest is an exaggerated example of Cartesian thinking.⁴⁷ Like the rest of Cartesian society, he does not understand how nature works. As Bell says,

He is the negative image of Arthur Ownby in The Orchard Keeper He is not a resourceful woodman simply because he is not an observer. He is innocent of, and uninterested in, the nature of the materials of the world and of how processes and procedures produce specific results He is oblivious to beauty, either

simple or complex, and would as soon shoot a bluebird as not, and for no reason in any case (64)

When he does observe nature, he often reflects a Cartesian view of domination; spying two hawks coupling in the spring sky, Ballard thinks, “He did not know how hawks mated but he knew that all things fought” (169). The combination of ignorance and misapprehension accentuates his bumbling action and lack of self-sufficiency. Berry notes that the condition of the family farm suggests that Ballard “has not inherited agricultural wisdom” (71) and, as a result, is forced to scavenge food from farms. Ballard not only uses his rifle to shoot bass in the creek; he lives “on a diet of stolen fieldcorn and summer garden stuff for weeks save for a few frogs he’s shot” (33). Other times, he waits for evening to enter a cornfield when “he and the doves went husbanding among the chewed and broken stalks and he gathered several sackfuls” (40). His housing also shows his inability to live as Ownby did. Starting out in a dilapidated farmhouse, Ballard retreats to Waldrop’s abandoned cabin which he burns down, forcing him to retreat further from society to a series of cave dwellings. This decline in diet and housing, the fundamentals of human existence, corresponds to the decline in his mental state.

The contrast between Ownby and Ballard is important. Ballard’s inability to connect with either the human or the nonhuman world is diametrically opposed to Ownby’s ability to connect with both. This difference influences their respective actions throughout the novels. Whereas Ownby chooses to retreat to Hurrykin in the attempt to continue his environmental life, Ballard is forced to retreat further into the wilderness because of his expulsion from the Cartesian society that he wants to be a part of. Juxtaposed to the resourcefulness that Ownby shows throughout The Orchard Keeper, Ballard exhibits ineptitude, most strikingly illustrated during his visit to the blacksmith shop (70-74). The degree to which he is incapable of living as

Ownby did is seen in his ludicrous determination to take his mattress with him wherever he goes, “a solitary and forlorn link to the civilized state” (59).

In the end, it is Ballard who finally realizes that he has tried and failed to establish relationships. Walking up to the front desk of the state hospital, he tells the clerk, “I’m supposed to be here” (192). Indeed, it is this act that serves as a final indictment of the social system; the monster that Cartesian society is responsible for creating is forced to seek refuge in the only place which can accept him. By driving Ballard from “a state that is a parody of innocence” (Bell 61) to insanity, Cartesian society both creates the murderous necrophiliac and, subsequently, provides an institution to contain him.

K. Wesley Berry has shown how the action in The Orchard Keeper and Child of God reflects the demise of the small farm in the Appalachia of the 1920s, but my deep ecological approach reveals the philosophical foundation that is responsible for that decline. Along with delineating the environmental characteristics of McCarthy’s Arthur Ownby and John Wesley Rattner, this chapter critiques the different aspects of Cartesian thinking that adversely affect nonhuman nature and humans who live on the margins of society. In its quest for order and conformity, in its belief in perpetual economic growth and endless technological advancement, in its entrenched anthropocentrism, Cartesian society ignores the ecological consequences of its actions and displays a “disposition toward violence” (Bell 55) against anything or that impedes its notion of progress. Like the elm that is cut down at the beginning of The Orchard Keeper or the farm that is auctioned off at the beginning of Child of God, Arthur Ownby and Lester Ballard are victims of Cartesian society. Even though Ownby and Ballard are on opposite extremes of McCarthy’s environmental continuum, they represent populations that either refuse or fail to conform to the values and standards of conventional society. Both die as wards of the state. If

McCarthy is an environmentalist writer, what is the significance of the fact that his most Thoreauvean character shares the same fate as his cross-dressing necrophiliac? Because both characters function outside of conventional society and because they both impede the smooth functioning of the institutions that maintain the economic status quo, Cartesian society finds it necessary to confine them. In Cartesian terms, Ownby's act of environmental protest is no different from Ballard's challenge to the auctioning of his farm or his subsequent acts of inhumanity. Though the characters and their motivations are vastly different, the authorities that enforce Cartesian values do not differentiate between the two. Whereas Ballard is obviously disturbed and in need of institutionalization, Ownby's confinement signifies that Cartesian society views his environmentalism as the product of a disturbed mind. Resistance to the environmentally irresponsible status quo, the novel suggests, is equated with mental illness.

Ownby and Ballard are examples of human diversity. While both characters are white men who live in Appalachia, the way that they see, experience, and relate to nature can hardly be more different. Ballard, as already argued, has a very limited ability to appreciate and connect with either human or nonhuman nature. As a parody of Cartesian thinking, he highlights in broad strokes the anthropocentric and atomistic thinking of the society that rejects him. Unlike Judge Holden in Blood Meridian, who is perhaps McCarthy's quintessential Cartesian character, Ballard is a malformed product of Cartesian society—more akin to the idiot who follows the Judge than the Judge himself. Ownby, on the other hand, represents a valid and more fully developed alternative to Cartesian thinking. Because of his life experience and his relationship with nature, he acts in a fundamentally different way than his Cartesian counterparts. In this way, he represents an environmental philosophy shared by a number of non-Cartesian cultures.

The loss of Ownby's ecological worldview will only accelerate the destruction of the nonhuman environment.

Social ecology and its feminist offshoot, ecofeminism, more specifically focus on the connection between the loss of bio-diversity and of cultural diversity. As Ynestra King argues:

A healthy, balanced ecosystem, including human and nonhuman inhabitants, must maintain diversity. Ecologically, environmental simplification is as significant a problem as environmental pollution. Biological simplification, i.e. the wiping out of whole species, corresponds to reducing human diversity into faceless markets. Social life and natural life are literally simplified to the inorganic for the convenience of market society. (4)

In The Orchard Keeper and Child of God, as well as McCarthy's other novels, such diversity of human and nonhuman species is destroyed in the biological and cultural simplification that results from Cartesian thinking. Because McCarthy writes mainly about individuals who live in extreme or marginal landscapes, the interplay between the demise of nature and humans is not only more apparent but also more relevant. His portrayal of the victims of Cartesian thinking, however, is not limited to nature and to white males who live in Appalachia. Contrary to the view that McCarthy's novels lacks strong female or minority characters, his novels show an understanding that all marginal human populations are vulnerable to the Cartesian determination to expand, develop, use, and in the process simplify and centralize. Though far from an being an writer with an ecofeminist or multicultural sensitivity, McCarthy repeatedly shows that the relationship that his female and non-white characters have with nature has also informed his environmental sensibility. The characteristics of environmental and Cartesian thinking that McCarthy establishes in his first two novels, therefore, reappear in later southern novels as he

continues to explore the implications of anthropocentrism, hierarchy, atomism, and mechanism in the modern world.

CHAPTER THREE

Ecofeminism, Child of God, and Outer Dark

While deep ecology focuses its critique of Cartesian thinking on the effect of anthropocentrism on the environment, ecofeminism focuses on the role of androcentrism in the interconnected domination of “women, other human Others, and nature” (Warren 2). Ecological feminism—or ecofeminism—“from its inception has insisted on the link between nature and culture, between the forms of exploitation of nature and the forms of the oppression of women” (Murphy 23). Largely based upon this precept, this chapter examines Child of God and Outer Dark for evidence of the interconnected domination of nature and women by the various entities of patriarchal or masculine worldviews that correspond to what I have identified as Cartesian thinking. In doing so, it not only provides an ecofeminist analysis of two of McCarthy’s books but also attempts to reconcile the schism between ecofeminism and deep ecology. Though an unlikely approach to the work of an author viewed as particularly androcentric, an ecofeminist analysis of Child of God and Outer Dark uncovers ecofeminist themes that contribute both to my reassessment of McCarthy criticism and to my development of the environmental ethic that permeates his work.

Because ecofeminism is a relatively new approach to literary criticism, it is still identifying ecofeminist traits in a myriad of texts; as Murphy explains, the ecofeminist critic can look “at an author’s work in terms of the extent to which it addressed ecological and feminist issues in positive or negative ways” (25). My analysis of Child of God could be characterized as

a “positive” ecofeminist analysis because it connects Lester Ballard’s objectification of women and nature. Because Ballard is both a product and a victim of Cartesian society, as argued in the previous chapter, his objectification and domination of women and nature reflects the Cartesian thinking within conventional society. An ecofeminist analysis of Outer Dark, however, is both “positive” and “negative.” While the story of Culla and Rinthy Holmes can be seen to affirm the interconnected domination of nature and women, it also reinforces the stereotype rejected by third-wave ecofeminists that women are inherently closer to nature than men. Even if Culla and Rinthy are viewed more symbolically as the personifications of “masculine” and “feminine” worldview, McCarthy’s portrayal of Rinthy represents two distinct and contradictory ecofeminist ideas: while she offers an alternative way of relating to the world than either Culla or the marauders, it is an alternative that appears too weak to overcome the violent power of the “masculine” worldview. Additionally, McCarthy’s portrayal of Rinthy as closer to nature is exactly the kind of stereotyping that ecofeminists view as responsible for the unjustified domination of women and nature in a patriarchal Western culture.

Child of God and Outer Dark, in the end, do not affirm an ecofeminist ethic as a viable alternative to Cartesian thinking, and they portray women too often as helpless victims. As such, the novel reinforces the pessimism of McCarthy’s environmental sensibility in that he describes a Cartesian society that is unwilling to admit the environmental ramifications of its hierarchical worldview. Even though McCarthy is not an ecofeminist writer, and even though Child of God and Outer Dark are not affirming examples of ecofeminist philosophy, his second and third novels confirm the ecofeminist premise that the philosophical origins of the contemporary environmental crisis are also responsible for the domination of women. Such a confirmation

strengthens the argument that McCarthy's novels are as focused on ecological philosophy as they are on existentialism.

Ecofeminism

Ecofeminism is a branch of social ecology that “addresses the basic dynamics of social domination within the context of patriarchy” (Capra Web 9). The term was first used in 1974 by French feminist Françoise d'Eaubonne who wished to “call attention to women's potential to bring about an ecological revolution” (Warren 21). D'Eaubonne identified a number of common values and goals between the feminist and environmental movements, the most important of which is the “bedrock recognition of the distinction between things-in-themselves and things-for-us” (Murphy 4). Such a recognition broadly distinguishes between an anthropocentric viewpoint (things-for-us) that sees nonhumans as objects for human consumption and an ecocentric viewpoint (things-in-themselves) that reflects the deep ecological idea of biological egalitarianism. More specifically, ecofeminism distinguishes between an androcentric viewpoint that sees women as objects for male consumption and a more ecological viewpoint that balances the masculine impulse (the self-assertive) with the feminine impulse (the integrative).

As a radical environmental philosophy, ecofeminism shares many of the same premises and principles as deep ecology, though some ecofeminists vehemently criticize deep ecology for privileging nonhuman nature over the suffering of certain human groups. Like deep ecology, ecofeminism argues that “everything in nature has intrinsic value” and that “our anthropocentric viewpoint, instrumentalist values, and mechanistic models should be rejected for a more biocentric view that can comprehend the interconnectedness of all life processes” (Birkeland 20). Also like deep ecology, ecofeminism perceives nature as an interconnected web rather than a

hierarchy, arguing that hierarchies created within human society have been projected onto nature and then used to justify social domination. Echoing Arne Naess's seventh deep ecological principle, ecofeminists argue that the survival of the human species "necessitates a challenging of the nature-culture dualism and a corresponding radical restructuring of human society according to feminist and ecological principles" (King 20).

Perhaps the most essential premise shared by deep ecology and ecofeminism is the critique of Western culture. Both "impute the contemporary environmental crisis to the anthropocentric underpinnings of Western thought" (Mathews 199). While deep ecology criticizes Western culture for alienating humans from the rest of nature through anthropocentrism and technology, ecofeminism argues that "the building of Western industrial civilization in opposition to nature interacts dialectically with and reinforces the subjugation of women" (King 19). Both are critical of capitalism, especially "the costs of competition, aggression, and domination arising from the market economy's *modus operandi* in nature and society" (Merchant xx-xxi). As with deep ecology and ecological philosophy in general, ecofeminism identifies the origin of modern Western society in the economic, cultural, and scientific changes of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries that resulted in the shift from an organic to a mechanistic worldview (Merchant xvi). In particular, Descartes's separation of the mind from the body privileges not only humans over the rest of nature but also privileges men over women. As Freya Mathews argues:

under the influence of these dualistic categories, Western culture has, over approximately the last 2000 years, developed a view of the world as divided into things which possess minds or reason and things which lack it, where the former are set above the latter, and the moral significance of the latter is discounted. . . .

Thus, in Western cultures, men have traditionally appropriated reason (hence mind, spirit, intellect and the subject position), while women have been consigned to nature (and hence to the body, matter, emotion, instinct and the object position). (200)

Such false dualisms have separated men and women, have associated men with civilization and women with nature, and are the basis of what ecofeminists call the “logic of domination.”

Using the terms “Ups” and “Downs,” Warren explains that the Ups take sometimes legitimate differences and base a value system upon those differences in order to justify subordination:

“the Ups are better than, stronger than, more powerful than, smarter than, older than, wiser than, more rational than, closer to the divine than, Downs” (Warren 48). Such hierarchical dualism has led to male domination of the public sphere, where problems of culture and civilization require reason, and has led to the relegation of women to the private sphere. Of course, not all hierarchies based on difference are unjustified. Differences may sanction legitimate hierarchies (such as parents’ authority over children), but unjustified subordination (such as child abuse) occurs when superiority is used to morally justify domination or subordination (Warren 49).

The logic of domination depends upon the acceptance of false dualisms to justify the domination of “masculine over feminine, human over nature, reason over emotion, mind over body, objectivity over subjectivity” (Des Jardins 254).

One of the goals of third-wave ecological feminism is to counter such false hierarchical dualisms by intertwining “the terrains of female/male and nature/humanity, which have been artificially separated by philosophical linearity for far too long” (Murphy 7). Instead of overvaluing the patriarchal conception of reason (the ability to entertain abstract, supposedly objective principles), ecofeminists argue for a more holistic idea of intelligence that balances

rational intelligence with emotional intelligence.⁴⁸ Through the realization of self and other as interdependent, a “gender heterarchical continuum” emerges “in which difference exists without binary opposition and hierarchical valorization” (Murphy 4). The commonalities between deep ecology and ecofeminism illustrate that these two environmental philosophies share a historical perspective that views Western culture as responsible for the suffering of nature and marginalized human populations. They also identify a number of characteristics within Western culture that make up what I have defined as the Cartesian worldview.

Although ecofeminism shares many of the same premises and principles with deep ecology, it is more focused on the forms of domination as they affect humans as well as nonhumans. While deep ecology is more concerned with changing the Cartesian relationship with nature by humbling humans to admit that they are part of the world as opposed to superior to or separate from it, ecofeminism is more concerned with social justice. Ecofeminists insist that “the ideological rehabilitation of nature cannot be achieved without the concurrent rehabilitation of women, colonized races, and other oppressed groups” (Mathews 200).

Ecofeminists explore

the links between androcentrism and environmental destruction. It is “an awareness” that begins with the realization that the exploitation of nature is intimately linked to Western Man’s attitude toward women and tribal cultures or, in Ariel Salleh’s words, that there is a “parallel in men’s thinking between their ‘right’ to exploit nature, on the one hand, and the use they make of women on the other.” (Birkeland 18)

While primarily focused on the conjoined domination of women and nonhuman nature, ecofeminism, as a branch of social ecology, recognizes that other historically exploited groups have also suffered because of the false dualisms used to justify domination.

Ecofeminism's focus on the effects of Cartesian thinking on human as well as nonhuman nature highlights its conflict with deep ecology, a conflict that has been cause for "lively debate in philosophical journals about their relative merits" (Capra Web of Life 8). Some ecofeminists have criticized deep ecology for being "too abstract and too general, ignoring the specific human and social causes of environmental destruction" (Des Jardins 235). Ecofeminists such as Karen Warren, Val Plumwood, and Ariel Salleh criticize deep ecology's patriarchal imposition on environmentalism (Brennan 334), charging that deep ecology's desire for transcendence is "masculinist" and "a supremely rational and technicist" way of thinking (Warren 24). Even when deep ecologists include ecofeminists concerns, as do Bill Devall and George Sessions in their anthology Deep Ecology, they are criticized for perpetuating "masculine egoism" (Brennan 334); even when Devall and Sessions "oppose the dominance of 'masculine over feminine,'" Murphy argues, they reproduce such patriarchal patterns" by sex-typing certain human characteristics, such as "love, compassion, receptivity, caring, cooperation, listening, patience, nurturing, deep feeling, affirmation, and quiet statement" (Devall and Sessions 33), as "feminine" values (Murphy 61).

Despite their differences, deep ecology and ecofeminism "are broadly ecocentric in their outlook," sharing an understanding of the phenomenal world that outweighs more minor differences in their view of human self-consciousness and individuality (Mathews 199). As ecofeminist Birkeland explains, both deep ecology and ecofeminism, as well as social ecology in general, "advocate radical social transformation in the direction of nonhierarchical and more

communal decentralized societies” (23). Valuing life processes regardless of their usefulness to humans, deep ecology and ecofeminism “share overlapping and mutually complementary ways of thinking” (Birkeland 16). Neither wants to banish rationalism, but both urge the balancing of rationalism with emotion and intuition. Ecofeminism focuses on patriarchy as it affects the domination of humans as well as nonhumans. As such, it is an example of Arne Naess’s call for multiple ecosophies to provide a variety of perspectives that share a holistic view of the world. For Naess, “an ecological worldview is not inconsistent with a high degree of epistemological pluralism and a rich diversity of cultural expression” (Mathew 201). My ecofeminist approach to Child of God and Outer Dark narrows the deep ecological critique of Cartesian thinking by focusing on the domination of women and nature. It shows that McCarthy is aware of the connection between the domination of women and the degradation of the nonhuman environment and that Rinthy Holme, like Arthur Ownby, possesses an environmental outlook that McCarty portrays sympathetically. At the same time, my analysis of Outer Dark illustrates the continuing problem within ecofeminism of identifying a “masculine” and “feminine” worldview while criticizing androcentric society’s tendency to associate women with nature.

What is the relationship between women and nature? “Cultural ecofeminists,” despite their appellation, argue that the relationship between women and nature is biologically determined. Because of women’s ability to conceive, give birth, and feed and nurture their offspring, they are necessarily closer to nature than men. The traditional experiences associated with childrearing and maintaining households—from collecting water and firewood to gathering and preparing food—have also intensified the contact that women have with nature. As such, cultural ecofeminists contend, women experience the effect of environmental degradation more keenly than their male counterparts.⁴⁹ Because of these factors, cultural ecofeminists not only

embrace “biological, sexual, and gender differences between men and women” but argue that “there do exist authentic and particular ‘women’s ways’ of experiencing, understanding, and valuing the world” (Des Jardins 250-51). For such ecofeminists, the remedy for both human and nonhuman degradation is “the creation of an alternative ‘woman’s culture’ . . . based on revaluing, celebrating and defending what patriarchy has devalued including the feminine, non-human nature, the body and the emotions” (Plumwood 10).

In contrast to “cultural” counterparts, third-wave ecofeminists—such as Warren and Plumwood—contend that any association of women with nature is culturally constructed. They accuse cultural ecofeminists of embracing the dualisms of patriarchy and of “unwitting complicity” with Cartesian thinking (Des Jardins 253). Instead, third-wave ecofeminists wish to subvert those dualisms, exposing the androcentric biases ungirding the reasoning that has not only associated women as inherently closer to nature but that has also feminized nature.⁵⁰ The acceptance of false dualisms and the application of the logic of domination have created a culture in which “women and nature [are viewed] as psychological and recreational resources for the harried entrepreneur-husband” (Merchant xxi).

Third-wave ecofeminists agree that women’s gender roles have traditionally placed women in closer daily contact with nature and thus have resulted in women bearing the destructive ecological consequences of high levels of production, consumption and mobility (Mellor 3-7). While such ecofeminists acknowledge differences between the sexes, they reject the implication that those differences justify domination. They also acknowledge that certain qualities and values have inevitably become gendered as “masculine” and “feminine,” but they disassociate “masculine” with male and “feminine” with female. In doing so, they align themselves more with deep ecology in characterizing “masculine” as self-assertive (instead of

male) and “feminine” as integrative (instead of female), and recognize the value of a perspective that balances both worldviews (Capra Web 9-10). Instead of favoring a “women’s culture” over a “man’s culture,” third-wave ecofeminists envision a human society that balances the self-assertive and the integrative impulses evident throughout nature. What they criticize is less the inherent maleness of Cartesian thinking and more the androcentrism that results from Cartesian thinking based upon false hierarchical dualisms and the application of the logic of domination:

We should challenge those distinctions that are designed to reinforce superior-inferior, oppressor-oppressed frameworks. This type of ecofeminism challenges both feminists and environmentalists to uncover the patterns of domination common to the oppression of women and nature and begin exploring alternative and nondualistic ways of thinking about both human and nonhuman nature. (Des Jardins 254)

This chapter accepts Des Jardins’s challenge by identifying the role of Cartesian thinking in the subjugation of women and nature, but it also acknowledges the difficulty of identifying an ecofeminist alternative without essentializing women as inherently closer to nature than men. This continues to be a difficulty in ecofeminism, and it a problem inherent in an ecofeminist analysis of Rinty Holme in Outer Dark.

The problem is that while ecofeminists contend that women are not closer to nature, they inevitably gender the holistic alternative to Western patriarchy. By focusing on the androcentrism (or patriarchy) of Western culture, third-wave ecofeminists inevitably describe the Cartesian worldview as “masculine.” At the same time, the “contextualist, pluralistic, inclusive, and holistic” (Des Jardins 256) ethic that they offer as an alternative to androcentrism is often cast in terms that have traditionally been used to describe the “feminine.” Some of the shared

characteristics that Cartesian society has associated with women and nature, therefore, are also seen by ecofeminists as remedies for human and nonhuman domination.

This seeming contradiction in third-wave ecofeminist thought is exhibited by Charlene Spretnak. In her critique of the dualistic thinking, she writes:

Countless ramifications follow from the Eurocentric notion of “the masculine” being associated with rationality, spirit, culture, autonomy, assertiveness, and the public sphere, while the “feminine” is associated with emotion, body, nature, connectedness, receptivity, and the private sphere. (183)

Because the ramifications of these false dualisms are implicitly negative, Spretnak views the designation of “masculine” and “feminine” traits as detrimental to women and nature. However, many of the characteristics that she uses to describe an ecofeminist alternative to the Cartesian worldview have traditionally been associated with the “feminine”:

The ecofeminist alternative for the Western patriarchal worldview of fragmentation, alienation, agonistic dualisms, and exploitative dynamics is a radical reconceptualization that honors integration: interrelatedness, transformation, embodiment, caring, and love. (187)

Spretnak’s inclusion of “caring” and “love” is especially close to the “ethics of care” of cultural ecofeminism that third-wave ecofeminists reject (Des Jardins 252). Despite Spretnak’s efforts to avoid the implication that females are closer to nature, her worldview is still gendered and still biased toward the “feminine” ethic. This problem is evident in an ecofeminist reading of Outer Dark where Culla (and the marauders by association) can be seen as the personification of the “masculine” worldview, and Rinthy can be seen as the embodiment of the “feminine” worldview. Such a reading blurs the line between an essentialistic and a non-essentialistic view

of the sexes. In doing so, McCarthy's novel of incest and infanticide can be seen as an example of hierarchical, dualistic thinking, especially given that McCarthy describes Rinthy in negatively gendered terms (Sullivan 69). However, a more critical examination of Rinthy and her relationship with nature suggests that she personifies many qualities of the environmental ethic espoused by ecofeminists, deep ecologists, and ecosystem ecologists alike. As such, Outer Dark can be read as both "negative" and "positive" in ecofeminist terms.

The Need for an Ecofeminist Reading of McCarthy

Because Child of God and Outer Dark have received disproportionately less critical attention than McCarthy's other novels, Vereen Bell's existentialist/nihilist thesis is even more important to a general critical assessment of these novels. Central to Bell's reading is the idea of the characters' homelessness: Lester Ballard's story is "a mediation of McCarthy on the theme of homelessness" (58), and Culla and Rinthy Holme are "each homeless and helpless" (34). Given that ecology is literally "the study of home," my ecocritical approach argues that this sense of homelessness is more a reflection of the characters' philosophical distance from nature than any essential alienation of humans from the rest of the world. In particular, Lester's and Culla's sense of homelessness is the result of the Cartesian system of thinking that alienates them from the world. Ecofeminism's critique of this "masculinist thinking" helps link their sense of homelessness to Cartesian thinking while juxtaposing their homelessness with Rinthy's relative at-homeness.

An ecofeminist approach to McCarthy's work seems like a far-fetched endeavor considering his overall portrayal of women. The critical consensus is that McCarthy resembles Hemingway in his treatment of women as somewhat two-dimensional foils for his male protagonists. This critical viewpoint is not without merit. From The Orchard Keeper to Cities

on the Plain, his male protagonists fail to establish meaningful relationships with women. As Ann Fisher-Wirth argues, “Fully developed female characters do not exist in McCarthy’s novels, though some have felt that he works in this direction with Alejandra and her grandaunt Alfonsa in All the Pretty Horses, or with John Grady Cole’s love, the whore from Chiapas, in Cities of the Plain” (126). Terri Witek argues that McCarthy’s women often play the role of “mater dolorosa”—the sorrowing mother whose grief is so great that it forces McCarthy’s men to leave home “so early and so guiltily” (139). Even more disturbing is the pattern that Nell Sullivan identifies: “the theme of female sexuality inextricably bound up with death and, therefore, posed as a source of masculine dread” (68). A brief overview of McCarthy’s female characters supports the criticism that his portrayal of women is often misogynistic.

In The Orchard Keeper, women are largely contained within the domestic sphere, acting as mothers, wives, or girlfriends. Their influence on the male characters is either negative or negligible. Though Arthur Ownby is never paired with a female, his presence in the mountains—living alone with his dog Scout—is partly explained by the fact that he was jilted by a woman to whom he was betrothed. John Wesley Rattner’s mother is a stock fundamentalist Christian character with whom he speaks few words and whom he abandons upon meeting Marion Sylder and Arthur Ownby. Likewise, Sylder’s unnamed girlfriend is a minor character whose role is to care for the bootlegger after fights and between trips to Knoxville. In Child of God, consistent with Sullivan’s observation, the majority of the women are literal corpses that Lester Ballard keeps as sexual objects. In Outer Dark, Rinthy Holme is a stoic victim (perhaps) of incest who is often compared unfavorably to Faulkner’s Lena Grove. In Blood Meridian, women suffer the same bloody end as the Indians and Mexicans who encounter Judge Holden and the Glanton gang. As an example of how the dominations of “women, other human Others,

and nature” are interconnected, Blood Meridian is McCarthy’s greatest articulation of the destructiveness of Cartesian thinking.

While McCarthy includes a number of female characters in Suttree, most of them serve as romantic interests for the main character, Cornelius Suttree. In each of these cases, McCarthy ends the relationship before needing to develop the female character more fully. Before the novel begins, Suttree has already separated from a woman with whom he had a child. She appears once, at the funeral of their child. During the novel, he has a relationship with Joyce, a prostitute whom Suttree lives with and off of as she plies her trade in a number of Southern cities. As a couple, they begin to develop domestic habits, such as keeping house and buying a car. This burgeoning domesticity gnaws at Suttree and leads to the relationship’s inevitable demise. As Terri Witek points out, “what looks like social and domestic prosperity in American terms is their ruin” (139). The more stable their domestic life, the more unstable their relationship becomes. For both Suttree and Joyce, making their irregular lives regular is the destruction of the relationship. After Suttree and Joyce part, he meets and courts the daughter of a man who harvests and tries to sell fresh-water pearls; it is a relationship that shows a degree of mutual caring and respect unmatched in McCarthy’s earlier books, but McCarthy abruptly ends this relationship by having the woman die in a freak rock slide.

In The Border Trilogy, McCarthy develops John Grady Cole’s character through a romantic relationship first with the daughter of a rich Mexican rancher and later with an epileptic prostitute whose pimp decides to kill her rather than lose her. In both instances, John Grady is unable to establish a meaningful relationship because the women are both dominated by physically and emotionally domineering men.⁵¹ Though Fisher-Wirth suggests that the portrayals of Alejandra, Alfonsa, and the epileptic whore of Chiapas show a growth in

McCarthy's portrayal of female characters, all of these characters, finally, exist only to forward the journeys of McCarthy's male protagonists. Despite this inauspicious pattern of weak or otherwise underdeveloped female characters, the function of females in Child of God and Outer Dark suggests that, while no feminist or ecofeminist, McCarthy reveals an environmental ethic that recognizes that Cartesian thinking is responsible not only for ecological degradation but also for female oppression.

Child of God

The previous chapter established two arguments that will be important to an ecofeminist reading of Child of God generally and of Lester Ballard specifically. The first argument was that Lester Ballard is both an example and a victim of Cartesian thinking. The second is related to the first: his abuse of animals and his desire for order—both in nature and “in men's souls” (136)—are examples of conventional society rendered in high relief. Though the difference between the actions of individual community members and those of Ballard is vast, as Bell reminds us, “the difference along the human spectrum is one of degree, not kind” (57). In this chapter, an ecofeminist analysis of Child of God builds upon those two arguments by relating the abuse and domination of nature with the abuse and domination of women. Ballard, by objectifying women and nature, illustrates the Cartesian tendency to feminize nature while characterizing women as essentialistically connected to nature (Warren 126). As such, Ballard's objectifications of women and nature are examples of “the logic of domination” that rationalizes the unjustified subordination of “women, other human Others, and nature” (Warren 43); such a logic that women and nature are at the disposal of men, is evident not only in Ballard but in the conventional society from which Ballard springs. Such a pattern of thinking further confirms the argument that Lester Ballard's actions are a reflection of Cartesian thinking. Nowhere are the

interconnected dominations of nature and women resulting from Cartesian thinking more apparent in Child of God than in the two scenes at the house of Ralph Lane; these two scenes most clearly justify an ecofeminist examination of Cormac McCarthy. They strikingly illustrate the logic of domination inherent in Ballard's thinking about nature and women, specifically the extent to which Ballard associates violence against animals with violence against women.

In the first of the two scenes set in Ralph Lane's house, Ballard offers a robin as a gift to a retarded toddler, hoping, somehow, to endear himself to Lane's daughter, who is the child's mother. The unnamed daughter, who will be Lester's first murder victim in the second scene, fears that the child will kill the small bird, a concern to which Ballard answers, "It's hisn to kill if he wants to" (77). When attention returns to the boy, "its mouth was stained with blood and it was chewing" (79). After the girl explains that "He's done chewed its legs off," Ballard responds, grinning uneasily, "He wanted it to where it couldn't run off" (79). While Bell first noticed the "connection between this episode and Lester's necrophilia" (64), what has not been examined are the ecofeminist implications of this scene and how it relates to Ballard's second visit to the Lane house later in the novel. By looking at both scenes, it becomes clear that Ballard uses the "logic of domination" to justify his violence against both nature and women.

In the scene described above, the hierarchical thinking apparent in Lester Ballard's gift is obvious. Calling the robin a "playpretty" (77), Ballard views the living bird not just as a toy but also as something feminine whose purpose is to entertain. Ballard's coinage of the word "playpretty" combines a prefix denoting entertainment with a decidedly feminine adjective—a clear example of the feminizing of nature characteristic of the logic of domination. Calling the bird a "playpretty" objectifies a living being into a thing whose sole purpose is its utility to humans. It demonstrates the Cartesian belief that humans are subject (and therefore superior)

and animals are object (and therefore inferior). Ballard's neologism is a clear example of the linguistic joining of nature and the female that Warren has identified throughout Western languages (27-28). In contrast to Ballard's view of the robin, McCarthy's narrative voice states that the bird felt "warm and feathered in [Ballard's] palm with the heart of it beating there just so" (76). Such a disjunction between Ballard's valuation of the bird and the narrative empathy for it as a living being further highlights not only Ballard's insensitivity but also McCarthy's environmental sensibility.

The second time Ballard visits the Lane house, the daughter and toddler are alone. Reluctantly granting Ballard entry, the daughter responds to his sexual innuendos by impugning his masculinity: "You ain't even a man. You're just a crazy thing." Ballard responds, "I might be more than you think How come you wear them britches? You cain't see nothin Why don't you show me them nice titties" (117-18). While the dialogue shows the daughter's own gender stereotyping, Ballard's words reveal the extent to which he objectifies women. As is true in pornography, Ballard's objectification of women reduces them to mere body parts. His reference to britches is not just a criticism of her choice of masculine attire but is also a complaint that he is unable to see her legs or to steal a glance at her crotch. His request to see her breasts, also an example of select body-part objectification, reveals the extent to which Ballard's sexuality is socially conditioned; at the Lane house Ballard uses the exact language that he heard at the junkyard when Ruebel's daughter, accompanied by a suitor, asks Ballard what he is looking at; the other man answers for him, "Why, he's lookin at them there nice titties for one thing" (29). The acceptability of such a comment is reinforced by Ruebel's daughter's laughter. At Ralph Lane's house, after using the language he learned at the junkyard, Ballard is rejected and told to leave. He leaves, walks around the house, and shoots the girl through a window. He

then reenters the house, picks up her corpse and burns the house down with the toddler in it. Just as Lester perceives that the toddler bit off the robin's leg to subdue it, so does he murder his first victim in order to subdue her—following the Cartesian principle of superiority, “It's hisn to kill if he wants to” (77).

Obviously, Ballard's belief that the child is justified in maiming the robin to keep it from running off is the same kind of reasoning that he uses to justify his own practice of killing women in order to possess them as sexual objects. Just as the toddler has “the right” to dispose of the robin by virtue of his superiority to it, so Ballard exercises his right as a man to possess the Lane girl. In the logic of domination, “superiority justifies subordination” (Warren 54). In more general, holistic terms, it is an example of the Aristotelian scale of ascent where the “higher” species are entitled to use a “lower” species as they see fit (Craig Ladder 9). In these paired scenes, animal abuse is prelude to sex abuse; in both cases, Ballard's assumed sense of superiority over both animals and women is based upon hierarchal thinking and the unfounded logic of domination integral to Cartesian thinking.

What makes Ballard horrifying and what separates him “by degree” from the rest of the Sevier County is that he takes the “logic of domination” to the extreme. As Gary Ciuba argues, Ballard conjoins murder and eroticism, violence with sex (80). That this applies to Ballard's treatment of women is clear in his necrophilia, but it also applies to his view of the nonhuman natural world as well:

In the Spring Ballard watched two hawks couple and drop, their wings upswept, soundless out of the sun to break and flare above the trees and ring up again with thin calls. He eyed them on, watching to see if one were hurt. He did not know how hawks mated but he knew that all things fought. (169)

Here, as Diane Luce has noticed, Ballard does not know that hawks mate on the wing, and that some species are thought to mate for life. Instead, Ballard has come to recognize “beauty only in sexually objectified women or in violence” (“Cave” 181). Luce hints at the connection between the domination of women and nature when she writes, “Just as Lester’s responses to the beauty of women becomes perverted as he becomes a collector of dead bodies, his response to the beauty of the natural world is numbed in all but a few scenes. . .” (“Cave” 180). Though it is his personal psychopathology that leads him to act in such an extreme and violent manner, it is always important to remember that, in the end, Ballard’s violence against women and nature is a reflection of the society from which he comes (Ciuba 81).⁵²

Besides the two scenes at Ralph Lane’s house, Child of God contains other, less obvious examples of Ballard’s twinned objectification of women and nature and the violence that results from that objectification. Besides punching a dog (24), shooting one cow (33), breaking the neck of another cow (35), and capturing the hapless frozen robin (75), Ballard repeatedly uses animals for target practice. Whether it is the random bird he encounters in the forest (25), a cat lounging at Ruebel’s junkyard (26), or even a spider in a web (57), Ballard aims his gun at live targets throughout the novel. These incidents are different from the instances in which Ballard kills animals for sustenance, as evidenced by the brace of squirrels he carries through the Frog Mountain turnabout (85). From Ballard’s perspective, these targets exist in order for him to hone his sharpshooting skills. His use of animals as targets provides additional examples of the dualistic thinking that Ballard uses to divide the world into the human and the nonhuman and to elevate himself above the value of objectified objects.

Perhaps the most bizarre and pathetic example of Ballard’s animal objectification is found in the role played by the stuffed animals that he wins at the carnival. As Winchell has

noted, “Rather than being a hunter of wild beasts, he is a winner of stuffed animals” (303). His rewards for shooting red dots out of paper targets are two “ponderous mohair teddybear[s]” and a tiger (64). The high value that Ballard places on these inanimate animals is evident throughout the novel. He first takes them to Waldrop’s cabin where they “watch from the wall, their plastic eyes shining in the firelight and their red flannel tongues out” (67). They are in the room when he drags his first female corpse back home. In a horrific parody of conventional domestic life, those stuffed animals are part of the tableaux that Ballard creates along with his female corpses (103). When the cabin burns in the night, Ballard emerges from the smoke with “the bears and the tiger in his arms” (105). In the cave he retreats to after the fire, “His mattress lay in a pile of brush with the stuffed animals upon it. . .” (134). It is only as he attempts to ford a swollen creek to avoid capture after his bungled assassination attempt at the turnabout that he loses these animals: “far downstream he thought he saw toy bears bobbing on the spate but they were lost from sight beyond a stand of trees . . .” (157). Like his female corpses, these toys—cartoon replicas of predatory wildlife—signify his attempt to bring order to the chaos of nature. For Ballard, the stuffed animals are forms of nature that he can control.⁵³ In his desire for communion, belonging, and a sense of order, his only success with either nature or women is to surround himself with objects that take the place of living beings.

At the same carnival where Ballard wins his stuffed animals, McCarthy reinforces Ballard’s objectification of nature and women through juxtaposition; as fireworks burst overhead and Ballard looks on with arms filled with stuffed animals, McCarthy describes him staring at a young girl. Addressing the reader, McCarthy writes:

And you could see among the faces a young girl with candyapple on her lips and her eyes wide. Her pale hair smelled of soap, womenchild from beyond the years,

rapt below the sulphur glow and pitchlight of some medieval fun fair. A lean skylong candle skewered the black pools in her eyes. Her fingers clutched. In the flood of this breaking brimstone galaxy she saw the man with the bears watching her and she edged closer to the girl by her side and brushed her hair with two fingers quickly. (65)

Here, Ballard's objectification of nature manifest in his stuffed animals is conjoined with his objectification of woman through the male gaze. Eating a candyapple, the forbidden fruit made sweeter with refined sugar, this young girl is a fair-going Eve—innocent and vulnerable. She too—like the bluebird, spider, and cat—is a target, a living object caught in Ballard's bead. As a subject, though, she has the will to sense the predatory nature of Ballard's gaze and to move away from him.

Though her repudiation of Ballard, as Jarrett has argued, reflects society's repudiation (52), it is important to note that voyeurism is the first stage of Ballard's sexual dysfunction. From watching couples have sex at the turnabout (20),⁵⁴ to trying to look down the dress of the dumpkeeper's daughter (29), to trying to get a glimpse of Ralph Lane's daughter in the outhouse (78), Ballard is always watching. As another subtle pattern throughout the novel, Ballard's objectification of nature and women through voyeurism are early examples of a way of thinking that will eventually lead to his acts of murder and necrophilia.

The violence that Ballard exhibits toward nature and women in Child of God is a result, in part, of the adversarial relationship he has with both. Though his hatred of the world certainly includes men as well as women and nature, his willingness to assault nature and women is unlike the relative passivity he exhibits toward men. When talking to either Sheriff Turner or to Greer, Ballard lapses into a sullen obeisance, probably a response he learned at the auction when his

effort to keep his farm was thwarted by a blow to the head. After that, Ballard restrains himself when confronted by men in authority; when Greer, the man who bought Lester's farm at auction and whom Ballard tries to shoot at the end, stops him on the road and asks him if he is Ballard, McCarthy writes, "Ballard did not raise his head. He was watching the man's shoes there in the wet leaves of the overgrown logging road. He said: No, I ain't him, and went on" (114).

When interacting with women and nature, however, Ballard erupts—a fact that is most clearly evident in the desecration of his first victim. McCarthy describes him as "A crazed gymnast laboring over a cold corpse. He poured into that waxen ear everything he'd ever thought to saying to a woman" (88).⁵⁵ Later he addresses the same corpse as a "Goddamn frozen bitch" (102). His hatred and violence toward women is also seen in his interactions with the prostitute both at the turnabout (42-43) and at the police station (52). The difference between his behavior toward men and women is another indication of his implicit understanding of the hierarchical order of society. Though he perceives himself as below such men as Turner and Greer, he sees himself above women and, therefore, he feels empowered to do violence against them.

Ballard shares an analogous hatred for nature. Besides his practice of randomly targeting animals, Ballard shows his contempt for nature when he tries to ford a swollen river.

Maintaining a tenuous foothold against the rushing water, Ballard sees a log:

steaming into the flat He saw it coming and began to curse. It spun broadside to him and it came on with something of animate ill will. Git, he screamed at it, a hoarse croak in the roar of the water

Git, goddam it. Ballard shoved at the log with the barrel of the rifle. . . .

Ballard was lost in a pandemonium of noises, the rifle aloft in one arm now like

some demented hero or bedraggled parody of a patriotic poster come aswamp and his mouth wide for the howling of oaths until the log swept into a deeper pool and rolled and the water closed over him. . . . [Once on the bank,] he turned and shook the rifle alternately at the flooded creek and at the gray sky out of which the rain still fell grayly and without relent and the curses that hailed up above the thunder of the water carried to the mountain and back like echoes from the clefts of bedlam. (156-57)

Like the scenes in Outer Dark where nature seems intent on punishing Culla, here nature seems bent on combating this extreme representative of Cartesian thinking.⁵⁶ Ballard's response to this perceived challenge is to hurl oaths against the water in much the same way he swears at women. As the novel progresses, Ballard's loathing for nature is heightened as he is forced to retreat to caves farther from civilization. Unlike Arthur Ownby, who retreats to Hurrykin by choice, Ballard lives in caves out of necessity, a forced immersion in the wilderness that exacerbates his hatred of the natural world. Instead of Ownby's meaningful communion with nature, Ballard's sojourn into the wild is a miserable and sanity-sapping journey into a natural world that seems to hold as much contempt for him personally as he does for it. As Bell states, Ballard is "both at war with nature and oblivious to its reality" (62). Just as his sense of superiority over women and nature is interrelated, so is his hatred of both. As Ynestra King argues, "The hatred of women and the hatred of nature are intimately connected and mutually reinforcing," which is exactly why, she continues, "feminism and ecology need each other" (18).

Another way that Cartesian society, including Ballard, objectifies both nature and women is by commodifying them. In chapter two, the discussion of the auction scene emphasized that both the auctioneer and the people in attendance view the Ballard farm in terms of its economic

potential. Most notably, the auctioneer emphasizes the future value of the timber. In a related way, both conventional Sevier County society and Lester Ballard commodify females through sex. By reducing nature and women to the status of objects, male-dominated Cartesian society can more easily dominate and control them. The commodification of women is clearest when Ballard, visiting the junkyard, is teased about paying to see Ruebel's daughter's breasts. After Ballard concedes that he would like to see her breasts, the daughter says,

Gimme a quarter.

I ain't got one.

She laughed.

He stood there grinning.

How much you got?

I got a dime.

Well go borry two and a half cents and you can see one of em.

Just let me owe ye, said Ballard.

Say you want to blow me? the girl said.

I said owe, said Ballard, flushing.

The man on the drum slapped his knee. Watch out, he said. What you got that Lester can see for a dime?

He's done looked a half dollar's worth now.

Shoot. I ain't seen nothin. (29)

This incident only reinforces a cultural message that female sexuality, like the trees on his farm, is a commodity to be bought and sold. That Lester's attraction to the dumpkeeper's daughter

“aligns him with the girl’s other unnamed suitor” only strengthens the position that Ballard is more like the citizen of Sevier County than any of them would like to admit (Lang 91).

In addition to the Ruebel girl, the prostitute that Ballard encounters at the turnabout reaffirms not only the economics of female sexuality but also the acceptability of violence against women. In both cases, Ballard is not alone in seeing women as sexual commodities. While Ballard sums up his judgment of the prostitute as “nothin but a goddamned old whore” (52), it was someone else—not Ballard—who left her there in the first place; the woman, woozy and confused from alcohol, says to the absent person who abandoned her, “I knowed you’d do me thisaway”(42). By observing the sexual relationships in Cartesian society, both at the junkyard and at the turnabout, Ballard internalizes society’s acceptance of the hierarchical domination of males over females. Along with the scenes at Ralph Lane’s house and Ballard’s violent interactions with nonhumans throughout the book, these episodes of sexual commodification and violence explain how Ballard went from abusing animals to abusing women. As Cartesian society continues to reject Ballard, his objectification and commodification of women and nature intensifies, resulting in his ability to view stuffed animals as companions and dead women as lovers.

As a number of critics have noted, Ballard’s necrophilia is the deviant attempt to fulfill his desire for companionship, love, and human connection on his own terms—under conditions where he is in ultimate control and can order the relationship (Bell 61, Winchell 293-309, Jarrett 52 et al.). Diane Luce concludes that Ballard’s necrophilia is a twisted and perverted attempt to gain human connection (“Cave” 179). Schafer notes that “his actions are rough parodies of ‘normal’ life: he courts women, takes them as brides, is obsessed with them” (117). As a corollary, critics have seen his necrophilia as an extreme reflection of the actions and attitudes of

conventional society (Luce “Cave” 184-85, Bell 57, Jarrett 36 et al.). Still others view his necrophilia, as well as his dreams, as an indication of his obsession with death, an assessment that leads to nihilistic readings of the novel. From the most obvious feminist perspective, his necrophilia is a form of misogyny. In killing women and violating their bodies, Ballard objectifies them—literally turning subjects into objects. In these terms, Ballard’s necrophilia is the ultimate objectification of women. An ecofeminist reading of Ballard or the novel does not necessarily contravene any of those other perspectives; what it provides is a perspective on the novel through the context of patriarchal domination, thus exposing the logic of domination that helps the reader understand Ballard’s attitudes toward nature and women.

An ecofeminist reading also contributes to the critical assessment of Child of God by linking Ballard’s hatred of and violence against both nature and women with the materialism and consumerism inherent in American capitalism. As previously mentioned, deep ecology and ecofeminism both implicate materialism, consumerism, and capitalism in environmental degradation, focusing on the attitudes and values inherent in a market economy that perpetuate the domination of “women, other human Others, and nature.”⁵⁷ As an economic system that employs the logic of domination to objectify nature and women for profit, capitalism is inseparable from Cartesian thinking; most broadly, the society of Sevier County reflects the elements of capitalism associated with environmental insensitivity. Instead of being connected to the land through yeoman farming, “the farmers and small tradesmen of the Appalachian lowlands have accommodated to or been absorbed by a cash-exchange economy and play the role of middleman to the upper classes” (Jarrett 27). More specifically, Ballard’s domination of nature and women throughout most of Child of God can be seen as an extreme form not only of commodification but also of materialism and consumerism. He literally collects women and

stuffed animals. Associating Ballard's collection of stuffed animals and dead women with the "levees of junk and garbage" (CG 26) at the dump and at the quarry (CG 38-39), Luce sees Child of God as "an indictment of this grasping and materialistic culture . . ." ("Cave" 177). In other words, the same impulse that drives Ballard to collect women is found in the consumptive habits of people who used to own the cars and appliances that litter Reubel's junkyard. Luce further argues that Ballard "is emblematic of the society from which he arises," that Ballard's

asocial point of view is constructed in part . . . from the privileged status of patriarchal science and consumer culture in the United States, which . . . fails to realize or acknowledge its manipulation or destruction of others. From this perspective, Lester's necrophilia functions as a metaphor for materialism . . . but also specifically for American consumer culture. ("Cave" 178)

Finally, Luce observes that many of Ballard's traits correspond to American ideals, including "armed individualism, (perverted) consumerism, (clumsy) improvisation, and his resilience as the underdog" ("Cave" 185). McCarthy's own description of Ballard floating down the raging river reinforces this picture of him as the comic version of an American hero: Ballard holds his "rifle aloft in one arm now like some demented hero or bedraggled parody of a patriotic poster . . ." (157). As Schafer argues, "Ballard is thus an analogy for or grotesque parody of the pioneer, the mountain man on the Daniel Boone pattern" (116). Luce's and Schafer's assessments of Ballard as a manifestation of the American culture, though not explicitly ecofeminist, suggest the link between capitalist economics and the domination of "women, other human Others, and nature." Such a link serves as another connection between ecofeminism and deep ecology that reinforces the argument that the two ecophilosophies share more than has generally been acknowledged.⁵⁸

Besides the connections between necrophilia and materialism, Ballard's acts against the dead express his desire for order and control—a desire that undergirds his perspective on and actions against both women and nature. Partly because of his lack of social skills and partly because of his low status in the community, Ballard is unable to have relationships with living women; unable to attract or interact with women or sustain relationships at all, he discovers through necrophilia a way to control women in order to approximate a relationship based on the same “power over” principle he has observed in society (Warren 47). As part of Cartesian thinking, this desire to control and to bring order to his social life outweighs any consideration of the rights of his victims to live. Nowhere is Ballard's desire to control nature more graphically evident than when Ballard surveys a winter mountainside:

Coming up the mountain through the blue winter twilight among great boulders and the ruins of giant trees prone in the forest he wondered at such upheaval.

Disorder in the woods, trees down, new paths needed. Given charge Ballard would have made things more orderly in the woods and in men's souls. (136)

What exactly Ballard would consider orderly is uncertain, but his dissatisfaction with nature, both human and nonhuman, stems from his inability to control them and his frustration at their mutability. As Bell points out, Ballard does not understand nature and the fact that things do not stay the same: “Flux for him means only deprivation, the unraveling of a life, diminution” (62). From an ecocritical sense, Ballard's desire for stasis and to control nature shows not only a lack of understanding of the natural world but also connects him further with Cartesian thinking. As an extreme manifestation of the Enlightenment desire to control nature for human purposes, Ballard looks over the land “he'd once inhabited,” watching “the diminutive progress of all things in the valley, the gray fields coming up black and corded under the plow, the slow green

occlusion that the trees were spreading. Squatting there he let his head droop between his knees, and he began to cry” (170). Though part of his sadness is a recognition of his isolation from the natural world, another reason he breaks down is because of the change of seasons. Ballard attempts to impose an order on nature and people throughout the novel, but ultimately he realizes the artificiality and ultimate failure of his efforts.

As the story concludes and Ballard begins to understand his separation from both Cartesian society and nonhuman nature, he more actively takes on the role of victim. Bell argues that Ballard “has ceased to be himself by becoming his victim” (59), while Ciuba argues that he “changes from victimizer to victim”(83). Part of the reason for this shift, Robert Jarrett argues, is that “his pathologies demonstrate that his unconscious knows what it is that he misses” (53). His “ghoulish family. . . is like a monstrous dollhouse where the corpses, along with his stuffed bears and tiger” are only facsimile people (Bell 61). His only solace is to take revenge upon those who have forced him to live in a cave with moldering dead bodies. The way that Ballard manifests his victimhood is in his increasing identification with women—a complicated and perverse process. While he continues to kill women and presumably copulate with them, he also lays them out on stone platforms or pedestals that resemble altars; McCarthy describes the bodies as arranged “on ledges or pallets of stone where dead people lay like saints” (CG 135). Besides buying dresses and colored underwear for his victims to wear, he begins to wear their clothes: “he’d long been wearing the underclothes of his female victims but now he took to appearing in their outerwear as well. A gothic doll in illfit clothes, its carmine mouth floating detached and bright in the white landscape” (CG 140). As his madness deepens, he begins to don even their scalps: “wearing the hair, garments, and make-up of his female victims. . . Ballard now seeks to be the Other, to seize the very identity of his victims His grotesque attire brings together

male and female” (Ciuba 80-81). That his cross-dressing is an identification with the victim is clear as Ballard, dressed “in frightwig and skirts” (172), returns to his auctioned farm to kill its new owner, Greer. It is significant that the victim Ballard stalks as he ventures out in such an outfit is the man who took his farm away from him.

It is not just the outfits that Ballard wears that indicate his turn toward the feminine. As he sinks lower into madness, the caves that he inhabits—often with a separate room full of corpses—are described in decidedly womb-like terms. His first cave is described as a “tall and bell-shaped cavern” with walls “slavered over . . . with wet and bloodred mud” (135). He is described as a fetus: in his first cave, he is shown sliding in and out and was “slick with red mud down the front of him” (107); in his final cave, he becomes lost, desperate, and wishing “for some brute midwife to spald him from his rocky keep” (189). Finally discovering a small hole through which light falls, he emerges headfirst, covered “all over with red mud” (CG 192): “In this form of blood-covered newborn, Ballard immediately turns himself in . . .” (Jarrett 42). Ballard’s movement from society to cave and back to society signifies his struggle to find his place in the world, and in that way Bell’s contention that the story is about homelessness is accurate. But, as Fisher-Wirth explains in reference to Outer Dark, his story can also be seen as illustrating his struggle with “the feminine.” Kristevan theory of the “feminine,” derived from Freud and Lacan, associates the body of the woman with “the body of mother, and those elements in nature such as mud and blood . . .” (125). This idea of the feminine is both “terrifying and alluring to the male subject” (125). The story of Lester Ballard confirms that contradiction; Ballard is attracted to and terrified of women. His murder of them is both an attempt to subdue and to bond with them. Finally, as his sanity ebbs, he attempts to merge with the feminine and to retreat to the caves of red mud only to flee away from the feminine he

encounters there. Combined with his recognition of himself in the face of a boy riding in a school bus, Ballard's realizes he has no place to go except the hospital. Standing at the front desk, he quietly admits to the nurse, "I'm suppose to be here" (192). As both a representative and victim of Cartesian society, as one both attracted to and disdainful of the feminine, Ballard retreats to a hospital for the criminally insane—a sterile institution completely separate from the feminine.

The fate of Lester Ballard is ultimately similar to the fate of his victims. After his death, his body is used as a cadaver. Ballard, the man who objectified women and nature, is ultimately objectified himself. His corpse is dismantled like a machine by medical students who are taught the Cartesian lesson that the body is separate from the mind. Of course, discovering what ailed Ballard through dissection is as absurd as Ballard seeking love through necrophilia. "At the end of three months," McCarthy writes, "when the class was closed Ballard was scraped from the table into a plastic bag and taken with others of his kind to a cemetery outside the city and there interred. A minister from the school read a simple service" (194). Ironically, the women that he left in the caves are also bagged and hauled off by the state. Like Ballard, they are bagged in "muslin shrouds on which was stenciled Property of the State of Tennessee" (CG 196). In a final juxtaposition, both Ballard and the women who suffered death at his hands are victims of the Cartesian society that objectifies "women, other humans Others, and nature" through the logic of domination.

Outer Dark

The idea of the feminine, which becomes relevant only late in Child of God when Ballard begins to wear his victims' clothes, plays a central role in the ecofeminist examination of Outer Dark. In many ways, Outer Dark can be seen as an earlier, Appalachian version of Blood

Meridian (Spencer 69), sharing a number of parallels in plot, theme, and characterization: Both books portray aimless, circuitous journeying by young characters lacking interior consciousness. Both books portray a band of marauders who are heartlessly and brutally violent; in Outer Dark, three mysterious figures traverse the book killing whoever crosses their path: the Magistrate, an old man, Clark, the Tinker, and the infant. In Blood Meridian, the Glanton gang ranges the barren borderland of Mexico in search of victims, some of whom are scalped for profit. The leaders of the two bands of killers in the separate novels differ in character development and sophistication but share some of the same philosophical viewpoints. While the bearded one in Outer Dark makes cryptic comments about such abstract ideas as naming and knowing, such philosophizing is much more highly developed in Blood Meridian where, as Bell as has pointed out, what the Judge and his confederates do “seems like an only slightly demented revival of Enlightenment philosophy” and what the Judge says “demonstrates what happens if Enlightenment doctrine is pressed to its logical conclusion” (124). Parallels and similarities between these bearded marauders and the Judge as well as the later development of the Judge as a personification of Cartesian philosophy suggest the need for a closer look at the bearded marauder’s few words. Without question, both the bearded one and the Judge can be viewed as manifestations of nihilism (as Bell argues), but from an ecocritical standpoint they can also be seen in Cartesian terms.

Unlike McCarthy’s other novels, Outer Dark lacks a specific historical time or definite geographical space. As Robert Jarrett has noted, Outer Dark “begins and ends within a relatively brief historical period that is impossible to date authoritatively but seems placed in the late nineteenth century during or immediately following Reconstruction” (25). One of the town squares is unpaved, with the mud reaching the horses’ fetlocks and halfway up to wagonwheels’

hubs (OD 37-38). With the absence of automobiles or other modern technology—along with the presence of log cabins, horse-drawn carriages, and river ferries—Jarrett’s supposition of a nineteenth-century setting is reasonable. At the same time, the references to “a state road” (21) and to Culla buying “a dope” (37) suggest that perhaps the book’s action occurs later than Jarrett guesses.⁵⁹

In terms of geography, McCarthy scatters ecological clues throughout the text that suggest that Outer Dark is not set in the same mountains as The Orchard Keeper and Child of God. Besides “the sandy pike coming out of the forest” (57), the mention of “the dull lowing of an alligator somewhere on the river” (12) suggests a more southern and more coastal locale than his previous books. McCarthy provides many generic place names that give little clue as to where the action takes place. The scattered settlements and isolated log cabins exist without contact or seeming relation to larger cities, resulting in a sense of isolation. In contrast to all of these nonspecific geographic details, McCarthy is very specific about the plant life through which the humans travel.⁶⁰

A number of critics have noted that the ambiguity of the setting—both in time and place—contributes to a feeling that Outer Dark “is set in an indistinct cosmos . . . verging on allegory The story takes on the blackest aspects of a Grimm fairy tale, with magical, supernatural events erupting in the path of everyday naturalism” (Schafer 111). Bell agrees that the “dreamlike setting and pace bring an almost medieval aura of allegory to the events . . .” (33). “As in a dream,” Winchell explains, “the locale of individual scenes is specific enough, often hauntingly so, without an identifiable context of period or region” (297). Unlike The Orchard Keeper and Child of God, where the realistic setting is situated within a specific time and place, in Outer Dark topography is “vague, dreamlike, and surreal in a way that imposes an

unwholesome, deranged aspect upon the entire scene” (Bell 33). Such an example of “magical naturalism,” places the subject of nature in an entirely different context than in any other McCarthy novel. Even the characters resemble figures from a grotesque fairy tale, with a gnomic tinker dragging his own wagon of goods throughout the countryside and an old crone living deep in a gnarled forest. As the novel progresses toward the swamp scene at the very end, nature is both allegorical and supernatural. As part of an allegory, nature is affected by the “masculine” worldview, ultimately reflecting the darkness and death personified in Culla and the marauders. At the same time, as a supernatural element, nonhuman nature takes on the role of characters in Outer Dark more forcefully than in any other McCarthy novel. The complicated and conflicting role of nonhuman nature within the novel is seen when the trees, as characters with agency, seem to attack Culla, and at the end, where the swamp takes on a symbolic role—a wasteland where trees resemble “hominoid like figures” (OD 242).

Because the world in Outer Dark seems self-contained, with pockets of civilization isolated from one another and circumscribed by a particularly animate wilderness, the novel can be seen as set in its own fantastic ecosystem. The antagonistic dominance of nature over Culla reinforces the feeling that humans are only one part of this ecosystem and that human society is neither exclusive of nor superior to any other natural species. As in fairy tales where nonhuman nature is often given voice and agency, in Outer Dark the role of nonhuman nature is perhaps more pronounced than in McCarthy’s other novels as seen in the way that nature actively assists or obfuscates the characters’ journeys. At the same time, nonhuman nature in Outer Dark seems more profoundly affected by the actions of humans—influenced and altered by the dominant Cartesian paradigm. Though nature functions very differently in Outer Dark, humans and

nonhumans are inseparable, interacting with on another in a way that confirms the ecological perspective that all phenomena are interconnected.

Vereen Bell argues that the journeys of Culla and Rinthy Holme signify a Manichean dualism: “a version of the world-and-flesh dualism is apparent in the separate stories of Rinthy and Culla—not the same as word and flesh but akin to it, for Rinthy believes and envisions, whereas Culla, demoralized and displaced by his own guilt, is without hope, feeling, motive, or direction” (35). An ecofeminist analysis of Outer Dark focuses on a different dualism, not word and flesh but male and female; Outer Dark is a highly gendered novel that separates not only brother from sister but male experience from female experience as Culla and Rinthy travel the same roads and meet some of the same people. As Fisher-Wirth explains, only in Outer Dark does McCarthy “cross this particular border to write the story of [the] Other”:

Only in Outer Dark does McCarthy create a female-focused narrative, which, in approximately alternating chapters, he juxtaposes with the male-focused narrative of Culla’s wanderings and with the male-focused, italicized interchapters that report the murderous progress of the unholy killer trinity, the minister, Harmon, and the unnamed mute. (132-33)

Related to McCarthy’s separation of male and female are a number of corresponding dualisms that correlate with ecofeminist conceptions of “masculine” and “feminine” principles.⁶¹ While rejecting the essentialism of the sexes, most ecofeminists, necessarily gender the characteristics of patriarchal society as masculine, such as individualism, competition, atomism, dualism, control, domination, and calculation (Birkeland 24). Opposed to the masculine principle is a “feminine” principle that emphasizes community, cooperation, communication, nurturing, caring, accommodation, and a sense of responsibility for others (Birkeland 27, Shiva 6). It is

important to reiterate that the balance of the masculine (or self-assertive) and the feminine (or integrative) values and principles is seen by both ecosystem ecologists and ecophilosophers alike as necessary for the sustainable functioning of ecosystems. An ecofeminist analysis of Outer Dark recognizes McCarthy's own essentialism but still views Culla as a personification of the "masculine" principle and Rinthy as a personification of the "feminine" principle as a way to see the novel in a positive ecofeminist light. Crucial to McCarthy's portrayal of the "masculine" in Culla and the "feminine" in Rinthy are the relationships and identifications that each sibling shares (or does not share) with nature. As Rinthy travels through the landscape, McCarthy aligns her with light, sunshine, nature (especially birds), and the countryside. He also portrays a female character whose single concern aligns her with a key characteristic of the "feminine" principle—her sense of responsibility and devotion to her son. In addition, Rinthy personifies the "feminine" principle, as Vandana Shiva defines it, by having to endure the domination of her brother. Culla, conversely, is aligned with darkness (especially his own shadow) and is persecuted not only by humans but also by nature itself. Besides trying to find work, Culla's journey is a search for Rinthy—not to reunite with her but to keep her from implicating him in incest and attempted infanticide. Culla's connection to darkness and evil is also apparent in his association with the three marauders who violently murder their way through the book.

The interconnection between women and nature in Outer Dark, therefore, is not found in their domination by Cartesian society as was the case in Child of God. Rather, in Outer Dark the ecofeminist perspective is found in the characters' alignment with the "masculine" and "feminine" principles manifest in their interactions with humans and nonhuman nature. The association of motherhood, female, nature, compassion, and responsibility toward others combines to make Rinthy a personification of the "feminine," while Culla's association with

darkness, death, maleness, the town, violence, and an overemphasis on autonomy and individualism combine to make Culla a personification of the “masculine.” Such a distinction distinguishes Rinthy’s experience from Culla’s and in doing so reassesses Bell’s conclusion that the siblings live in an existentialist void (Bell 33-34). While Culla’s interactions with human and nonhuman nature may illustrate isolation and alienation, Rinthy’s story represents the possibility, however slim, of belonging to both a place and a people. In the case of Outer Dark, Culla’s existentialist experience relates “masculine” characteristics to Cartesian thinking, while Rinthy’s experience relates “feminine” characteristics to more holistic, environmental thinking.

Ecofeminism has not satisfactorily resolved the apparent contradiction of rejecting the idea of an essentialistic relationship between women and nature while critiquing the androcentricism of Cartesian thinking and offering the idea of the “feminism” of ecology.⁶² Ironically, it is precisely this problem that lies at the heart of an ecofeminist reading of Outer Dark. McCarthy is guilty of essentializing Rinthy as closer to nature, but, at the same time, Rinthy offers an alternative worldview that reflects a holism that ecofeminists promote. It is, therefore, possible to see McCarthy both in an ecofeminist and a Cartesian light. In the end, Outer Dark reveals a seemingly inherent relationship between a female protagonist and nature while showing at the same time the discord between a male character and nature. The differences between how Rinthy and Culla act and how they are received by nature and by other human beings illustrates the differences in the “feminine” and “masculine” principles that are important to ecofeminist thought.

Outer Dark describes a patriarchal human society. With the exception of Rinthy, the public sphere—the towns, roads, shops, and professional offices—is populated by men. In the

domestic sphere, women are either alone (as in the case of the Old Crone) or in conflict with men (as seen in the house where husband and wife fight over butter); in general, in McCarthy's novels, "domestic spaces are emblematic not only of family, but a family's women" (Fisher-Wirth 138). Outer Dark is no different. In the most general terms, the world within the novel is one in which women have been excluded from the public arena, a phenomenon that Carolyn Merchant identifies as symptomatic of the male/culture-female/nature dichotomy that developed in pre-industrial capitalistic Europe (Merchant 150, Warren 50). Besides the fact that the dominance of men in the public sphere is an indication of androcentrism, the presence of Rinthy in that public sphere suggests that she is a stronger character than critics have acknowledged.

Of the relatively few articles that have been published on Outer Dark, the consensus of critical opinion compares Rinthy unfavorably to Faulkner's Lena Grove (Bell 34, Jarrett 23); Fisher-Wirth states: "Rinthy makes Lena Grove look like a nuclear physicist; she is nothing but body and patience" (132). Yet, despite such "overt narrative gestures that might otherwise trivialize her or make her ridiculous," Rinthy exhibits dignity, power, and courage throughout her journey (Sullivan 68). Seemingly unfamiliar with anybody in the world besides her brother and late father, Rinthy says, "They ain't a soul in this world but what is a stranger to me" (29). She enters towns she has never visited before and asks for help from strangers in stores and offices of the type she has never talked to before. Despite assessments that attribute her resolve as "stubborn materialism," Rinthy's tenacity illustrates a simple but strong and principled character.

Along with her role as a personification of the "feminine," Rinthy Holme is also portrayed as a woman whose perpetual suffering is the result of male domination. McCarthy deliberately omits the circumstances of the actual incest, but regardless of whether the sexual

relations were consensual, her suffering after the birth of her son is because of her brother's domination. Most significantly, McCarthy portrays her as having to give birth on her own, without the aid of either a midwife or even her own brother. After discovering that her brother lied about the baby dying, his attempt to cover-up the evidence of their incest, she is forced to travel through a foreboding landscape in search of her son.

While Rinthy is clearly a victim of male oppression, the novel is such a strange amalgam of naturalism and magical realism that Rinthy takes on more symbolic meaning as well. One of the most important aspects of the "feminine" principle that Rinthy embodies is her sense of interconnectedness. Unlike Culla, whose misbelief in individualism is at the root of his persecution, Rinthy understands the importance of relationships and responsibility. This is most boldly seen in her deliberate search for her baby, but McCarthy strengthens this association by aligning Rinthy with nonhuman nature—with sunshine, birds, flowers, and even female deer. Nowhere in the book is this more evident than when she approaches the false grave of her infant dug by her brother: "With her bouquet clutched in both hands before her she stepped finally into the clearing, a swatch of grass, sunlight, birdcalls, crossing with quiet and guileless rectitude to stand before a patch of black and cloven earth" (32). The number of times that Rinthy is associated with birds hardly seems coincidental. She is personally described in bird-like terms, lying on a bed in labor like "a wounded bird" (11) and with a hand falling "in her lap like a fallen bird" (115). Throughout the novel, as she walks along the forests and roads, she is often accompanied by the sounds of songbirds (32, 53, 63, 97, 98). As she sleeps under a bridge, "martins came and went among the arches. Slept into the first heat of the day and woke to see toy birds with sesame eyes regarding her from their clay nests overhead" (97). In one scene, as Rinthy accompanies another woman down a dogtrot between a house and a kitchen cabin at

night, a whippoorwill calls “from nearby for just as long as they passed through the open and [hushes] instantly with the door’s closing” (61). The whippoorwill commences singing again as Rinthy leaves the house to retrieve water for the pump (63). Only when she is confronted with a man’s presence does the whippoorwill stop singing (63), a pattern that is also evident when Culla passes near birds.⁶³ Throughout her journey, “Butterflies attended her and birds dusting in the road did not fly when she passed” (98). Besides the association with birds, butterflies, and sunshine, Rinthy is often associated with flowers. Culla and Rinthy travel along the same roads; however, only in Rinthy’s case does McCarthy describe the flowering plants that she passes. After six months of wandering, Rinthy still bothers to arrange “some lateblooming wildflower in her pale hair” (184). Finally, on two different occasions, she is compared to a doe, once by the tinker (91) and once by the narrator (237). Rinthy’s association with nature, though mentioned by Bell (37), has not yet been discussed in ecofeminist terms.

Bell discounts these associations by saying that Rinthy’s perception of nature is incompatible “with the world she passes through. She is absurd in that her idea of the world is better than the one that is. In her reticent and modest way she is defiant and heroic but she is also dead wrong” (45). Bell’s example to support this criticism of Rinthy and to describe the world she passes through, however, is two corpses from a tree. In doing so, he assesses the essential nature of the world through the human acts of domination against other humans. The world, for Bell, is characterized by human actions. Such a view is anthropocentric. In this case, the men dangling in the tree are victims of the marauders, the embodiment of Cartesian thinking in the novel. The violence done to them is not any indication of how the nonhuman world functions. Even though McCarthy’s himself seems to slip into cliché when associating Rinthy with sunshine, singing birds, butterflies, flowers, and deer, the fact remains that Rinthy’s

association with nature corresponds to her unscathed journey through a world made dangerous by men.

One of the ways that McCarthy essentializes the relationship between women and nature is by focusing on Rinthy's biological functionings, most notably her involuntary lactation. Without exception, Rinthy's breasts leak when she is either near a young child or when she hears news of her own lost son (30, 99, 115, 153, 187). Fisher-Wirth argues that "Rinthy's most eloquent language lies in the Kristevan 'semiotic,' the blood and milk of her body" (133), and it is this language that instills the compassion she encounters from others. Sullivan, on the other hand, argues that McCarthy's repeated reference to Rinthy's uncontrollable lactation is part of the Western canon's perception that the female body is "naturally grotesque—which is to say, open, permeable, effluent, leaky" (69). Linked specifically to female biology, Rinthy's involuntary lactation is the most prevalent motif in the book that conjoins her and nature. It is a connection that Winchell makes when he argues that Rinthy's "strong maternal instincts . . . make [her] a positive symbol of the life force" (297). It is a biological phenomenon that takes on symbolic importance, suggesting that her journey is sustained by a biological and emotional need to find her child. One scene in particular, between Rinthy and a doctor, reveals not only the biology that drives Rinthy's search but the tension between medical science and her maternal instinct. As another example of her strength of character, she challenges a doctor's medical knowledge. After learning when Rinthy gave birth and seeing that she is still producing milk, the doctor declares:

That's not possible, he said.

Well it was March then.

Look, the doctor said, what difference does it make if it was later than that. Like maybe in July.

I wouldn't of cared, she said.

The doctor leaned back. You couldn't have milk after six months.

If he was dead. That's what you said wasn't it. She was leaning forward in the chair watching him. That means he ain't, don't it? That means he ain't dead or I'd of gone dry. Ain't it?

Well, the doctor said. But something half wild in her look stopped him. Yes, he said. That could be what it means. Yes.

I knowed it all the time, she said. I guess I knowed it right along.

Besides confirming that she has more volition than critics have generally acknowledged, the scene also shows the conflict between “masculine” science and “feminine” natural instinct. The doctor is certain that it was not possible for her to continue to lactate six months after giving birth if she had not been nursing during that time. Even in the end, he does not try to explain the phenomenon. Though he starts to insist that it is impossible that she is still lactating, he relents. With no other explanation and seeing the need for Rinthy to remain hopeful about finding her child, he decides not to impose a fact that he has learned from medical books, especially when he has no other explanation for the phenomenon. Despite the doctor's belief that she should have ceased lactating by now, Rinthy believes her continued lactation indicates that her baby is alive, which indeed—at that point—he is. Though her baby will eventually face a horrible death at the hands of the marauders, that her body is telling her he is still alive provides her enough “reason” to continue the search.

The recurring motif of Rinthy's lactation suggests that McCarthy is portraying a female character inextricably bound to motherhood. Though ecofeminists could accuse McCarthy of essentializing the relationship between Rinthy and nature by making her knowledge of her son's continued survival mysterious, they would also have to acknowledge that Rinthy is operating under a different worldview than the doctor, Culla, the marauders, and the rest of the patriarchy. Rinthy's knowledge of her son's continued survival is portrayed as a mixture of biological determinism and mysterious maternal intuition. As such, it mixes the natural (or naturalistic) with the magical—a trait that characterizes the novel in general.

One of the stark differences between Rinthy's and Culla's experiences is how they are perceived and received by humans and nonhumans. Given that ecocriticism considers how nature functions as a character, it is important that the different ways that humans treat Rinthy and Culla parallels the ways that nonhumans treat the siblings. In alternating chapters throughout the novel, humans show sympathy and compassion for Rinthy while treating Culla with suspicion and contempt. The difficulty that Culla experiences at the country store is followed by the compassion that Rinthy encounters later (38, 55). The Squire's condescension toward Culla is juxtaposed with the welcome Rinthy receives from the large family (41-48, 59). Culla's being run off a farm by a crowd is in opposition to the different farms where Rinthy is invited to stay (90-91, 98-116).⁶⁴ In each case, Culla is excluded from and Rinthy is included in the human community (Jarrett 16). While these examples may reflect the socially constructed assumptions that a lone man wandering the countryside is a vagabond and that a single woman doing the same needs protection, from an ecofeminist perspective, the differences reflect the "natural" responses that people have to each sibling's request. Jarrett argues, in accord with Bell's existentialist thesis, that their separate journeys "throughout the remainder of the novel

represents two opposing forms of alienation: alienation by Culla's repression of his sin and guilt and by Rinthy's acceptance of hers" (19). While he acknowledges that, unlike Culla, Rinthy is invited to reintegrate into the larger community, he emphasizes that each case reveals domestic dysfunction. Yet there are other cases where Rinthy is welcomed into female-led households that are neither patriarchal nor dysfunctional, especially one farm where a grandmother tends to her granddaughter after she invites Rinthy in (98-100). In these cases, she leaves because of the single-mindedness of her quest. Propelled by her maternal drive, Rinthy is unable to stop her search until she finds her child. As she says to the doctor, "I don't live nowheres no more I never did much. I just go around huntin my chap. That's about all I do any more" (156). It is her sense of responsibility for her child, which Jarret sees as an acceptance of her guilt but which ecofeminist see as part of the "feminine" ethic, that sets her apart from Culla.

As opposed to Rinthy, Culla's stated purpose for wandering the countryside and towns is, more often than not, a search for employment (40, 90, 132-3, 136, 201, 160). Bell notes, "He tells people he is looking for her, but nothing else he does would indicate that" (36). In only two instances does Culla say that he is looking for his sister—once when talking with a random beehiver that he meets (81) and once with the marauders at their riverside camp (177). As opposed to Rinthy, Culla is often willing to stop and labor. Late in the novel, after being arrested for trespassing and sentenced to ten days labor, he asks the sentencing squire if he can stay after he serves his term:

What about after that?

What about it?

I mean can I stay on longer?

What for?

Well, just to stay. To work.

At fifty cents a day?

I don't care.

Don't care?

I'll stay on just for board if you can use me. . . .

Unlike Rinthy, Culla would be satisfied to give up his search, a search that has more to do with trying to control her spreading the knowledge of their incestuous relationship or his attempted act of infanticide than with his concern for her wellbeing. It is important to note that he never does say he is looking for his son. Culla's search for Rinthy, in addition to being "a repression of the sin and guilt," is yet another example of his attempt to control her. As such, it reveals his sense of selfish individualism that contrasts with Rinthy's sense of responsibility for her child. Along with their associations with light and dark, Rinthy and Culla are distinguished by how they are received by other people and by the way they explain the purpose for their journeys. All of these combined suggest an elemental difference in character. Rinthy, associated with nonhuman nature and maternity, is nurtured by those she meets, while Culla is persecuted by human society.

In addition to humans, nonhuman nature itself seems to view Culla as anathema. This is most vividly seen after he lays his newborn on a bed of moss in the forest and retreats into the woods. Upon first leaving the infant, McCarthy hints that the creatures in the forests are aware of Culla and know what he represents: "Night fell long and cool through the woods about him and a spectral quietude set in. As if something were about that crickets and nightbirds held in dread" (16). Then, the forest itself seems to assault him: "He followed [another creek] down, in full flight now, the trees beginning to close him in, malign and baleful shapes that reared like enormous androids provoked at the alien insubstantiality of this flesh colliding among them"

(17). His panic climaxes as he splashes into the creek, spits, and—by the illumination of lightening—watches his spittle slide “inexplicably upstream, back the way he had come” (17). Such a scene is repeated at Culla’s river crossing in which the raging river and a trampling horse deliver him from a ferry to the fireside camp of the marauders (157). Culla’s struggle against the nonhuman environment has been noted by Bell: “Culla is repeatedly required to negotiate or fend off thick vegetation, weeds, waist-high grass, encroaching stands of trees” (37). However, Bell assesses that struggle in terms of the existentialist separation of human from nature (33). What Bell fails to notice is the juxtaposition between nature’s treatment of Culla and nature’s treatment of Rinthy. From an ecofeminist perspective that views Culla as a manifestation of the “masculine,” his experience in nature suggests the degree of discord between the ways of nature and the actions of Culla. In perhaps the greatest example in all of McCarthy’s novels, nature is a character with agency. As part of what critics alternately call the novel’s medieval or fairy tale tone, the forest attacks a human whose act of abandoning his child offends some natural sensibility. It is a surrealistic scene of magical realism but one that positions Culla in opposition to nature. Juxtaposed to its more benevolent treatment of Rinthy, nature’s assault on Culla reinforces the negative associations that he has with darkness and evil, personified in the three marauders.

Whereas Rinthy is often bathed in sunlight, Culla is repeatedly accompanied by his shadow. Early in the novel, Culla is described standing with his “shadow pooled at his feet, a dark stain in which he stood. In which he moved” (13). As Rinthy kneels at the false grave of her son, Culla’s shadow, both literally and metaphorically, overrides her (32). Elsewhere his shadow interacts with another in a “pantomime of static violence” (47), and moils “cant and baneful” (91). Even at night, his shadow is present: as he stands in the door of the cabin he

shares with Rinthy, holding an axe, his reflection is described as “an assassin’s silhouette against the slack gloss of the moon” (24). Standing in a town square at night, he is described as “an amphitheatrical figure in that moonwrought waste manacled to a shadow that struggled grossly in the dust” (131). In these examples and others (146, 198), Culla’s shadow is a constant companion.

Culla’s shadow takes on additional significance given his association with the marauders. Spencer, along with Bell and others, has aptly made the case for this connection: “The novel makes it increasingly clear that these evil raiders are not so different from Culla Holme” (71). One way that McCarthy aligns Culla with the marauders is through his contact with their victims. On three different occasions, Culla’s interactions with certain characters presage their deaths. First, Culla meets a squire. After cutting up a tree for him, Culla steals his boots and leaves. During the Squire’s pursuit of Culla, the marauders savagely butcher the Squire (50). Next, Culla visits an old man with a liking for snakes. Again, immediately after leaving the old man’s cabin, the marauders appear and inexplicably disembowel the old man (129). In both cases, the murders are set off from the main narrative in separate italicized sections. In the third case, Culla asks Clark—the sole authority in town—for work; the next morning, Culla happens upon him hanging in a tree next to two other men who previously had been hanged for some unspoken crime (146). In all three cases, the marauders do not seem to be pursuing Culla in order to catch him but seem to be following him in a deliberate manner. As part of the strange sense of inevitability that pervades the novel, the marauders seem confident that in time Culla will stumble upon them without their effort.

Culla’s two seemingly serendipitous encounters with the marauders finally confirm his link with them. The first encounter takes place on a river bank after Culla is tossed from a ferry,

another example of nature's antagonism against him. At this meeting both Culla and the reader are introduced to the individual members of the trio: the leader—an unnamed man distinguished by a beard, Harmon—who always holds a rifle, and the unnamed mute. In this scene, Culla is initiated into their group through two ritualistic acts: the exchange of footwear and the consuming of mysterious meat—possibly human. The bearded one forces Culla to give him the fine boots Culla stole from the squire; a procession of exchange down the hierarchy proceeds until Culla is handed the mute's "mismatched, cracked, shapeless, burntlooking and crudely mended" shoes (180). Culla is then forced to eat a tough, unchewable piece of meat, an act that seems to initiate him into the group. As important as the rituals is the fact that the marauders do not kill Culla when they leave him by the fire.

Culla's second encounter with the marauders occurs at the end of the novel. Months have passed, and Culla unsuspectingly happens upon their campfire. The bearded one comments, "Well, I see ye didn't have no trouble findin us. . . . We ain't hard to find. Oncet you've found us" (232-33). With the dead tinker's pans hanging "like the baleful eyes of some outsized and mute and mindless jury" (231) and with the bearded one saying to Culla, "I'll be the judge of that" (234), the scene is very much like a trial against Culla—against his guilt, his journey, and his actions. The bearded one, having given Culla one last chance to acknowledge his actions, slits the baby's throat and hands it to the mute one who "buried his moaning face in its throat" (236). It is a horrific scene, but also one that further connects Culla to the bearded one. As Bell has argued, "That [the bearded marauder] actually kills the baby Culla himself had left to die in the beginning suggests that the difference between them is one of degree rather than kind" (41).

In both scenes, the subject of naming is central. In the first scene, the bearded leader says of the mute, "I wouldn't name him because if you cain't name something you cain't claim it.

You cain't talk about it even. You cain't say what it is" (177). In the second scene, the bearded one asks Culla:

"What's his [the baby's] name?"

I don't know.

He ain't got nary'n.

No. I don't reckon. I don't know.

They say people in hell ain't got names. But they had to be called somethin to get sent there. Didn't they.

That tinker might of named him.

It wasn't his to name. Besides names dies with the namers. . . . (236)

The subject of naming in these two scenes refers back to the beginning of the book when Culla, in response to Rinthy's suggestion that they name the baby, retorts, "It's dead You don't name things dead" (31). The topic of (not) naming connects Culla with the bearded marauder, who, for Bell, "seems to regard himself as the philosopher of an opportunistic and obliterating nihilism" (42). Spencer, however, suggests that he might signify something else: "the bearded leader of the terrible threesome believes in gaining control through knowledge" (69). Control through knowledge, from an ecofeminist perspective, directly relates the bearded marauder (and Culla by association) with Cartesian thinking, specifically the scientific desire to control nature for the benefit of human society. Instead of naming, however, Culla and the bearded leader control the beings they consider inferior to them by not naming them. By not naming his infant son, Culla is more able to abandon it in the forest, erasing the evidence—the knowledge—of his incestuous relationship. Likewise, the bearded marauder, in not naming the mute, is able to distance himself from the horrors the mute perpetrates. The act of naming, as the book of

Genesis shows, denotes sovereignty over; conversely, not naming absolves one of responsibility. Human language, anthropocentric thinking dictates, determines if something exists or not. Of course, the presence of species in nature without names is evidence that such a perception is unfounded. In both cases, the act of not naming is Culla's and the bearded marauder's attempt to absolve themselves from responsibility. By not naming, both the bearded leader and Culla control knowledge in much the same way that Cartesian science attempts to control nature through naming for the purpose of exploiting it. In this case, however, not-naming that for which they are responsible absolves them of responsibility. In ecocritical terms, Culla and the bearded one regard themselves as subjects while their respective mute beings are objects; in doing so they are independent of their mute objects and therefore not responsible for them—one a vicious killer, the other a complete innocent. Without the ability to speak, both the mute and the baby are unable to articulate their status, allowing their dominators to assign a status to them. In the case of the baby, Culla's refusal to name it was an act of rejection and an attempt at denial—a stance he maintains until the end. In the case of the mute, the bearded one's refusal to name is an abdication of responsibility for the violence the mute perpetuates even though that violence is sanctioned by him. Culla and the bearded marauder share a philosophy of language, naming, and knowing that relates to Cartesian anthropocentrism. As if in final judgment of Culla, the bearded one hands the bleeding baby to the mute; Fisher-Wirth points out that is the moment the two nameless beings are joined (135). So too are Culla and the marauders.

After the baby's murder, the next scene shows Rinthy arriving after an unknown period of time at the abandoned campsite where her brother witnessed the murder of her son. She enters "as delicate as any fallow doe" and stands "in a grail of jade and windy light" (237). Seeing the "little calcined ribcage" in the charred remains of the fire and the "burnt remains of the tinker's

traps” (237), she simply lies down as “blue twilight” turns into “dark.” She is enveloped in darkness and cold; “after a while,” McCarthy writes, “little sister was sleeping” (238). That is the last of Rinthy. Winchell views this as the true end of the narrative because Rinthy’s journey to find her son is now complete (299). Sullivan notes that despite McCarthy’s negative descriptions of Rinthy, here he shows “a sort of narrative kindness to Rinthy, a respect for her person remarkable in light of the horrors that happen to other bodies in the text” (72). Sleep, so often a metaphor for death, is an appropriate term, “for Rinthy has technically found her son and thus can finally rest” (Sullivan 72). As Fisher-Wirth concludes, “Rinthy’s presence in the clearing, in the novel, calls into question the whole mad enterprise. She, who does not fear blood and time, speaks another language—she is another language—from the language of horror entirely” (137). In ecofeminist terms, that language is “feminine.” Her quest may have come to an end, but it is undeniably tragic. Here is no tale of the “feminine” winning out over the “masculine.” To the contrary, it is the masculine ethic of Culla and the marauders that leads to the demise of Rinthy’s son and Rinthy herself. Equally significant is the allegorical degradation of nature by the masculine.

The novel ends with a vignette of Culla years later. After leaving an old blind man, Culla walks a road that leads to a swamp:

Before him stretched a spectral waste out of which reared only the naked trees in attitudes of agony and dimly hominoid like figures in a landscape of the damned. A faintly smoking garden of the dead that tended away to the earth’s curve. He tried his foot in the mire before him and it rose in a vulvate welt claggy and sucking. He stepped back. A stale wind blew from this desolation and the marsh

reeds and black ferns among which he stood clashed softly like things chained.

He wondered why a road should come to such a place. (242)

Because the setting in Outer Dark is unlike that of The Orchard Keeper or Child of God (Bell 33) and because Outer Dark is suffused with fairy tale elements, the swamp can be seen less as a natural wetland and more as a mimetic device. It is a reflection of the effect of the marauders on the isolated world, both human and nonhuman, that is described in the novel. The marauders, along with Culla, have altered the world to the extent that nature reflects the suffering of humans; out of the swamp, Culla sees “only the naked trees in attitudes of agony and dimly hominoid life figures in a landscape of the damned.” While such anthropomorphism is often linked to anthropocentrism—the use of nonhuman nature as an objective correlative to the state of humans or human society—it is within the context of Outer Dark an indication that the natural world has been defeated as surely as Rinthy has. The reeds and ferns sound “like things chained,” a description that aptly described the domination of Rinthy and, by association, the nonhuman natural world with which she is so heavily identified.

That the swamp scene genders nature is clear in McCarthy’s word choice: Culla’s attempt to traverse the swamp is impeded by ground that is described as “vulvate.” This is the most striking example not only of the feminizing of nature but also of what Sullivan calls McCarthy’s “narrative misogyny” (76). Associating the “mire” of the swamp with female genitalia strongly suggests that far from being an ecofeminist writer, McCarthy is engaging in the same negative conjoining of women and nature as any Cartesian. Yet, the many more positive associations of Rinthy and nature suggest that McCarthy may be using the swamp to comment on Culla. As Fisher-Wirth argues, this scene is a final example of Culla’s “one long flight from, and one long arrival at” the feminine in an attempt to construct an identity (128).

While this reading is persuasive, the important implication is that by feminizing the swamp McCarthy strengthens the connection between nature and Rinthy. As such, the last scene of the book confirms that the dialectic at work within the novel is as much a conflict between the masculine and the feminine worldviews as a conflict between word and flesh.

The feminine ethic is a casualty in Outer Dark. In the last scene, the world is without Rinthy Holme or her baby. The swamp is “a faintly smoking garden of the dead” (242). The world that exists at the end of the novel is devoid of the feminine ethic and of compassion and natural life. It is a dead world that results from the domination of the marauders’ ethic of individuality and violence. Placed within a broader ecocritical context, Outer Dark joins The Orchard Keeper and Child of God as a novel that shows the complexity of McCarthy’s environmental ethic. While McCarthy shares the holism and biological egalitarianism of deep ecology and recognizes that humans and nonhumans alike suffer at the hands of Cartesian society, he is not hopeful that such an ethic is strong enough to counter the Cartesian world view based on domination.

CHAPTER FOUR

Social Ecology, Urban Ecocriticism, and the Landscapes of Suttree

Besides the fact that it is the last of his novels set in Appalachia, Suttree is the culmination of McCarthy's southern novels in other ways. Started before but published after Child of God, Suttree is McCarthy's un-nostalgic threnody to the South, a bitter farewell to a place about which he would no longer write and in which he would no longer live. In geographic terms, Suttree takes place in relatively close proximity to the action of The Orchard Keeper and Child of God,⁶⁵ and, though most of the book is set in Knoxville, Tennessee, Suttree ventures into the same areas where Arthur Ownby and Lester Ballard lived. Additionally, many of the characters who populate the novel could have easily stepped out of the pages of earlier novels. The traveling goat herder, for instance, can be seen as a Christian version of Ownby. Gene Harrogate—the “country mouse” turned “city rat” who is arrested for improper relations with a field of melons—can be seen as a more comic and sociable version of Lester Ballard (Bell 85), while Suttree can be seen as an educated version of Marion Sylder.

At the same time, Suttree is distinct from McCarthy's other southern novels, mainly because its hero is more self-conscious but also because it is his only urban novel. Other aspects distinguish Suttree. The urban setting allows McCarthy to include a number of African-American characters heretofore absent from his fiction, and the book's timeframe is later than that of the other novels—describing the years between 1950 and 1955. Such a setting of time and place (as well as the book's publication date of 1979) marks a transition period in Southern literature between what has popularly been called the Southern renaissance—comprising the

work of the Agrarians, William Faulkner, Eudora Welty, Flannery O'Connor and other writers—and the postmodern South of Walker Percy and Bobbie Anne Mason whose regionalism, though nominally southern, is overshadowed by a growing sense of national homogeneity.⁶⁶

In ecocritical terms, Suttree can also be seen as both a culmination of his southern work and as a unique text that reiterates and augments the environmental themes found in his previous novels. Certainly, the two main ecocritical themes already discussed are present in Suttree. McCarthy continues to portray the conflict between an individual environmental character and Cartesian society; Suttree removes himself from the place prepared for him in conventional society by his father. His self-imposed exile is elliptically explained as a rejection of his father and of his family's social standing, but a close examination suggests that Suttree's retreat to a houseboat in Knoxville's slum is also a rejection of the hierarchical, materialistic, and racist values personified by his father and embodied in the city of Knoxville. Unlike other environmentalist characters in McCarthy's southern novels, however, Suttree's refuge is not the wilderness nor is it characterized by solitude. A host of characters join him in the apocalyptic pastoral world of McAnally Flats on the banks of the Tennessee River. As in previous novels, these characters are in almost constant conflict with representatives of conventional society, most notably the police. Even more so than in The Orchard Keeper, Suttree illustrates the other main ecocritical theme—that the persecution of the environmental character and other characters is concomitant with the degradation of the environment; the same Cartesian thinking responsible for polluting the Tennessee River is responsible for perpetuating the misery and suffering pervasive in McAnally Flats. In this way, Suttree combines the deep ecological quests of McCarthy's environmental characters with the social ecological exploration of the role of Cartesian institutions in the domination of nature and human Others.

The Need for an Ecocritical Reassessment of *Suttree*

As most of the scholarship on the novel contends, Suttree is primarily a book about death: “[e]very critic of Suttree, following the lead of Vereen Bell . . . has recognized that Suttree’s problems stem from his fear of death” (Jarrett 56).⁶⁷ Suttree is, in fact, both fearful of and attracted to death (Shelton 76), and his quest is partly about “transcending death—not in fact, of course, but in mind and spirit” (Bell 65). Battling a tangle of psychological problems, Suttree specifically struggles with the “mathematical certainty of his own death” (§ 295) and of the oblivion it represents. The problem for Suttree is whether or not to continue to live or to embrace the ragman’s nihilistic philosophy: “I just wisht I could die and I’d be better off” (175).⁶⁸

Complicating this fear of death is Suttree’s search for identity and feelings of incompleteness, problems stemming from the fact that he is a surviving twin whose brother died at birth.⁶⁹ The meaning of that fact haunts him: “His subtle obsession with uniqueness troubled all his dreams” (§ 113). Throughout the text, McCarthy employs the motif of doubling to explore Suttree’s struggle with questions of individuality, uniqueness, and wholeness; Suttree’s first appearance in the novel shows him lying prone over the gunwale of his fishing skiff, staring at his reflection in the moiling filth of the Tennessee River (§ 7). The importance of this doubling motif has contributed to the existentialist critical assessment of the novel.

McCarthy criticism debates whether Suttree makes any progress in resolving his deep-seated psychological and existential problems. Walter Sullivan, for instance, complains that Suttree “has no beginning and no end; it takes up, it catalogues the outrages and the agonies and small gains of this limited segment of humankind, and it stops with nothing solved or put to rest or brought to fruition” (343). William Prather disagrees, arguing that Suttree realizes “that the

aspects of life that are of key importance tend to unite members of humanity” (110). Others have argued that through his experiences, many of them near-death experiences, Suttree rejects the ragman’s nihilism and emerges with a determination to live (Guinn 112, Bell et al.). Bell, whose chapter on Suttree is entitled “Death and Affirmation,” notes that while the extent of Suttree’s progress is not explicitly defined, his experiences throughout the novel suggest personal growth.

The novel’s frame has been viewed as a device that McCarthy uses to show that Suttree, while not solving his existential issues, is at least empowered to continue striving for meaning. In the opening frame, death is depicted as, among other things, a hunter with hounds (§ 5). At the end, as Suttree climbs into a car taking him away from Knoxville, a hound comes “from the depths and was sniffing at the spot where Suttree had stood” (471); switching into the first person of the opening frame, the narrator suspects that the huntsman is near: “His work lies all wheres and his hounds tire not. I have seen them in a dream, slaverous and wild and their eyes crazed with ravening for souls in this world. Fly them” (471). Frank Shelton agrees with Bell that Suttree is in the end finally determined to live. In “Suttree and Suicide,” he argues that while Suttree often places himself in situations in which he could very easily be killed, he does not follow the example of the businessman in the seersucker suit who plunges off a bridge to his death at the beginning of the novel (76). That Suttree finds some resolution can be discerned from the declarations he makes toward the end of the novel; he confesses that he is not unhappy (414), he “recants” from speaking bitterly about his life (414), and he acknowledges that he has “learned that there is one Suttree and one Suttree only” (461). This final lesson, for Suttree, constitutes significant progress in resolving his existential crisis concerning individuality.

The existentialist theme is reinforced by a number of other characters who personify different philosophies. From the Ragpicker’s nihilism, to Harrogate’s materialism, to the goat

herder's Christian existentialism, to Michael's Native American spiritualism—Suttree encounters a variety of people who embody different ways of making meaning in their lives. None of those ways, however, is acceptable to Suttree; his departure from Knoxville is, therefore, not only an affirmation of life but also a movement toward constructing his own philosophical worldview. What that philosophy will be is unknowable, but Suttree's thoughts and actions throughout the text indicate that his personal existentialism will include, in large part, an environmentalism that rejects Cartesian thinking. His life on the river, his interactions with other environmentalist characters (e.g. the goatman and Michael), and his trek into the Smoky Mountains all indicate Suttree's own environmentally aware consciousness. At the same time, his rejection of society is a clear indication that, contrary to his father's hope, Suttree's environmentalism will not be found in "the law courts, in business, [or] in government" (§ 14).

Even when discussing Suttree's existential crisis, critics have acknowledged the importance of the nonhuman natural world in his quest for meaning, but they have not acknowledged the extent of its importance. For instance, both Bell and Thomas Young have identified the Thoreauvean qualities of Suttree's life on the ramshackle houseboat on the river. Bell, though not explicitly identifying Thoreau, makes an obvious allusion to Walden when he points out that by abdicating his place in middle-class society, Suttree seeks "to know what life is fundamentally and whether in the midst of death there can be life to be affirmed" (72). Young quotes directly from Walden, saying that Suttree wants to reduce life "to its lowest terms, and if it proved to be mean, why then to get the whole and genuine meanness of it . . . or if it were sublime, to know it by experience . . ." (Young 100).⁷⁰ Critics have also acknowledged that Suttree's trek through the wilderness indicates that McCarthy is interested in the role nonhuman

nature plays in his character's development, but such acknowledgement constitutes a shallow ecological appreciation of the environmental issues evident throughout the book.

An ecocritical analysis of Suttree goes farther than more anthropocentric criticism by applying the fundamental premises of deep and social ecologies not only to the individual character of Suttree but also to the broader novel. Deep ecology illuminates the importance of Suttree's identification with nonhuman nature throughout his existential quest, confirming his status as one of McCarthy's environmentalist characters. Social ecology, as the last chapter showed through the application of ecofeminism, identifies the interconnected domination of humans and nonhuman nature by studying the landscapes of the river, McAnally Flats, and the city.⁷¹ Social ecology additionally provides the ideas of environmental racism and justice as a way to analyze both Suttree's sojourn in McAnally Flats and its final destruction (Des Jardins 236). Such an approach, while acknowledging the clear existentialist qualities of Suttree's quest, continues to assess the role of Cartesian thinking in the domination of humans and nonhuman nature. While the alienation that Suttree experiences is primarily the result of family dynamics, especially his estranged relationships with his father and the mother of his child, the goal of his existential quest is to achieve a feeling of wholeness through close contact with other environmentalists characters and the natural environment.

As in the other chapters, one of the most basic ecocritical assumptions is the extension of ethical consideration to nonhuman nature; a sensitive reading of how the land and water are used in the novel reveals the hierarchical structure of Knoxville society that privileges bourgeois society over both the poor and the nonhuman environment. Most critics gloss over the destruction of McAnally Flats for the construction of an expressway, viewing it as a mere plot device that pushes Suttree out from Knoxville. What they fail to appreciate are the societal

forces that destroy a vital human community to make room for a road. At the same time, by viewing the polluted river as a metaphor for Suttree's life (Jarrett 49) or as an analogue to the swamp in Hemingway's "Big Two-Hearted River" (Bell 73), critics fail to acknowledge that in the story, the marginal population of McAnally Flats is forced to live in and off of a river polluted by Cartesian society.⁷²

While an existential reading of Suttree is valid, a reassessment of Suttree's immersion in urban and wilderness landscapes emphasizes the role that nonhuman nature plays in his partial rehabilitation. Suttree is not only an existentialist but also an environmentalist. His interactions with four interrelated landscapes—the Smoky Mountains, the river, McAnally Flats, and the city—reveal that far from being alienated from the world, he is dependent upon contact with nonhuman nature for his survival. Besides the nonhuman elements in these different landscapes, however, human and manufactured elements also play an important role in the overall urban ecocritical evaluation of the novel. By including man-made features, especially the automobile, in its analysis of landscape, this chapter concludes that Suttree's existential crisis reflects the suffering of the environment along with the people who live there.

Suttree as Environmentalist Character

Unlike McCarthy's other southern novels, Suttree presents the conflict between an environmental character and Cartesian society as a personal one. While Arthur Ownby and John Wesley Rattner are alienated from their families as well, Suttree's conflict with his family, especially his father, is immediate and visceral. Suttree has abandoned not only the place prepared for him in conventional society but has also abandoned a woman with whom he had a child. The specifics of these family dynamics are not detailed, but Suttree's relationship with his

father and his father's side of the family is more contentious than his relationship with either his mother or the mother of his child.⁷³ Early in the novel, Suttree receives a letter from his father that illustrates the values that Suttree has come to reject. His father writes,

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 courts, in business, in government. There is nothing occurring in the streets. Nothing but a dumbshow composed of the helpless and the impotent. (13-14)

For Suttree's father, law, commerce, and politics are the realms that comprise the relevant world—the only arenas in which one can experience “life,” arenas composed entirely of people and remote from the nonhuman natural world. His conception of the “world” as comprised only of human society is clearly anthropocentric. Within that human world, Suttree's father divides people into separate and discrete groups—those who take part in Cartesian society (the lawyers, businessmen, politicians and their ilk) and those who do not. Difference in occupation, in other words, equals difference in value. Suttree's father applies such hierarchical thinking to his own family; in a conversation with a maternal uncle, Suttree reveals the superiority his father and paternal grandfather felt over the rest of the family because of their higher social standing. Suttree explains: “When a man marries beneath him his children are beneath him. . . . As it is, my case was always doubtful. I was expected to turn out badly. My grandfather used to say Blood will tell. It was his favorite saying” (19). Though these examples of Cartesian thinking are restricted to human affairs, it is this same type of thinking that is apparent in the larger society's treatment of the human Others and the nonhuman environment. It is precisely this hierarchical and anthropocentric thinking that Suttree seeks to escape.⁷⁴

One way to view Suttree as an environmentalist character is through his vocation of fishing. Rejecting even the most modest of conventional jobs—selling shoes at Miller’s department store (10)—Suttree has resolved to live in a houseboat moored to the shores of the Tennessee River and to subsist by trolling his trotlines. Though one of his father’s friends assures him that “a lad with your head on his shoulders should be able to put a wrinkle into it that would make it pay” (367), Suttree’s intention is not to profit from fishing in the traditionally capitalistic sense. Fishing keeps him in close contact with the river and with the people whom his father discounts as inferior. At the beginning of the novel, the reader first sees Suttree working his lines, pulling up catfish and carp from the polluted and ominously bubbling water. He sells these fish at the different markets in town, taking the best fish to the white fishmonger and the leftovers to the black fishmonger. When asked why he fishes, he simply states, “It seemed like a good idea at the time” (10), even though he admits “I don’t much like fish” (205).⁷⁵ It is through this elemental work in close contact with nonhuman nature that Suttree finds marginal happiness:

He bought three five hundred yard spools of nylon trotline and spent two days piecing them with their droppers and lead and hooks. The third day he put out his lines and that night in his shanty with the oil lit and his supper eaten he sat in the chair listening to the river, the newspaper open across his lap, and an uneasy peace came over him, a strange kind of contentment. (413)

Though a rare and fleeting moment of peace for Suttree, the scene strengthens Suttree’s connection with Thoreau, emphasizing the value of deliberate but elemental work balanced by being still in the environment. Fishing is also important because it places him in contact with the

novel's other environmentalist characters, such as the goat herder and Michael, the only Native American in McCarthy's southern novels.

Another aspect of Suttree that defines him as an environmentalist character is McCarthy's portrayal of him as an amateur naturalist. Throughout the novel, Suttree studies the natural phenomena, especially fossils and birds.⁷⁶ This preoccupation with fossils is certainly linked to his obsession with death and oblivion, but it also indicates his knowledge of natural history and his ability to observe the natural world.⁷⁷ This appreciation is illustrated on three separate occasions when Suttree stops to study nature. On a ramble to visit his Aunt Martha and the ruined ancestral home, Suttree walks "the high rolling country" and observes "an osprey turn very high and hang above the distant thunderheads with the sun parried pure white from underwing and panel. He has seen them fold and fall like stones and stayed to watch it out of sight" (121). The quotation suggests that Suttree makes a habit of bird watching. On this same expedition, he stops to watch "the long cataphracted forms of gars lying in a kind of electric repose among the reeds" (121). Later, as Suttree is rowing his skiff near the bank of an island in the river, he oars toward shore where:

he saw a muskrat nose among the willows and he saw a clutch of heronshaws
gawping from their down nest in the reeds, spikelet bills and stringy gullets, pink
flesh and pinfeathers and boneless legs spindled about. He tacked more
shoreward to see. So curious narrow beasties. (225)

Much later in the novel, Suttree shows Joyce, his prostitute girlfriend, features of the landscape that indicate that he has spent considerable time studying the geological features and archeological remains surrounding a remote lake:

He showed her cores of flint jutting from the mud and he found an arrowhead knapped from the same black stone and gave it to her. Out there on a mudspit white gulls. Mute little treestumps on twisted legs where the shore had washed from their roots, darkly fluted, waterhewn, bulbed with gross knots . . .

I've never seen one before, [Joyce] said, turning the arrowhead in her hand.

They're everywhere. In the winter when the water is down you can find them. (408)

These examples show Suttree to be an observer of nature. In this way, Suttree emulates the narrative voice in all of McCarthy's novels that meticulously describes the exact kinds of plants and animals that live in the wild (Berry 72-73). Sharing the narrative voice's knowledge of and interest in nature, Suttree is different from Ownby, John Wesley, and Rinthy, all of whom note phenomena only as they pass through a place. This affinity between Suttree and the narrative voice is not surprising given the fact that Suttree is McCarthy's most autobiographical novel (Marius 15). Unlike the Judge from Blood Meridian, whose study of nature always leads to its destruction, Suttree's activity is purely observational. He allows plants and animals to continue to thrive in their environment.

The episode in the novel that most clearly identifies Suttree as an environmentalist character concerns his trek into the Smoky Mountains. More anthropocentric criticism has acknowledged this difficult and hallucinatory trip through wilderness but has discounted it as a failure. Shelton and Bell agree that while Suttree conceives of the trip as "an attempt to purify himself through contact with nature" (Shelton 77), it ends "after weeks of starvation and solitude, on the border of madness" (Bell 90). Both critics believe that Suttree fails to gain any

understanding of himself or the world by immersing himself in nature because of the world's "disinterested authority over individual being" (Bell 90). "In McCarthy's cosmology," Shelton argues, "nature is not benevolent, and this trip too becomes a form of suicide" (77). Shelton and Bell assume, however, that Suttree is not aware of nature's power or of his place within the natural order. Yet Suttree is like Arthur Ownby in that his contact with nature has provided him with an understanding that nature is both beautiful and violent, benevolent and brutal. His trek in the mountains illustrates that knowledge.

It is unclear whether Suttree is careless in preparing for his trek or whether he intentionally sets off without adequate food and clothing. His motivation for going in the first place is related to the "rain and woodsmoke [that] took him back to other times more than he would have liked. He made himself up a pack from old sacking and rolled his blanket and with some rice and dried fruit and a fishline he took a bus to Gatlinburg" (283). He knows where he is going, and he does not get lost when he gets there. Quite deliberately, he leaves "the roads and then the trails" (283). Even after running out of food, he does not panic. Instead, "He wondered could you eat the mushrooms, would you die, do you care. He broke one in his hands, frangible, mauvebrouwn and kidney colored. He'd forgotten he was hungry" (285). Whether or not the mushroom had a hallucinogenic effect, Suttree has visions. Besides falling into the silent study of small flowers and "the delicate loomwork in the moss" (284), he sees "an elvish apparition come from the wood and go down the trail before him half ajog and worried of aspect" (285). It is during this trip that he has one of the most transcendent experiences to be found in any of McCarthy's novels:

He looked at a world of incredible loveliness. Old distaff Celt's blood in some back chamber of his brain moved him to discourse with the birches, with the oaks.

A cool green fire kept breaking in the woods and he could hear the footsteps of the dead. Everything had fallen from him. He scarce could tell where his being ended and the world began nor did he care. (286)

In the closest example of deep ecological Self-realization, the boundary between Suttree's sense of self and the rest of the world is erased. He talks to trees. He achieves transcendence and unity with nature by being in direct contact with his environment, without excessive gear that mediates human contact with nature. This is a way of being in nature that Naess described in his *Ecosophy T* (179). William Spencer has compared Suttree's trek to a Native American vision quest, where a seeker ventures out with "very little clothing and a blanket to a high place for two to four days, during which time he would abstain from food and water" (100-01). Besides testing one's endurance and courage, the purpose of such trips was to be "rewarded with visions, sometimes of monsters but more frequently of animals, one of which might be revealed to the seer's 'spirit animal'—an ally and symbol of the seeker's personality and proper path" (Spencer 101). The affinities between Suttree's trek, Naess's deep ecology, and the Native American vision quest suggest that the journey is more than a passive attempt to commit suicide as Shelton contends. Coming from a writer like McCarthy, such unequivocally romantic descriptions are rare and indicate the importance of Suttree's interaction with nonhuman nature as part of his existential journey. Though a difficult and dangerous journey, the trip provides Suttree with a degree of resolution. Emerging from the trees and confronting a poacher in a deerstand, Suttree makes two seemingly simplistic but (for him) meaningful conclusion: "At least I exist" (288) and "I'm not a figment" (289). Meager realizations no doubt, but they signify Suttree's progress as he renounces the ragman's nihilism and continues to search for an existentialism informed by

environmental consciousness. As such, Suttree joins Arthur Ownby, John Wesley Rattner, and Rinthy Holme as an environmentalist character.

The Three Urban Landscapes: The Tennessee River, McAnally Flats, and the Downtown Business District

The wilderness that Suttree walks through is the most obvious landscape conducive to an ecocritical analysis, but, though his trek plays an important role in establishing Suttree as an environmental character, the wilderness is not the predominant landscape in the novel. Because Suttree is an urban novel, an ecocritical analysis must examine the interrelationships between the three urban landscapes: the river (as it flows through and away from the town), the slum of McAnally Flats, and the central downtown business district of Knoxville. In doing so, what become apparent is that the degradation of the natural environment and the domination of the marginal human population result from the same hierarchical and anthropocentric thinking that is responsible for Suttree's existential crisis. The epicenter of such thinking in the novel is downtown Knoxville, the location of the courts, the banks, and the government. Suttree's decision to live in a houseboat on the river and in McAnally Flats not only reinforces his rejections of his father's value system but also aligns him with the other victims of Cartesian society. Living both in the slum and on the water connects his suffering with that of the landscape and the people who live in it. The fate of the people and the place are interconnected.

The river is the most obvious "landscape" adversely affected by the Cartesian thinking of the city. Perhaps the most succinct description of the river comes from the narrator who calls it "Cloaca Maxima" (13)—the great sewer. It is a description that McCarthy develops throughout

the novel. At the beginning of the book, McCarthy shows Suttree staring at his reflection in the water:

With his jaw cradled in the crook of his arm he watched idly surface phenomena, 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. The watcher's face rode beside the boat, a sepia visage yawing in the scum, eyes veering and watery grimace. 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)

Such a description rightly leads critics to find symbolic meaning in the river; as Jarrett argues, the river “operates as an agent of death and as metaphor for Suttree’s life—a one way lifestream that cannot be repeated or reversed” (49). While Jarrett’s interpretation is certainly valid, the state of the river also illustrates the anthropocentric attitude that human society holds toward the nonhuman environment. Besides being a literary device that reflects Suttree’s personal crisis, the river is also the sewer that receives the city’s waste.

From a more traditional critical perspective, the pollution in the river is “always already” there, a fact that garners little consideration; an ecocritical perspective, however, looks for the source of the pollution in an effort to understand how the river came to be in the state that McCarthy describes and to identify the values of the society that pollutes it. For instance, McCarthy makes clear that some of the people responsible for the pollution are the residents of McAnally Flats. Whether it be a person slinging “two rattling bags of trash overboard” (88) or a person urinating directly into the river (307), many of the humans living along the river view it as nothing more than a gutter that conveniently carries away their waste. That residents of

McAnally Flats perpetrate many of these acts of environmental insensitivity reinforces two points: though most of the residents of the slum are alienated from Cartesian society, they hardly live environmentally conscious lives. Just as Lester Ballard is both a Cartesian character and a victim of Cartesian society, so are the majority of the people who live in McAnally Flats.

Secondly, and more importantly, their acts of seemingly casual disregard for the environment highlight the very problems facing the poor and minority communities in urban areas; regular garbage pickup and an adequate sewage system, givens in the affluent neighborhoods up the hill, are non-existent in McAnally Flats, forcing people with few alternatives and no financial resources to use the river as a sewer. Such a social reality has been the focus of the environmental justice movement. As opposed to the traditional environmental concerns of wildlife and wilderness conservation, the environmental justice movement has made more visible the environmental priorities that affect urban residents—issues such as “sanitation, rat and pest control, noise pollution, hunger, malnutrition, poor health, premature death, not to mention the conditions that underpin these hazards, like the slashing of public services and the savage inequities of public housing policy” (Ross 15).⁷⁸ With the exception of public housing policy of which there is none in Suttree, this list could very well describe the conditions in McAnally Flats. Though not usually considered by literary criticism, the absence of these services greatly affects the overall health of people living in McAnally Flats and of the environment. Yet this devastation of people and place is invisible to those who live and work up the hill: “[t]he smoke for their fires [in McAnally Flats] issues up unseen among the soot and dust of the city’s right commerce” (§ 144).

More significantly, the river’s condition is also the result of the industries and other human activities along its banks, a fact that emphasizes the interrelatedness of these three urban

landscapes. From his houseboat, Suttree hears “the drone of machinery, the lonely industry of the city,” which include “the howl of the saws in the lumbermill across the river . . . and . . . the intermittent scream of swine come under the knacker’s hand at the packing company” (63). The reason so many industries are located next to the river, besides the efficiency of shipping products by boat, is the close proximity to the river for “free” disposal of industrial waste.⁷⁹ The pig slaughterhouse alone contributes more pollution to the river, including on occasion “[a] dead sow pink and bloated” (306), than do the people from McAnally Flats. In addition to the industry that contributes to the degradation of the river, cars are also an important polluter. Throughout the novel, McCarthy describes the oiliness of the river, including the ever-present “odor of oil” that comes off the water” (20). This oil, as current environmental studies contend, comes from the many cars, both functioning and non-functioning, that litter the landscape of McCarthy’s Knoxville.⁸⁰

At the same time that the river is used as a “cloaca maxima,” it is also used as a source of food. The poor of McAnally Flats rely on the river for fish to provide part of their meager diets. Though Suttree and Michael are shown selling fish in the markets of the city, the majority of the residents are fishing for their own consumption. In scenes that embody the environmental aphorism “everybody lives downstream,” McCarthy shows how one person’s use of the river as a sewer affects another person’s use of it as a food source. Harrogate passes “a row of black fishermen” sitting on the riverbank with “their legs dangling above the oozing sewage” (99). Elsewhere, as Suttree talks to two boys fishing, McCarthy describes the scene: “Their bobbers lay quietly in the scum. Ringent pools of gas kept erupting in oily eyes of the surface. Mauves and yellows from the spectrum guttered and slewed in the dead current” (107). The poor of McAnally Flats, therefore, have few options. Without adequate sanitation, the river is their only

means of disposing of waste. Without adequate economic opportunity, the river is one of their few choices for finding food. As the environmental justice movement has pointed out, the practice of placing polluting industries in minority neighborhoods and of failing to provide adequate sanitation and health services in urban areas leads to environmental degradation that compromises the health of people who live in McAnally Flats (Bullard). At the root of this cycle is the hierarchical dualism that places rich above poor, white over black, the “city’s right commerce” over the slum and the river.

The river is not stationary like the city and McAnally Flats; it is constantly moving, flushing the sewage, garbage, and oil away from Knoxville and into the agricultural and wilderness areas far beyond its borders. As Suttree rows downriver away from the city and past “peaceful farmland. . . greening purlieus and small cultivated orchards,” McCarthy describes the river as “like a giant trematode curing down out of the city, welling heavy and septic past these fine homes on the north shore” (119). The river, polluted by the city as it passes, “*flows in a sluggard ooze toward southern seas, running down out of the rainflattened corn and petty crops and riverloam gardens of upcountry landkeepers, grating along like bonedust, afreight with the past, dreams disperse in the water someway, nothing ever lost*” (original italics) (4). The literary significance of the river as a symbol of time and history is clear, but the detritus from civilization in the form of pollution is also a part of McCarthy’s overall description of the river. Acknowledging the river’s environmental condition is, therefore, as important as appreciating its symbolic value.

McAnally Flats is the second urban landscape in Suttree. It is a piece of land wedged between the river and the central business district, and, as such, it is a transition zone between Cartesian society and nonhuman nature. McAnally Flats is composed of rundown mill houses,

ramshackle structures made of found materials, rotting multi-story buildings containing bars and flophouses, a few small stores, insubstantial houseboats floating on empty oil drums, and various caves, bridges, and concrete structures that afford shelter for the otherwise homeless. It is literally on the other side of the railroad tracks: “Beyond the tracks lay the market warehouses and beyond these the shapeless warrens of McAnally with its complement of pariahs and endless poverty” (296). McCarthy writes that “[i]n these alien reaches, these maugre sinks and interstitial wastes that the righteous see from carriage and car another life dreams” (original italics) (4). For those who do not live there, the “righteous,” McAnally Flats is a place that one literally looks down upon either from bridge or town because down is where McAnally Flats is. Because of geography, demographics, gravity, and entropy, it is—like the river—the receptacle of the city’s waste: “Here at the creek mouth the fields run on to the river, the mud deltaed and baring out its rich alluvial bones and dread waste, a wrack of cratewood and condoms and fruitrinds . . .” (original italics) (4).

Besides the innumerable junked cars and assorted trash strewn all over McAnally Flats, there is evidence of deliberate dumping; Suttree passes “an old limestone sink that had been filled back as a city dump and graded over years ago” (227). But even in the present, McAnally Flats is a “landscape of old tires and castoff watertanks rusting in the weeds and bottomless buckets and broken slabs of concrete” (64). Harrogate surveys the riverfront slum from a bridge:

The viaduct spanned a jungly gut filled with rubble and wreckage and a few packingcrate shacks inhabited by transient blacks and down through this puling waste the dark and leprous waters of First Creek threaded the sumac and poison ivy. Highwater marks of oil and sewage and condoms dangling in the branches

like stranded leeches. Harrogate made his way through this derelict fairyland toward the final concrete arches of the viaduct where they ran to earth. . . . (116)

That a significant amount of this refuse originated in the city above McAnally Flats is clear when Suttree walks from the city back to his houseboat:

Down there the littoral of siltstained rocks, old plates of paving and chunk of concrete sprouting growths of rusted iron rod. He'd even seen old slabs of masonry screed with musselshells here in the weeds. Coming down the concrete steps with the mangled iron handrail and past old brick cisterns filled with rubble. Past the stone abutment of an earlier bridge on the river and the last ramshackle house and the brown curbstones that had once lined main street and the old cobblestones and pavingbricks and blackened beams with their axed flats and their mortices, all this detritus slid from the city on the hill. (411)

The very curbs that used to line the downtown streets lie among the heap of other civic junk that the city has dumped into the invisible land of McAnally Flats. The phrase "the city on the hill" associates Knoxville's downtown with the vision of America that John Winthrop alluded to in his sermon aboard the *Arbella* as it approached the shores of the New World in 1630 (49). In Suttree, the false promise of a new order is revealed in the city's clutter of junk. The city's belief in progress and development, as social ecology argues, is paid for in the suffering of others (Des Jardins 236).

Despite the devastated land, McAnally Flats is a place that still supports life. One spring, Suttree notes the difference between downtown and the riverfront: "The shadows of the buildings still harbored a gray chill and the sun sulked smoked and baleful somewhere over the city and in the sparsely weeded clay barrens wasting on the city's perimeter first flowers erupted

drunkenly through glass and cinder and came slowly to bloom” (448). Besides wildflowers, there are a number of small gardens throughout McAnally Flats. Though far from the agrarianism that Thoreau describes, the “farming” done in McAnally Flats is an attempt to supplement the fish they catch from the river. Though described metaphorically as “gardens of rue,” McAnally Flats contains a number of “[l]ittle plots of corn, warped purlieus of tillage in the dead spaces shaped by constriction and want like the lives of the dark and bitter husbandmen who have this sparse harvest for their own out of all the wide earth’s keeping” (29). Peering up to “the brickwork of the university and a few fine homes among the trees,” Harrogate looks down on McAnally Flats: “A patch of gray corn by the riverside, rigid and brittle. A vision of bleak pastoral that at length turned him back toward the city again” (99)⁸¹. Elsewhere Harrogate looks down on the “[d]ark and near vertical gardens visible among the tin or tarred rooftops and vast nets of kudzu across the blighted trees” (116). In addition to small gardens, some residents raise livestock. Rufus Wiley keeps pigs (138), while someone else has a “a run of chickens” (227).⁸² McCarthy’s descriptions of these meager agrarian efforts are equivocal, but they illustrate the greater connectedness to the earth of this poor community compared to the wealthy, white citizens who shop in the markets.

Besides the agrarian activities that distinguish the landscape of McAnally Flats from the commercial enterprises of the downtown business district, the interactions between residents of the community reflect some characteristics of what Naess’s describes as “green communities” (144-45). Though McAnally Flats falls short in many important ways, a sense of community exists that contradicts the belief of Suttree’s father that there is nothing occurring in the streets “but a dumbshow composed of the helpless and the impotent” (14).⁸³ The communal nature of McAnally Flats represents a human ecological alternative to Cartesian society—where self-

reliance and individualism are seen as virtues leading to the material success of proper citizens. In McAnally Flats, there is a vital sense of mutual support that Suttree values and in which he actively participates. McCarthy portrays Suttree as a part of a community whose members share not just camaraderie but also compassion and caring for one another as well. As Shelton has noted, this communal spirit evident in the stores and bars of McAnally Flats is exactly what was absent in the “respectable life of [Suttree’s] family and his forebears” (75). Though often contentious and sometimes dangerous, the gatherings at Comer’s and Clevenger’s illustrate the affection and humor of a community enduring great poverty and deprivation (§ 110-12, 234-37). The sense of community is most relevant, however, in times of travail. In winter, the insubstantial wood shacks and houseboats are unbearably cold, forcing people to gather at various meeting places, especially stores, to huddle around stoves. Among the group who gather at Howard Clevenger’s one winter day is an old black widow who “kneaded her hands each in each in their cropfingered army gloves and mumbled a ceaseless monologue” (165). One of the regulars, Oceanfrog, notices her crying to herself:

Hey Howard, said Oceanfrog. Who is this old woman?

How would I know.

How would Howard know? said Oceanfrog. He went to a box and lifted the lid and poked around and came back with a half pint of milk and opened it and bent and put it in the old woman’s hands. When Suttree left she was still holding it and she was still talking but she wasn’t crying anymore. (167-68)

This act of kindness, overlooked by critics otherwise focused on Suttree’s existential crisis, is followed by a series of acts in which Suttree shows and is shown altruism.

First, Suttree makes his rounds among the poor, old, weak, and infirmed. He proceeds to a diner where he is treated to coffee by the beggar Blind Richard. From there he checks on Harrogate who is shivering in his concrete pillbox beneath the Hill Street viaduct.⁸⁴ He takes Harrogate to a Walgreen's and, even though both he and Harrogate are penniless, the waitress that he knows serves them platters heaped with food (§ 172). From there, Suttree checks on the ragman who lives on the other end of the bridge from Harrogate; not finding him there, he searches and finds him at a 50-cents-per-night flophouse. Assured that the ragman is safe from the cold, Suttree secures a room for Harrogate so the city rat will not freeze to death. Having spent his last money on Harrogate's room, Suttree finds a trolley token with which he pays for what he thinks will be a warm continuous ride.⁸⁵ The next day, Suttree checks on the old railroader, a train conductor who lives in some abandoned train cars on the edge of McAnally Flats; accepting a seat by his fire, Suttree says, "Thought I'd better check on you to see were you still living" (180). Suttree is reciprocating an earlier visit by the railroader (87-88). Throughout the novel, Suttree receives as much generosity as he gives. When Suttree is in greatest need—as when he is hit in the head by a floorbuffer and suffers from typhoid fever—members of the community care for him during recovery. Undoubtedly, there is horrible crime and selfishness in the Flats resulting from the crushing poverty that abounds there, but the acts of altruism and cooperation distinguish his life in McAnally Flats from his previous life among his family and the larger Cartesian society and illustrate the more ecological, sustainable, and meaningful life that Naess proposes.

Terri Witek argues that the sense of community cooperation and altruism in McAnally Flats is partly the result of the impermanent and insubstantial nature of the housing. Writing about the recurrent pattern of impermanent houses throughout McCarthy's fiction, Witek argues

that contrary to the alienated and isolated lives of the Cartesian characters, the residents of McAnally Flats are free from the strictures and obligations of materialistic Cartesian society and are more integrated into a community whose individual members rely on one another for survival:

McCarthy characters seem to understand implicitly that with such things as cash crops and permanent buildings comes not freedom but alienation: think of our suburbs, each family locked into an individual but similar house, a cliché which is furthest, in house terms, of the American dream. According to material culturalists, impermanent dwellings have the advantage of enforcing a particular type of community, despite their appearance; such structures are so high-maintenance they actually force their inhabitants to depend on each other and to venture out into the larger world. Consider a freezing, racist Gene Harrogate warming himself over black Knoxvilleians' stoves and bottles (140-41)

For Witek, the sense of community so evident in McAnally Flats springs from the people's reliance on others for survival. This is true for both the poor who are victims of "irresistible social and economic forces" (Shelton 73) and the residents of McAnally Flats who choose to live there in an effort to escape the strictures of conventional society. For all of them, the concepts of community and cooperation are more a matter of survival than an expression of a radical environmental philosophy. However, underneath the pragmatism of survival is a system of symbiosis and mutualism that reflects the cooperation found in larger ecosystems. As such, the life in McAnally Flats can be seen as more environmental than that of the Cartesian individualism of the city.

Another ecological characteristic of McAnally Flats that distinguishes it from the city is the diversity of humans that reside there. It is a diversity that Suttree finds attractive.

“Unwilling to hide behind conventional social forms and structures as his family does” (Shelton 74), Suttree abandons Cartesian society for the marginal world of McAnally Flats. Partly because it represents the opposite of his family but also because of the vitality and the interrelatedness of the residents that Suttree discovers there, McAnally Flats represents “a renegade anti-community, a Jaycee’s nightmare, which Suttree takes to embody the truth, or at any rate, not falsehood” (Bell 34). As Butterworth argues:

McCarthy’s overt condemnation of the “righteous” seems clearly to mark his project as the restoration of the “illshapen, black, and deranged” humanity. By restoration I mean the recovery of the value and importance of the marginalized, the reconstitution of marginal figures as subject of concern and sympathy. In Suttree McCarthy seems to adopt the project of recentering characters who have been marginalized by American culture and especially by the hierarchical economic structures of urban America. (Butterworth 95)

Human diversity is just as important in deep ecology as nonhuman biological diversity, a fact that often goes unnoticed by its critics but that illustrates the similarities between deep and social ecology. Yet the same forces of centralization that threaten endangered animal species and habitats are responsible for the destruction of minority cultures (Naess 123). The importance of human diversity is central to social ecology, as Ynestra King attests:

A healthy, balanced ecosystem, including human and nonhuman inhabitants, must maintain diversity. . . . The wiping out of whole species, corresponds to reducing

human diversity into faceless workers, or to the homogenization of taste and culture through mass consumer markets. (20)

Likewise, in Suttree, McCarthy goes to great pains to include a wide range of humans who express a range of ontological beliefs and who are also endangered.

Among the large population of anonymous blacks in McAnally Flats are a few more developed characters who illustrate the human diversity residing in the slum. Among the homosexuals who find a grudging acceptance in McAnally Flats is the “black and ageless androgyne in fool’s silks” (110), Trippin Through the Dew, who plays a small but significant role in the book. Though ridiculed by some, Trippin garners respect from Suttree, who is the only person to address Trippin by his real name, John. In smoking ruins of McAnally Flats at the end of the book, Suttree and Trippin are the last two people who have persevered in the face of conventional society’s challenges. Suttree and Trippin say goodbye to one another in a striking and—for McCarthy—unusual display of human affection:

The black reached out sadly, his face pinched. They stood there *holding hands* in the middle of the little street

Trippin Through The Dew squeezed his hand and stepped back and gave a sort of crazy little salute. Best luck in the world baby, he said

Thanks John. You too. (emphasis added) (468)

Disenfranchised from conventional society because of his color and sexual orientation, Trippin is a vibrant and courageous individual who continues to haunt McAnally Flats after its destruction. Despite McCarthy’s harsh descriptions of Trippin (“A high whinny escaped the painted gaud perched at Oceanfrog’s elbow. The mascaraed eyes sidled, the black and languid hands made

draping motions about the elbows” (110)), Suttree acknowledges him as a fellow human being trying to live in a society that excludes both of them.

Besides Suttree and Trippin, other characters populate the landscape of McAnally Flats who represent its diverse human ecology. Ab Jones, the Goatman, and Michael represent three different philosophical perspectives that challenge conventional value systems. In all three cases, their chosen lifestyles provoke the persecution of the police—the agents of social control in Cartesian society. By far, Ab Jones suffers the worst at the hands of the police: “[d]etermined 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” (Shelton 77). His life and death are an assertion of meaning and dignity in the strongest terms (Shelton 77).

Ab Jones is a black man who lives on a houseboat that doubles as a bar. Despite repeated police beatings, Ab Jones continues to defy the racism and classism inherent in their harassment. Suttree respects Ab Jones, visiting him to socialize or to check on him as he recovers from his latest injuries. This respect for Ab is evident when he witnesses the police chasing Ab for the last time; usually very careful either to avoid or placate the police, Suttree steals a police cruiser and subsequently drives it into the river (§ 442). Though not an environmentalist character, Ab Jones is “very important to the transformation in Suttree’s attitude toward death” (Shelton 77).

Two other characters, both of whom temporarily reside in McAnally Flats, add to its diversity and are environmentalist characters. Like Ab Jones, they are persecuted by the police because they live outside of the conventional mode. The first is the pastoral figure of the goatman who leads his herd into town on a “Sunday morning before anyone was about” (195). Stopping to let his goats graze on the post office lawn, he is confronted by “an officer of the law”:

Get them damned goats off the grass.

The goatman located the voice with narrowed eyes.

Let's go, oldtimer.

Them's mulish goats at times, said the goatman.

Off, said the lawman, pointing.

You Suzy. Get off that there grass now. It aint for you. All of you now.

The goats grazed on with soft goat bells, with goat's ears tilting.

Them goats needs to be on a lead or something you want to bring em thew here. . . . This aint Sevierville or some damned place where you can bring a bunch of goats through the middle of town any time you've a notion and let em shit all over the place.

I came thew there but I never stayed over.

Well let's be for goin thew here and not stayin over. (195-96)

The scene, a humorous version of Arthur Ownby's capture in The Orchard Keeper, illustrates not just the disjunction between city and country but also a conflict between environmentalist (who views the lawn as pasture) and Cartesian (who views the lawn as ornament). After playing with the police officer for a moment, the goatman peacefully acquiesces, leading his herd to McAnally Flats where his goats can freely graze and where they are welcomed by people interested not only in the goats but in his preaching. Though not the violent encounter with the police that Ab Jones experiences, the minor incident highlights the goatman's struggle to live in close contact with nature while the agents of Cartesian insist on the discrete separation of pastoral and urban.

The interactions between the goatman and Suttree, though brief, indicate that Suttree is interested in meeting him and hearing what he has to say. Suttree recognizes the goatman as someone who lives close to animals and outside of the confines of Cartesian society and who might reveal some bit of wisdom that he might use in his own quest. Suttree quickly realizes that the goatman gathers his strength from Christianity, a perspective that he is unable to separate from the religious upbringing of his childhood:

I preach every Sunday at four oclock rain or shine. Just straight preachin. No cures, no predictions. Folks ask me about the second comin. Most aint heard about the first one yet. You be here?

Suttree looked down at the goatman. Well, he said. If I'm not, just go ahead and start without me. (200)

Due to his own rejection of Christianity, Suttree is not interested in the goat herder's theology. At the same time, McCarthy's sympathetic portrayal of the goat herder suggests a alternative faith that is less alienated from the natural order than the Catholicism of Suttree's (and McCarthy's) childhood.⁸⁶ The goatman is a character whose closeness to the nonhuman natural world provides Suttree with an example of a meaningful life outside of the confines of Cartesian society. As such, the only place for his brief sojourn in Knoxville is McAnally Flats.

The other important environmental character who briefly resides in McAnally Flats is Michael, the Native American responsible for catching an 87-pound catfish that Suttree sees at the market. Michael lives on the river as Suttree does, eking out a living by fishing. He lives in a cave high above the river and fishes from a skiff constructed from recycled materials: "actual driftwood, old boxes and stenciled crateslats and parts of furniture patched up with tin storesigns and rags of canvas and spattered over with daubs of tar" (220). Michael acts as a mentor to

Suttree, introducing him to techniques and materials that make the most out of what the river has to offer. He supplies Suttree with a jar of bait that he had used to catch the monstrous catfish and shows him how to prepare turtles to eat.⁸⁷ Though Suttree is repulsed by the grotesque process of dressing a turtle, he finds that when cooked properly the meat is “succulent and rich, a flavor like no other” (240). Using a natural bait and eating what is plentiful in the environment, Michael lives both in and off of the surrounding environment. In these terms, he is an environmentalist character.

Another aspect of Michael’s character that interests Suttree is his spiritualism. Though elliptically described, Michael has a belief in the powers of inanimate objects. Michael’s own talisman are a “pair of china eyes” pinned to his shirt (221) that he found in the belly of a fish (240). Though he trivializes the significance of the doll eyes, saying they are merely good luck (239), when he gives Suttree “a small lozenge of yellowed bone” (239), Michael warns him, “Dont forget about it You cant just put it away and forget about” (239). Michael’s faith in talisman reflects a belief that objects have properties beyond the physical. It suggests faith in an animate nature. Though Suttree disposes of Michael’s gift at the end of the novel, Michael’s belief provides Suttree with an alternative worldview from the materialism of many of the other characters, especially Suttree’s father. Michael’s spiritualism, Spencer argues, is also responsible for Suttree’s decision to hike in the mountains in order to find resolution for his existential crisis in nature (101).

Like Ab Jones and the goatman, Michael’s way of life lead to conflict with the police. After not seeing Michael for a while, Suttree asks him where he’s been and he answers,

I got thowed in jail, he said.

When?

Last week? I just got out.

What did they have you for?

Vag. You know. They got me once before. (233)

Michael has been arrested repeatedly for vagrancy. Though he is self-sufficient and does not engage in the criminal behavior that warrants police actions, Michael is arrested for having no established residence and for wandering “idly from place to place without lawful or visible means of support.”⁸⁸ Like Ab Jones, the goatman, Suttree, and the environmentalist characters in The Orchard Keeper, Michael is persecuted for not conforming to the standards of conventional society. As an environmental character, he not only lives in close contact with nature but also is responsive to the needs of others as seen in the generosity he shows to Suttree. Like the pastoral character in Wordsworth’s poem by the same name, Michael conjures a Romantic image; by making Michael a Native American, McCarthy risks depicting him as a Noble Savage, but by presenting Ab Jones (a black man), and the goatman and Suttree (both white) as fellow refugees from Cartesian society, Michael remains, more than anything else, another existential environmentalist living in the McAnally Flats landscape.

Failing to provide an environmental philosophy that Suttree can adopt, Michael simply fades from the narrative. Attempting to visit Suttree, he knocks on the door of the apartment that Suttree shares with Joyce. Unable to rouse Suttree from the deep sleep and complacency that characterizes his domesticated life with the prostitute, Michael “descended the stairs and went away in the winter night” (§ 404). Suttree’s real rejection of Michael’s philosophy is evident in his abandonment of the bone good luck charm: “He had divested himself of the little cloaked godlet and his other amulets in a place where they would not be found in his lifetime and he’d taken “for talisman the simple human heart within him” (468). By then, Suttree has realized that

neither Ab's violent rebellion against authority, the goatman's Christian pastoralism, nor Michael's spiritualism will help him resolve his existential crisis. Though the people Suttree encounters in McAnally Flats fail to provide him with an answer to his existential questions, they—like the physical environment—provide him with sanctuary after his escape from his father's world.

The city itself, specifically the central business district, is the third urban landscape in Suttree. From this inorganic, concrete-and-steel downtown, Cartesian conducts its business. It is the origin of both Suttree's existential crisis and the broader environmental crisis. McCarthy's descriptions of the city, though less numerous or detailed than those of McAnally Flats, focus on the randomness of the architecture of the downtown buildings. The buildings that make up the central business district are described as an incoherent assemblage of styles composed of architectural references but lacking an overall coherence. In the opening prologue, the narrator describes downtown Knoxville as: "*The city constructed on no known paradigm, a mongrel architecture reading back through the works of man in a brief delineation of the aberrant disorder and mad*" (original italicized) (3). Going to sell his fish, Suttree enters the market building where bricks "the color of dried blood rose turreted and cupolaed and crazed into the heat of the day form on form in demented accretion without precedent or counterpart in the annals of architecture" (67). Described generally as a postmodern collection of architectural motifs and styles derived from the history of architecture, the city's buildings were conceived individually to stand alone in atomistic isolation. As a result, the overall urban environment lacks coherence and meaning.⁸⁹ The artificial insubstantiality of the urban environment is emphasized by McCarthy's description of the city at night: "the city behind them drawn upon the dark with its neon geometry seemed somehow truer than the shape it wore by day" (§ 248).

Like the buildings, the people who populate downtown are merely stone edifices lacking the vitality of those who live in McAnally Flats: “Out there in the winter streets a few ashen anthroparians scuttling yet through the falling soot. Above them the shape of the city a colossal horde of retorts and alembics ranged against a starless sky” (188). Here, McCarthy employs a neologism “anthroparian” that highlights the difference between the flesh-and-blood inhabitants of McAnally Flats with the stone-like citizens of the city. “Parian” refers to white porcelain, suggesting that the “anthroparians” who frequent the city sidewalks have the appearance and demeanor of statues. Their whiteness contrasts with the blackness of the African Americans who predominate in McAnally Flats.

Besides its incoherent architecture, one of the more striking characteristics of the city is the hollowness upon which it is built. Based upon the actual geography of the Knoxville area, Suttree describes a city that is literally constructed above cavities that make the entire urban enterprise seem precarious and unsubstantial. This hollowness is made apparent when Harrogate witnesses a truck drop into a sinkhole (§ 259) and subsequently during Harrogate’s exploration of the “stone bowels whereon was founded the city itself” (§ 259). Harrogate is enthusiastic about his plan to blow the city’s bank vaults from below, gleefully wondering, “What if the whole fuckin city was to cave in?” Suttree humors Harrogate, saying, “That’s the spirit” (259), but he shares the desire to see the city implode.⁹⁰ Suttree’s fascination with the hollowness of the city, Young notes, “is not just with the flimsiness of the urban edifice; it is with the cultural substrata of a modern city, the underlying increments by which ‘civilized’ life has evolved” (110). The architecture above ground and the cavities below combine to reinforce McCarthy’s contempt not just for the city but for the ideas upon which it is built. Juxtaposed to this critique of the city is both McCarthy’s and Suttree’s veneration for the nonhuman natural world.

The influence of the city on the broader landscape is not limited to the buildings of the downtown business district but extends in all directions in the form of structures and institutions that support the functioning of Cartesian society. The common motif in the novel that links all of these structures and institutions is concrete. McCarthy's Cartesian world is constructed of concrete. Besides the sheer number of occurrences of the word "concrete" in the novel, McCarthy's own interest in stone laying and the role of cement in his play The Stonemason also suggests that the repeated references to concrete are significant.⁹¹ Throughout the book, McCarthy pairs "concrete" specifically with structures and institutions that function within Cartesian society: the concrete jails (84-86, 280), the concrete "box" used to punish prisoners in the workhouse (36, 37, 39, 40, 43, 48), the workhouse itself (52), the concrete dolphins at his family ruined ancestral home (135), the concrete font in a church (253), and, lastly, the concrete piers, columns and ramps of the new expressway (463, 471). Besides these references there are many others that indicate that for McCarthy, concrete construction is a defining characteristic of Cartesian society.⁹²

Of the concrete structures in the novel, the Henley Street Bridge that spans the Tennessee River and the squalor of McAnally Flats is the most significant.⁹³ In the many descriptions of this bridge throughout the novel, McCarthy almost always notes the material of which it is made and often remarks on the shadow it casts: Suttree watches the "pigeons ascending into [the bridge's] concrete understructure" (89) and notices its lengthening shadow on the water at the end of a day. Harrogate walks "under the concrete arch" (96), studying the darkness it casts and the slate-colored birds that croon "among the concrete trusses overhead" (97). On his skiff, Suttree drifts

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. Glancing up at these cathedraled vaultings with their fossil woodknots and pseudomorphic nailheads in gray concrete, drifting, the bridge's slant shadow leaning the width of the river with that headlong illusion postulate in old cupracers frozen on photoplates, their wheels elliptic with speed. These shadows form over the skiff, accommodate his prone figure and pass on. (7)

The bridge is a modern cathedral built in honor of human engineering prowess. The impression of woodknots in the concrete reveals the organic casings that were used to build this inorganic structure of poured concrete, suggesting the cost to nonhuman nature of this human edifice. The metaphor of cupracers further links the bridge to motorcars and emphasizes the value of speed that makes such an enormous (and expensive) structure necessary in the automotive age. Besides speed, the purpose of the bridge is to enable cars and trucks to cross the river unaffected by topography, the river, or the slums. By spanning both river and slum, the bridge enables the daily commuters to bypass the environmental and human degradation evident there, effectively making these byproducts of Cartesian society invisible.

The importance of the bridge as a symbol of Cartesian society is not limited to the spanning of river and slum. The bridge link the Cartesian desire to control the environment with its obsession with technology. Most specifically, the bridge is designed to transport cars across the river, thereby enabling commuters living far from town to quickly and easily drive long distances to the central business district. This is particularly apparent to the people who live underneath the bridge. Though Harrogate hears "the sewage gurgling and shuttling along through the pipes hung from the bridge's underbelly overhead," the most dominant sound coming

from the bridge is "[t]he hum of tires" (136). Suttree wakes up early to see the "gray shape of the city gathering out of the fog On the bridge the lights of the cars crossed like candles in the mist" (107). Most powerfully, however, the ragman thinks about the cars that travel above his hovel in the base of one of the bridge's massive concrete pillars:

The sound of morning traffic upon the bridge beat with the dull echo of a dream in his cavern and the ragman would have wanted a sager soul than his to read in their endless advent auguries of things to come, the specter of mechanical proliferation and universal blight. (256)

The ragman, though a nihilist, thinks about the cars passing above him on the bridge in much the same way an environmentalist would. He sees the endless stream of cars as a harbinger for the increased automobile dependency that would characterize the second half of the twentieth century in America. His thoughts prove to be prophetic. Most immediately, McAnally Flats will soon be leveled and its inhabitants dispersed to make room for an expressway. However, his thoughts are even more prophetic in predicting the suburbanization of modern American society, a socio-economic trend that perpetuates a cycle of land-clearing, building, and paving that causes enormous environmental damage.⁹⁴

The ragman's dread of the increased mechanization of human society is strikingly similar to the criticism of unbridled technological development in deep ecology. Naess writes,

the technological developments in modern industrial societies have resulted in continuous pressures towards a kind of lifestyle repugnant not only to supporters of the deep ecology movement but to those in most alternative movements. Some of the reasons for such a confrontation are fairly obvious: modern industrial technology is a centralizing factor, it tends towards bigness, it decreases the area

within which one can say “self-made is well-made,” it attaches us to big markets, and forces us to seek an ever-increasing income. The administrative technologies are adapted to the physical technologies and encourage more and more impersonal relations. (92)

For Naess, the “centralizing factor” of modern industrial technology refers broadly to the global economic markets and political entities evident in the modern world. In many cases, such technology is an impediment to an individual’s Self-realization because it mediates an individual’s experience with nature. Such separation leads to “impersonal relations” and to an inability to extend ethical consideration to other humans and nature. Naess is not a Luddite, but he believes that it is necessary to evaluate new technology in light of social and cultural goals; he argues that currently “in the industrial societies, these social consequences [of new technologies] are not given enough consideration” (94).⁹⁵ For McCarthy, the “centralizing factor” is the downtown, where the institutions of government and finance are located. Suttree’s experiences downtown illustrate the “impersonal relations” that result from technologies, both administrative and physical, and that isolate humans from one another and alienate humans from nature.

McCarthy’s skepticism of technology and increased mechanization is also strikingly parallel to that of his fellow Southerners, the Nashville Agrarians, who warned of the consequences of rampant industrialization in their collection I’ll Take My Stand. In his essay, John Crowe Ransom writes that human “engines transform the face of nature—a little—but when they have been perfected, he must invent new engines that will perform even more heroically. And always the next engine of his invention . . .” (8). Ultimately, “there will be a stream of further labor-saving devices in all industries, and the cycle will have to be repeated over and over. The result is an increasing disadjustment and instability” (Twelve Southerners

“Introduction” xlv). The ragman’s fear of mechanical proliferation and universal blight (256), as well as that of Naess and the Agrarians, is realized at the end of the novel as McAnally Flats is razed for a new expressway to accommodate additional cars coming into downtown Knoxville.

As part of the urban landscape in Suttree, cars symbolize Cartesian thinking that is responsible for the domination of nature and human Others.⁹⁶ Certainly, there are cars in McAnally Flats and in the country, but their function in Cartesian society and their negative impact on the other landscapes link them to the city. Generally, functioning automobiles are driven by anonymous commuters and police officers while barely functioning or nonfunctioning cars reside in McAnally Flats. When Suttree is serving time in the workhouse, he spends his days on a road crew. In the mornings, "A few cars eased past, faces at the glass. Men bound for work in the city looking out with no expression at all" (45), a description that echoes the couple driving by the cemetery at the end of The Orchard Keeper. Here, the narrative voice is clearly making a judgment on the lives of those Cartesian commuters. The image of the expressionless drivers heading to the city suggests a lifelessness that is very different from the humorous and vital experience of men in the workhouse.⁹⁷ Later, when Suttree emerges from the ruin of his ancestral home, he looks across the river and sees "traffic going along the boulevard, locked in another age of which some dread vision had afforded him this lonely cognizance" (135). The world of the mansion, which symbolizes the South's blasted plantation past, is lost, but the people who lived there, Suttree's paternal ancestry, have simply moved to the world of the automobile on the other side of the river. Like the ragman, Suttree looks upon the traffic as a dread vision of the Cartesian city from which he seeks escape. As Suttree stands there looking, he knows that he can find meaning in neither his family's plantation past nor its urban present because both realities originate from the same Cartesian sensibility.

Though Suttree is aware of the significance of the automobile, he is not immune to its allure. During his life with Joyce, which constitutes a backward step in his existential quest, Suttree buys a used convertible Jaguar. As a result of living in an apartment, setting up a bank account (and filling it with the proceeds of Joyce's prostitution), and buying consumer goods, Suttree is drawn into buying the ultimate symbol of bourgeoisie respectability. However, even before he has purchased the car, as he listens to the salesman's pitch, he feels "himself being slowly anesthetized" (405). The feeling is a foreshadowing of the inevitable breakdown of this relatively conventional life with Joyce. Between the purchase of the car and the breakup of the relationship, Suttree slips into a lifestyle he had desperately tried to escape. With the car, Suttree and Joyce take trips that are meant, ostensibly, to be parodies of bourgeois vacations, but they end up being little more than conventional vacations. Staying at the Grove Park Inn in Asheville, they ate lunch on the

sunny tile terrace overlooking the golf course They went about the premises leisurely, these apprentice imposters, or sat by the pool while she told outrageous lies to the other guests. [After nighttime mountain rides, they] came back to have drinks in the lounge where a small orchestra played music from another era and older couples twosteped quietly over the dimlit dancefloor. (407)

Suttree finds himself in his father's world. In his attempt to find meaning in a romantic relationship—albeit with an unconventional woman—he inadvertently adopts a conventional life of materialism and mechanism that is embodied in the automobile. It is Joyce who recognizes the car as emblematic of a materialism that has destroyed their romance. Drunk and angry, she thrashes about the car, grabbing the gearstick, kicking out the windshield, smashing the radio knobs. Suttree, horrified at the destruction of the car, screams obscenities at her to which she

responds, “It’s just a car It can be fixed.” Police stop them and ask Suttree for his papers—documents that signify his compliance with the rules and regulations and that attest to his respectability and ownership. Suttree responds by leaving; he “put the keys back in the car and walked on out across the tarmac to the street. She was shouting at him some half drunken imprecations, all he could make out was his name. He seemed to have heard it all before and he kept on going” (411). This attempt to find meaning in romantic love has failed. He abandons Joyce and the car and walks back to his houseboat and to his environmental life.

In McAnally Flats, abandoned cars outnumber functioning ones. Most notable are the wrecked automobiles in Harvey’s junkyard. When Harrogate enters the drunken junkman’s lot he notices that it is “crammed with the salvage of highway disaster” (93). The junkman gives Harrogate the job of ripping leather upholstery out of a car, but Harrogate bolts when he discovers a human eye belonging to a victim of the wreck (96). The junkyard, which reappears occasionally, illustrates the human cost of the automobile in literal terms. Not only are human Others and nonhuman nature degraded by the automobile, but the very people who own and operate these vehicles are killed because of the machine’s design. The junkyard is filled with the cast-off mechanical hulks that no longer function in Cartesian society, a testament to the waste created in a mechanistic consumer economy. As Modris Eksteins argues in the Preface of Rites of Spring, the automobile graveyard is “the most prominent memorial to the twentieth century and our cultural references. Many would say that it is a symbol of modern values and aims, of our striving and our regrets, the contemporary interpretation of Goethe’s invocations *stirb und werde, die and become*” (xiii).⁹⁸ The junkman himself seems to be a casualty of his trade. Though there are many alcoholics in McAnally Flats, Harvey is one character who is always drunk, either lounging in his junkyard (93, 208) or wandering around accusing a relative of a

wrong that is never specified (264-68). As a figure inextricably linked with the automobile, he embodies the point made by Alfred Alvarez in The Savage God that technology (and by implication the city, a product of technology) is linked with man's growing sense of estrangement and absurdity (244).

The presence of wrecked cars in McAnally Flats is not limited to the junkyard. As a subtle motif running throughout the novel, abandoned and wrecked automobiles litter the riverside landscape. Suttree and others often find themselves dumped in wrecked automobiles after drinking binges. One night, Suttree ends up lying "on the moldy upholstery of an old car seat" after being dragged past "the rusting carcass of an automobile"(79); what Suttree hears at this time is particularly mechanical: "A switchengine shunted cars in a distant yard, telescoping them in crescendo coupling by coupling to an iron thunder that rattled sashwork all down McAnally Flats" (80). As he comes to his senses, he notices the landscape of "stonegray shacks and gutted auto hulks" (81). After a night at the Green Room, Suttree finds "Reese asleep in a wrecked car" (341). And towards the end of the book, the narrator reports that "a female simpleton is waking naked from a gang-fuck in the back of an abandoned car by the river" (416). Abandoned cars also provide temporary shelter; in winter, Suttree and a group of his friends light fires and huddle together in abandoned cars to seek shelter from the cold weather (184). The use of abandoned cars for shelter, from the standpoint of social justice, indicates a lack of adequate housing, but the presence of wrecked cars in McAnally Flats in the first place reinforces the fact that the city perceives the slum as nothing more than a dumping ground for the obsolete objects of its consumerism.

Perhaps the most important kind of car in the novel is the police cruiser. As part of the landscape, the patrol car acts like a mechanical predator. A symbol of law and order, the police

cruiser appears to stalk Suttree. Early in the novel, Suttree is walking the streets after eating at the bus station cafe when a "police cruiser passed slowly. He moved on, from out of his eyecorner watching them watch" (29). After a night of binge drinking, Suttree staggers back home when a "police car was turning the corner" (83), and he is arrested. On his way out of the cemetery after his son's funeral, "a gray car with a gold escutcheon on the door came down the little gravel road and stopped alongside him" (156); again, he is apprehended and taken away from the respectable people of the town. After Reese and Suttree recover from their night at the Green Room, a police cruiser passes them, whereupon they are stopped and harassed (344). Later, Suttree reveals his contempt for the police when he is stopped at the scene of a house fire: "A police cruiser must ask his name, where is he going. Suttree proper and wellspoke, bridling the malice in his heart" (383). An example of metonymy, McCarthy uses the machine to take the place of the officer. But of all the encounters with police in automobiles, the most telling is Suttree's theft of a cruiser after its officers have run to chase Ab Jones (442).

The role of the police cruiser is related to an important topic in urban ecocriticism—the portrayal of inner-city urban environments as jungles and their inhabitants as savages. As Andrew Light argues, the role of police in representations of inner-city life is often one of surveillance and harassment, activities that are a constant in *McAnally Flats*. Writing about contemporary film, Light argues that in "Falling Down" "Menace II Society" and "Boyz in the Hood," the objective of police patrols is to keep the marginal populations contained within their geographic area and out of the more respectable parts of town. At the same time, Light continues, racial minorities are often described as "savage inhabitants of an urban wilderness," which is "a continuation of the general legacy of the depiction of racial others and nature itself as uncivilized and thus unworthy of equal moral consideration" (137). In such depictions, the

inner-city is assigned many of the characteristics of classical wilderness that needs to be subdued by civilization. In such a scenario, the police represent the “strong arms of a white government” (152) sent into these areas to subdue the “natives” and to keep the wilderness separate from civilization. Light’s analysis is useful in analyzing Suttree; McAnally Flats is a place within the city where blacks are segregated by race and economic status. As the narrator notes, when Harrogate walks from downtown to the slum, he comes “from the dwellingstreets of whites to those of blacks and no gray middle folk did he see” (101). Through surveillance, these agents of social and geographic control enforce the belief that “the separation of one part of the city from another is justified and rational” (Light 143). It is clear through the experiences of Ab Jones, the goatman, and Michael that the police do indeed employ a “logic of domination” to justify segregating the poor and black side of town from the respectable and white sections of town. The pattern of police surveillance, also evident in Ownby’s arrest in The Orchard Keeper, illustrates the characteristics of Cartesian society—the atomism of racial segregation, the domination of the “respectable” over the “disreputable,” and the use of technology as a mechanism of control. As such, the police cruiser is the ultimate symbol of Cartesian thinking in Suttree.

The automobile is the reason that McAnally Flats is destroyed. The end of Suttree is marked by the razing of McAnally Flats and the displacement of its population for the construction of an expressway. Before the physical demolition of McAnally Flats, however, there is the systematic dispersal of its population. McCarthy characterizes this time as a “season of death and epidemic violence” (416) and tells of the people from McAnally Flats who are killed, jailed, or otherwise institutionalized.⁹⁹ Others are pushed out through the pressures of the

market economy, many moving to work in northern factories. "Working as an assembler" in Cleveland (384), J-Bone is an example of the:

[o]thers from McAnally [who had] gone north to the factories. Old friends dispersed, perhaps none coming back, or few, them changed. Tennessee wetbacks drifting north in bent and smoking autos in search of wages. The rumors sifted down from Detroit, Chicago. Jobs paying two twenty an hour.
(398)

McCarthy is describing the latter stage of the Great Migration that started in the 1920s in which large numbers of African Americans from the rural south moved to the industrial centers of the north to work in factories.¹⁰⁰ While the causes of this migration involve complex economic forces, the consequence is the depopulation of McAnally Flats that makes the demolition of it for an expressway easier. Combined with the forced evacuations of people like Harrogate, Ab Jones, and the old railroader Watson, the economic evacuations of the community leaves McAnally Flats practically deserted.

Suttree studies the new concrete structures as well as the ruins that remain of McAnally:

. . . . Pale concrete piers veered off, naked columns of some fourth order capped with a red steel frieze. New roads being laid over McAnally, over the ruins, the shelled facades and walls standing in crazed shapes, the mangled iron firestairs dangling, the houses halved, broke open for the world to see. This naked spandrel clinking someway to sheer wallpaper and mounting upward to terminate in nothingness and night like the works of Babel.

They're tearing everything down, Suttree said.

Yeah. Expressway.

Sad chattel stood on the cinder lawns, in the dim lilac lamplight. Old sofas bloated in the rain exploding quietly, shriveled tables sloughing off their papery veneers. A backdrop of iron earthmovers reared against the cokeblown sky.

New roads through McAnally, said J-Bone.

Suttree nodded, his eyes shut. He knew another McAnally, good to last a thousand years. There'd be no new roads there. (463)

In referring to the concrete pillars of the new expressway as “naked columns of some fourth order,” McCarthy is adding to the Doric, Ionic, and Corinthian columns of classical architecture. Such an association links modern society to ancient Greece and Rome, but it also disparages the lack of aesthetics in industrial design.¹⁰¹ The massive public works project will benefit those who drive from far away into the city but will displace those who lived near the city in the first place.

As he watches the destruction of McAnally Flats, he thinks, "Gnostic workmen who would have down this shabby shapeshow that masks the higher world of form" (464). For McCarthy, “gnostic,” as Leo Daugherty and Rich Wallach have argued, refers to a theology that views Earth as a corrupt version of a perfect heavenly world and that views humans as the only beings on the planet capable of transcendence. It is a theology that separates heaven from earth and human from nonhuman; as such, McCarthy identifies these gnostic workmen as part of the Cartesian worldview. As Matthew Guinn has argued, the workmen are like Suttree's father in that both are obsessed with form and dedicated to the chimera of order. Whereas his father endorses institutions that “reify meaning through a delusive ordering principle . . .[,] the workmen who raze McAnally Flats serve the ordering version of commerce and conventional

progress” (113). Clearly, as Bell has argued, “the builders of cities continue to miss the point as they continue the collective doomed flight from nature and death” (110). At the same time that McCarthy critiques the city, he elevates McAnally Flats. By masking “the higher world of form,” McAnally Flats represents a different paradigm than the conventional city on the hill. Though Suttree’s vision of “another McAnally” is ambiguous, it includes a human community that is more aware of natural processes and cycles and that is more communal and altruistic than the city.

Viewing the destruction of McAnally Flats, Suttree decides to leave; while waiting for a ride away from Knoxville, he watches carpenters “hammering up forms and a cement truck wait[ing] with its drum slowly clanking” (470). Before he leaves he sees “the white concrete of the expressway gleam[ing] in the sun where a ramp curved out into empty air and hung truncate with iron rods bristling among the vectors of nowhere” (471). And Suttree flees.

It is appropriate that Suttree is McCarthy’s last southern novel. As the more agriculturally based economy of the “Old South” has been replaced by the industrial- and finance-based economy of the “Sun Belt,” much that distinguished southern literature from that of the rest of the country has become irrelevant, historical, or nostalgically quaint. For Suttree and for McCarthy such a transformation of the region has resulted in a cultural alienation of humans from nonhuman nature. As the south joined the rest of the nation to become a society of suburban dwellers reliant upon machines, what was necessarily lost was that which McCarthy and his environmentalist characters are looking for—a life deeply connected to other humans and the nonhuman world. John Grammar approaches this ecocritical understanding of McCarthy and his characters when he argues that

the ruling desire of McCarthy's strongest characters, from Arthur Ownby in The Orchard Keeper to Cornelius Suttree in Suttree, is to live in some place that is not yet touched by the complications of the modern world, where it is possible to be one with the earth and to live in a genuine human community. In practice this means that they want not so much to reverse history as to transcend it. (33)

For Grammar, Bell, and other critics, the desire of McCarthy's characters to live outside of the increasingly mechanistic and alienated culture of Cartesian society is romantic at best and foolhardy at worst. McCarthy himself is incredulous that such an existence is possible, but at the end of Suttree he leaves open the possibility of finding it. Suttree leaves Knoxville for places unknown. His attempt to live on and off of the river and in a diverse and vital community of people has ultimately failed because of the rapacious development of Cartesian society, but his determination to live close to the environment and outside of the mainstream remains strong. Such a life, it is clear, is not to be found in the post-agrarian, industrial south, so it must be pursued elsewhere. McCarthy shares his fictional creation's desire to flee the south, and in 1977, he relocated to the southwest. McCarthy leaves the south but continues to write about the conflict between environmentalist and Cartesian characters as well as about the related persecution of humans and nature resulting from Cartesian thinking. These are McCarthy's environmentalist themes that weave throughout not only his southern but also his southwest novels.

CHAPTER FIVE

Conclusion: McCarthy's Growing Environmental Sensibility in His Southwestern Novels

After McCarthy finished Suttree, he moved from Tennessee to Texas, and since then he has set all of his subsequent books in the border region between the United States and Mexico. This move has had a tremendous impact on his life and his art; as Robert Jarrett states, "Viewed in retrospect, McCarthy's move to the Southwest in 1977 represents a sudden break with his past, including his family, wife, and career in Southern fiction" (4).¹⁰² Why McCarthy moved to Texas and set his remaining novels in the desert can only be guessed given his unwillingness to grant interviews or even to read his work in public; "everything he had to say," his ex-wife recalls, "was on the page" (Woodward 30). One of the things that McCarthy has left "on the page" that may explain his departure from Tennessee is the pattern of male characters who flee the south. John Wesley Rattner in The Orchard Keeper and Cornelius Suttree in Suttree leave the south, at least in part, because of the encroachment of modern institutions and their environmentally degrading technology. In The Orchard Keeper, the construction of a metal tank adjacent to the abandoned orchard leads to Arthur Ownby's rebellious act and to John Wesley Rattner's decision to abandon the region. Likewise, Suttree flees a city and a region that is increasingly being paved over for the benefit of commerce and technology at the expense of the environment and of marginal human populations who find themselves in the way.

This pattern of flight from the south reappears in McCarthy's first southwestern novel, Blood Meridian. Instead of fleeing at the end of the novel, as do the heroes in the southern

novels, the “kid” in Blood Meridian flees at the very beginning. While the primary reasons he leaves the south are his drunken, abusive father and his own brooding “taste for mindless violence,” it is significant that he leaves a father who is a schoolteacher and not a “hewer of wood” or a “drawer of water” like his ancestors; it is also significant that the kid leaves a place where the forests “harbor yet a few last wolves” (3). These details suggest that modernity is already alienating humans from nature in the 1840s.¹⁰³ In addition to other important factors, the kid flees to the desert southwest where life for any creature is a daily struggle to survive in harsh environmental conditions. The departures of Rattner, Suttree, and the kid from the south—along with the subsequent depictions in The Border Trilogy of characters who strive to remain deeply connected to the nonhuman world—suggest that McCarthy’s move to the desert southwest re-immersed the author in a place where the nonhuman natural environment can be more integral to the daily life of human beings than is possible in the modern, developed, and homogenized south.

The ecological difference between McCarthy’s Appalachia and his desert southwest could not be more dramatic. The mountains, dense forests, and caves that typify McCarthy’s southern novels provide an insularity and seclusion for his characters that do not exist in his desert novels where characters seem always visible and always vulnerable. Both ecosystems are rugged and, except for Suttree, are removed from cities, but McCarthy’s desert is more dangerous than his mountains, partly because of the extremities of temperature and the scarcity of water in the desert but also because of the humans who populate his southwestern novels.

Despite their significant ecological differences, McCarthy’s southern and southwestern novels are unified in other ways. Many of the same character types and many of the same themes remain constant despite the shift in geography. For instance, the Glanton gang in Blood

Meridian is essentially a more horrific form of the marauding trio in Outer Dark; each group has a spokesman, Judge Holden and the bearded one respectively, whose philosophy reflects his and his companions' violent acts. Likewise, the southwestern books continue to illustrate the same existential and ontological questions as the southern novels. From an ecocritical standpoint, McCarthy still portrays Cartesian characters dominating both environmentalist characters and nonhuman nature. Like Child of God, Blood Meridian lacks an environmentalist character but ties the human characters' anti-social and pathological behavior to their alienation from nature. More importantly, the character of Judge Holden represents the most sophisticated and developed personification of Cartesian thinking in all of McCarthy's novels. In The Border Trilogy, McCarthy portrays the plight of young environmentalist characters, John Grady Cole and Billy Parham, who can be seen as more developed versions of John Wesley Rattner from The Orchard Keeper. In particular, Parham and Rattner experience an environmental awakening as a result of their contact with endangered wildlife; seen in this way, Parham's experience with the wolf is an amplification of Rattner's experience with the hawk.¹⁰⁴ These general comparisons suggest that the southwestern novels reaffirm what McCarthy has portrayed throughout his previous novels—an environmentalism that shows his more heroic characters struggling but ultimately failing to maintain a connection with the environment as they are persecuted by a Cartesian society that does not perceive the consequences of its environmental destruction.

As the more traditional criticism cited throughout this study indicates, there is more to McCarthy's novels than this pattern of Cartesian society's dominance of environmental characters and the nonhuman environment. However, while non-ecocritical scholarship has continued to acknowledge the aesthetic and thematic complexity of McCarthy's work, more

scholars are also acknowledging the presence of ecocritical themes in the southwestern novels and a few have identified deep ecology as a way of understanding McCarthy's relationship with the nonhuman natural world. This new ecocritical focus is the result of the increased role of nature in McCarthy's later novels as well as the growth of the ecocriticism itself. At the same time, these articles do not identify the connection between McCarthy's deep ecological affinities and his concomitant critique of Cartesian thinking—a connection that unifies an ecocritical reading of all of his novels.

The purpose of this study has been to reassess the role of the natural environment in McCarthy's southern novels by analyzing the relationship that his heroes and anti-heroes have with human and nonhuman nature. This conclusion proposes that the next step in analyzing the presence of environmental and Cartesian thinking is to study the conflicts in McCarthy's southwestern novels. By using the theoretical approach developed here, it is possible to see that the ecocritical themes present in his southern novels reemerge in his southwestern novels with even greater intensity. By broadening the scope of critical inquiry, a more developed ecocritical approach can further challenge the anthropocentric readings that have dominated McCarthy criticism. Such a rereading emphasizes the meaning that environmental characters gain from contact with nature that is absent from the existentialist and nihilistic perspectives. In doing so, future study will continue to develop what kind of environmental writer he is: one who, with an unflinching, naturalistic eye, describes the power of nature in both its transcendent beauty and its ability to destroy; one whose more heroic characters share a deep ecological philosophy of biological egalitarianism; one whose horrific anti-heroes view the world through the anthropocentric, atomistic, hierarchical, and mechanistic perspective of Cartesian thinking, which results in the suffering and destruction of both humans and nonhumans. Finally, this

conclusion reveals the need for additional investigation of the role of nature in all of McCarthy's eight novels.

Blood Meridian is considered by many to be McCarthy's magnum opus, and it has garnered more critical attention than any of his other works (Owens 3). The high critical standing of Blood Meridian is reflected in Harold Bloom's "Introduction" to the Modern Critical Views volume devoted to McCarthy: "I venture that no other living American author, not even Pynchon, has given us a book as strong and memorable as Blood Meridian . . ." (1). Bloom asserts, "The fulfilled renown of Moby-Dick and of As I Lay Dying is augmented by Blood Meridian, since Cormac McCarthy is the worthy disciple of Melville and of Faulkner" (1). McCarthy's indebtedness to Faulkner has been noted since the publication of The Orchard Keeper, but comparisons of McCarthy and Melville begin and end, as Bloom indicates, with the discussion of Blood Meridian. Vereen Bell was the first to make the connection between the Blood Meridian and Moby-Dick, viewing the enigmatic and frightening character of Judge Holden as "a direct descendant of Melville's Ahab" (119). Bloom, on the other hand, sees the seven-foot tall, bald and otherwise hairless Holden as "Moby-Dick rather than Ahab. As another white enigma, the albino Judge, like the albino whale, cannot be slain" (4). Others have noted the similarities between the kid and Ishmael, and between the Glanton gang and the crew of the Pequod (Jarrett 76).¹⁰⁵ Dana Philips argues that while Blood Meridian includes many of the same characters and even some of the same language as Melville's novel, McCarthy's use of landscape leads to vastly different philosophical conclusions. Though a number of analogues exist between Melville's use of the ocean and McCarthy's use of the desert and though

McCarthy sounds Melvillean when he sees the desert as a place “to try whether the stuff of creation may be shaped to man’s will” (BM 5),

McCarthy does not go on to portray the tragic downfall of characters guilty of cosmic presumption. Whereas Melville was anxious to record his horror of darkness by having his characters react to it, Blood Meridian treats darkness, violence, sudden death, and all other calamities as natural occurrences—like the weather, which can also be vicious in McCarthy’s border landscapes. (Philips 438-39)

Besides discussing the similarities and differences between Blood Meridian and Moby Dick, the most prevalent critical topic in the criticism of McCarthy’s fifth novel is the possible meaning of its extreme violence. The book has been seen both as an example of regeneration through violence (Arnold “Naming” 60-63) and as a nihilistic text in which the violence is indicative of nothing except the perpetuation of more violence (Parrish 26-27). For Bell, the novel is a portrayal and an articulation of a metaphysic of violence espoused by Judge Holden throughout:

‘War is God,’ he proclaims (p. 249), and this odd shibboleth is supported in the novel by a genuine metaphysic that piece by piece the judge articulates. It is enacted everywhere in the novel by his dimmer protégés. It is put into words, with a Jacobean grandeur and cogency, only by the judge. (Bell 120)

“War was always here,” the Judge says, “Before man was, war waited for him” (248). Since violence defines human history, the Judge rationalizes, it must be holy; otherwise, “man is nothing but antic clay” (307). In what amounts to tacit agreement with the judge, most scholars

agree that the story of the kid, the judge, and the Glanton gang supports D.H. Lawrence's observation that "the essential American soul is hard, isolate, stoic and a killer" (65).

Many critics have focused on McCarthy's use of history, beginning with John Sepich, whose Notes on Blood Meridian identified many of McCarthy's source materials. Bell recognizes Blood Meridian as "a novel about the American west [that] presses the psychology of the frontier theory to its logical, appalling extreme" (119). Others have argued that the book can be seen more specifically within the context of Manifest Destiny (Sepich 10, Jarrett 124, Shaviro 144 et al). Robert Jarrett reflects the critical judgment that

As a historical romance, Blood Meridian begins its revisionary project in its selection of narrative materials to tell a story (not The Story) of the Southwest, avoiding the well-covered ranching era after the Civil War to focus on the largely ignored era of Manifest Destiny. (74)

It is this idea that Blood Meridian can be seen as McCarthy's revisionist account of "Manifest Destiny" that is central to an ecocritical re-evaluation of the novel.

The term "Manifest Destiny" was first used by John O'Sullivan in 1845 when he wrote in the Democratic Review that it was America's "manifest destiny to overspread the continent allotted by Providence for the free development of our yearly multiplying millions" (Zinn 149). Such a doctrine rested on the belief that, in the words of one congressman, "This continent was intended by Providence as a vast theatre on which to work out the grand experiment of Republican government under the auspices of the Anglo-Saxon race" (Takaki 176). Using such thinking, the proponents of Manifest Destiny strove to extend the United States from the Atlantic to the Pacific Oceans, regardless of the established sovereignty of other countries or the indigenous peoples who already lived in those lands. It is not surprising that the term was coined

in 1845 because it was used widely as the political-theological justification for the 1846-1848 war between Mexico and the United States. The Mexican War was ostensibly fought over the disputed border between Texas and Mexico, but, as the terms of the Treaty of Hidalgo show, the outcome resulted in the realization of Manifest Destiny. Besides establishing the Texas border at the Rio Grande, the treaty provided over half a million square miles of Mexican territory now lying within the states of California, Nevada, Utah, New Mexico, Arizona, Wyoming, and Colorado (Rico and Mano 556).

With the country now stretching the width of the continent, Americans faced the task of “settling,” “taming,” “conquering,” or otherwise “winning” the west. In actuality, as historians Howard Zinn and Ronald Takaki have argued, the task of western expansion led to the subjugation of Native American, Mexicans, and the land itself (Zinn 145-66, Takaki 166-90). The view that the land, along with the nonwhites who lived on the land, needed to be tamed is evident in the words of John Adams who said that to settle the west, Americans would have to “conquer it from the trees and rocks and wild beasts” (Garraty 368). Such a conflation of nonwhite humans and nonhuman nature, of course, has been identified by social ecology as characteristic of Western culture and its societal institutions. Though there are aspects of McCarthy’s novel that certainly reflect the doctrine of Manifest Destiny, particularly the figure of Captain White, an ecocritical re-evaluation of Blood Meridian argues that, more than an account of Manifest Destiny, McCarthy’s fifth novel can be seen as a novel about Cartesian thinking set during the period of Western expansion.

To argue that Blood Meridian is a revisionist novel about Manifest Destiny tends to simplify the contradictions within the novel. Most important is the fact that the murderous members of the Glanton gang harbor not the slightest pretense of being on a crusade for Manifest

Destiny. Their main motivation in roaming the desert in search of scalps is greed; as Sepich explains, the payment of a single scalp, “exceeded the amount which a gang member could earn by hard labor in a year” (7). Far from championing the goals of Manifest Destiny, the gang is employed throughout much of the book by the governors of the Mexican states of Chihuahua and Sonora. While Captain White professes the more stereotypically racist tenets of Manifest Destiny when he claims that the members of his filibuster will be “the instruments of liberation in a dark and troubled land” (BM 34),¹⁰⁶ the members of the Glanton gang have no ideological reason for their actions. A much more accurate way to view Captain White and the Glanton gang is to see them as exhibiting the hierarchical dualism inherent in Cartesian thinking. A far more developed manifestation of Cartesian thinking in Blood Meridian, however, is the dominating figure of Judge Holden.

Harold Bloom calls Judge Holden, “the most frightening figure in American literature” (1). What makes him so horrifying is that he not only outmatches the brutality of the other members of the Glanton gang but also possesses an especially keen intelligence. He exhibits his knowledge of the world through both his actions—as seen when he makes gunpowder from materials found in the desert—and in his many speeches. Throughout the book, Holden lectures on a wide variety of topics, rarely missing “an opportunity to ventilate himself” (BM 240).¹⁰⁷ Of all of McCarthy’s characters, Judge Holden is without question the most articulate. What exactly he is articulating, however, is at issue.

One question that has been raised is whether or not what the judge says throughout the novel is necessarily consistent. Bell concludes that while the judge’s arguments seem to cohere and while he prevails in the end of the book, he contradicts himself by first espousing the

stability of history and knowledge throughout but finally conceding that “Men’s memories are uncertain and the past that was differs little from the past that was not” (BM 331):

The fact that [the judge’s] rhetorical authority obscures real contradictions for both himself and his listeners is a sign that he has contrived a belief system for which unwavering conviction itself is the objective.

It is the very cornerstone of his own argument that the judge himself discloses to be fundamentally insecure. Having appealed to the evidence of “historical law,” to the “historical absolute,” to support his claim that war and power are sacred, he subsequently attempts to argue—toward another end—that the reality of the past can be subject to doubt because the power of the human mind that seeks to recall it is fallible. (125-26)

Bell’s analysis of the judge does not, in the end, minimize the character’s frightening power. The apparent contradictions within the judge’s speeches fail to lessen his ability to act with impunity, but the contradictions do reveal something about the judge’s use of language; as Philips points out, “it is a mistake . . . to regard his speeches as representative of his character. Because they are first and foremost literary performances, the sum of his speeches does not equal a whole person” (441). In instances in which the judge is most disingenuous is when he is trying to dupe others, as is evident during his lecture to the kid about jurisprudence (BM 292, 293).

In other cases, his words parallel his actions in such a way that they amplify the significance of what he does. When the judge speaks of his relationship with the natural world, for instance, he is often engaged in cataloguing and then destroying human artifacts and nonhuman creatures (BM 140, 173, 198). This consistency between word and deed with regard to nature is more indicative of his character than his other speeches that Bell and Philips have

found contradictory or disingenuous. It is in the instances when words and actions correlate that the judge can be seen as McCarthy's greatest personification of Cartesian thinking.

The identification of the novel in general and the judge in particular as indictments of Western culture has already been articulated by Bell. He states that Blood Meridian can be read as a critique of our culture's anthropocentrism. What the judge says and he and his confederates act out eventually seems like an only slightly demented revival of Enlightenment philosophy, and the judge's intellectual imperialism may be read finally as an instance of what happens if Enlightenment doctrine is pressed to its logical conclusion. (124)

Because anthropocentrism and Enlightenment philosophy are inherent in what this dissertation has identified as Cartesian thinking, it is significant that Bell first identifies them as driving forces in Blood Meridian. With this recognition, Bell approaches an ecocritical understanding of Blood Meridian but fails to acknowledge the presence of "Enlightenment philosophy" in McCarthy's other novels. The same anthropocentric, atomistic, and hierarchical thinking that is "pressed to its logical extreme" in Blood Meridian is in fact present in all of McCarthy's previous novels.

Bell describes the judge as "a naturalist as well as a warrior-intellectual" (124), but Holden's form of natural study is more accurately described in Cartesian or Baconian terms in which the purpose of the study of nature is to control and to harness nature to serve human ends. Throughout the novel, McCarthy describes the judge shooting and stuffing exotic birds, pressing leaves, trapping butterflies, and recording his finds in a notebook, "a grotesque and demonic Audubon who 'tabernacle[s]' the natural world in his ledger by inscribing, then destroying, the objects of his ruthless gaze" (Lilley 153). In perhaps the most often quoted passage of Blood

Meridian, the judge explains the purpose of his collecting and cataloguing. I quote at length to illustrate the extent to which Judge Holden is the embodiment of Cartesian thinking:

Whatever in creation exists without my knowledge exists without my consent. . . . Only nature can enslave man and only when the existence of each last entity is routed out and made to stand naked before him will he be properly suzerain of the earth. . . . The judge placed his hands on the ground. . . . This is my claim, he said. And yet everywhere upon it are pockets of autonomous life. Autonomous. In order for it to be mine nothing must be permitted to occur upon it save by my dispensation. . . . The man who believes that the secrets of the world are forever hidden lives in mystery and fear. Superstition will drag him down. The rain will erode the deeds of his life. But that man who sets himself the task of singling out the thread of order from the tapestry will by the decision alone have taken charge of the world and it is only by such taking charge that he will effect a way to dictate terms of his own fate. . . . The freedom of birds is an insult to me. I'd have them all in zoos. (198-99)

Perhaps no where else in all of McCarthy's works has a character expressed so directly, so articulately, and so fully the major characteristics of Cartesian thinking. The anthropocentrism is clearly apparent; the purpose of his constant collecting and cataloguing is to understand everything in nature in order to control and dominate it. His wish to be "suzerain" over all the earth echoes the words of Genesis that man is to "have dominion" over all the earth (1:28). The judge's desire to single "out the thread of order from the tapestry" also reflects Descartes's scientific method, but his motivation is not the appreciation of nature and of humans' place in it; the judge wants to understand nature's secrets for the purpose of exploitation and domination.

As a new kind of scientist that Descartes and Bacon envisioned, Holden wishes to “establish and extend the power and dominion of the human race itself over the universe” (Bacon Works 4: 114-15). As if McCarthy was referring to Bacon’s vision of utopia found in The New Atlantis, Holden would rather have all of the birds in zoos than allow them to be free (Bacon Atlantis 33). The difference between Bacon and Holden is the degree of malevolence in their desire to control nature. Both men wish to enslave nature in order to keep it from enslaving humans, and both men use sexual imagery in their description of how they wish to dominate nature, but Holden’s desire to dominate nature is driven by the sheer pleasure of doing so. As opposed to Bacon, Holden’s maliciousness toward nature is characterized ultimately by a desire to obliterate it. Bell’s assertion that the judge pushes Enlightenment or Cartesian philosophy to its logical extreme is, therefore, an accurate conclusion.

Another aspect of Blood Meridian that corresponds to the ecocritical themes developed in the previous chapters is the interrelated domination of human and nonhuman nature by the agents of Cartesian thinking. Though neither the judge nor the members of the Glanton gang take pains to differentiate between white and nonwhite victims or male and female victims, they do their most vicious scalp-hunting among the Native American and Mexican populations, a fact that indicates their belief in the racial superiority of whites.¹⁰⁸ The connection between the violence against nonwhites and nonhumans is less obvious in Blood Meridian than it was in Child of God and Suttree because the landscape in Blood Meridian contains fewer animals than the landscape in the southern novels. However, Jarrett illustrates the connection between humans and nonhumans by giving three examples of the gang’s violence against the innocent: “the massacres of the peaceful Tiguas and various Mexican villagers or in the judge and the Vandiemender’s use of newborn puppies for target practice (BM 173-74, 180-81, 192-93)” (Jarrett 75). The

murder of Native Americans, Mexicans, and puppies illustrates the contention of social ecology and ecofeminism that hierarchical thinking leads to the perception of human Others as animal-like and therefore inferior. This application of the “logic of domination,” as defined in chapter three, justifies the gang’s violent acts against human Others and nonhuman nature. The puppies, while not as potent symbol of nonhuman wild nature as—say—wolves, are much like the robin in Child of God that Lester Ballard gives to the toddler as a toy. The sheer, barbaric pleasure that the judge and the gang take in killing nonwhites and nonhumans suggest that, in their minds, there is little difference between the two. The judge’s decidedly Cartesian attitude toward nonhuman nature and the evidence of hierarchical thinking by both the judge and the gang toward nonwhites and nonhumans alike are just a few examples of the themes established in earlier chapters. A much more thorough analysis of Blood Meridian using ecological philosophy is needed to fully explore the implications of the novel’s violence.

Besides the Cartesian elements in Blood Meridian that link it to McCarthy’s more Cartesian-centered southern novels, Blood Meridian also includes a number of incidents in which McCarthy’s narrative voice disputes the judge’s hierarchical, anthropocentric view of humans as separate from and superior to nonhuman nature. In these passages, McCarthy describes humans as part of the environment and of no greater importance than any other phenomenon. Such a rendering, which he calls “optical democracy” in the narrative itself (BM 247), is similar to the biological egalitarianism of deep ecology. The criticism focusing on humans’ place in the environment, however, has failed to acknowledge this biocentric aspect of the novel. Instead, Bell and others have insisted that humans and nonhuman nature are separate. Bell contends that in Blood Meridian, as well as in all of McCarthy’s other novels, nature is “both a void and an emanation”:

If we think of the whole of Blood Meridian as a parable, it is a perfect vehicle for representing the futility of the human will—because of, not despite, the hubris that the Indian-killers embody and the judge rationalizes. The human beings constitute one protagonist and the natural world another. (133)

Bell's conclusion reveals both the ecological limitations of a more anthropocentric view of literature and the need for a full ecocritical analysis of the novel. By presuming that the hubris of the Indian-killers—a pride that is partly a manifestation of Cartesian thinking—is indicative of the essential nature of the human species, Bell re-affirms the Cartesian ontological belief that humans are separate from nature. Such a philosophical premise is, of course, completely counter to the widely accepted ecological and evolutionary view that humans are very much part of and inseparable from nonhuman nature. To argue that humans are separate from the rest of the natural world ignores how deeply McCarthy imbeds humans within the landscape and also ignores the more altruistic figures that appear in Blood Meridian and throughout McCarthy's other books. Though overshadowed by the overwhelming violence perpetrated by the Judge and the Glanton gang, other groups of people—including white Americans, Native Americans, and Mexicans—are present in the novel who do not subscribe to the nihilism of the gang and the rationalistic philosophy of Judge Holden.¹⁰⁹

More important to the idea that humans are inextricably linked to the nonhuman natural world are the examples describing humans as part of the environment. As the kid trudges through the desert and comes upon a flaming tree in the middle of a cold night, the equality between human and nonhuman is clear:

It was a lone tree burning on the desert. A heraldic tree that the passing storm had left afire. The solitary pilgrim [the kid] drawn up before it had traveled far to be

here and he knelt in the hot sand and held his numbed hands out while all about in that circle attended companies of lesser auxiliaries routed forth into the inordinate day, small owls that crouched silently and stood from foot to foot and tarantulas and solpugas and vinegarroons and the vicious mygale spiders and beaded lizards with mouths black as a chowdog's, deadly to man, and the little desert basilisks that jet blood from their eyes and the small sandvipers like seemly gods, silent and the same, in Jeda, in Babylon. A constellation of ignited eyes that edged the ring of light all bound in a precarious truce before this torch whose brightness had set back the stars in their sockets. (215)

McCarthy chooses a cast of ominous and lethal animals to join the kid at the flaming tree, a group of animals that seems like the nonhuman equivalent of the Glanton gang. But all of these creatures, human and nonhuman, gather in "a precarious truce" of a fiery communion that highlights their similarities more than their differences. In an even more trenchant deep ecological statement, however, McCarthy describes how the desert levels the relative importance of all elements of the natural world:

In the neuter austerity of that terrain all phenomena were bequeathed a strange equality and no one thing nor spider nor stone nor blade of grass could put forth claim to precedence. The very clarity of these articles belied their familiarity, for the eye predicates the whole on some feature or part and here was nothing more luminous than another and nothing more enshadowed and in the optical democracy of such landscapes all preference is made whimsical and a man and a rock become endowed with unguessed kinships. (247)

It is fundamental to deep ecology to recognize the “unguessed kinships” between humans and the other phenomena in the environment. In this case and in many others, it is McCarthy’s narrative voice that makes the claim of phenomenal interrelatedness—a narrative voice that subtly but consistently counterbalances Judge Holden’s hierarchical anthropocentrism.

Blood Meridian ends in the year 1878. As the kid travels to his death at the hands of the judge, he crosses the plains of north Texas, encountering an old buffalo hunter alone at his fire. The buffalo hunter tells the kid of the slaughter of what was thought to be an endless supply of buffalo:

On this ground alone between the Arkansas River and the Concho there was eight million carcasses for that’s how many hides reached the railhead. Two year ago we pulled out from Griffin for a last hunt. We ransacked the country. Six weeks. Finally found a herd of eight animals and we killed them and come in . They’re gone. Ever one of them that God ever made is gone as if they’d never been at all.
(317)

His final words are, “I wonder if there’s other worlds like this, he said. Or if this is the only one” (317). The judge has answered this question earlier in the novel: there were no other worlds, he affirms, and “there were no men anywhere in the universe save those upon the earth” (245). The resources on earth are finite, the episode illustrates—a fact that causes even the buffalo hunter to ponder the implication of species extinction. In the end, the buffalo hunter’s question and the judge’s answer project a dismal ecological future: one that McCarthy continues to explore in latest novels.

The Border Trilogy

McCarthy's last three southwestern novels are markedly different from Blood Meridian. The books that make up The Border Trilogy—All the Pretty Horses, The Crossing, and Cities of the Plain—are set before, during, and after World War II and represent a less violent and less nihilistic McCarthy, focusing more on romantic and fraternal love than rugged individualism. From an ecocritical standpoint, The Border Trilogy illustrates McCarthy's growing environmental sensibility. While Blood Meridian—like Child of God and Outer Dark—critiques Cartesian thinking, The Border Trilogy—like The Orchard Keeper and Suttree—reveals a greater understanding of deep ecology's biological egalitarianism. In the trilogy, McCarthy develops two environmentalist characters who struggle with the forces of Cartesian thinking as they attempt to maintain close contact with nonhuman nature. While John Grady Cole, the hero of All the Pretty Horses and Cities on the Plain, is the main environmental character in the trilogy, it is Billy Parham, the hero in The Crossing and a supporting character in Cities on the Plain, who best exemplifies McCarthy's more developed deep ecological sensibility. Specifically, in developing a relationship between Billy and a pregnant she-wolf, McCarthy depicts the she-wolf as a full character without overtly anthropomorphizing her. The episode, as well as the rest of the trilogy, shows that McCarthy is more interested than in his previous novels in overt environmental issues such as species extinction, military-industrial development of wild or agricultural lands, and the importance of human relationships with the nonhuman world.

McCarthy criticism has more readily acknowledged an environmental sensibility in The Border Trilogy, perhaps because recognizing its presence is unavoidable. However, more anthropocentric critics continue to discount the importance of the relationships between human characters and the nonhuman world. While Robert Jarrett views the departures of John Grady

Cole and Lacey Rawlins from Texas to Mexico in All the Pretty Horses on horseback as an “implicit rejection of the mechanized American Southwest of the post-World War II era” (101), he views their quests as futile attempts to recover the historic West. Because of their nostalgia for the past, neither John Grady nor Billy Parham in The Crossing is willing “to accept or assign himself an authentic social identity” (105). Both are “unable to move into ‘the world to come’” (106). Barclay Owens has argued that the boys’ journeys are updated but still naïve and idealistic versions of the traditional pastoral narrative. He sees the boys as unwilling to accept positions within conventional society. In reference to the picture of horses that hangs in the dining room of John Grady’s soon-to-be auctioned farmhouse, Owens argues that “to act on picturebook dreams means disregarding the solid realities of social conventions” (78). Along with Jarrett, Owens proposes that John Grady Cole and Billy Parham would have been better off if they had relinquished the desire to live in close contact with nature as their fathers and grandfathers had lived. The argument that John Grady and Billy are seeking some historic or pastoral past that is either gone or never was, however, minimizes the valid and contemporary ecological sensibility each possesses. Certainly, the boys are naïve in embarking on their trips, but viewed from the standpoint of ecocriticism, the boys’ refusal to assume a modern identity within contemporary Cartesian society is an act of defiance, much like Arthur Ownby’s shooting of the tank or John Wesley Rattner’s outrage at the county’s policy of paying a bounty for dead hawks. They reject a place in a social order that alienates humans from the rest of nature and that ultimately is responsible for environmental destruction. Regardless of the failure of their endeavors, their quests signify a deep ecological understanding of the importance of the nonhuman natural environment. As such, in a revision of Bell’s judgment of McCarthy’s characters, their quests reveal a commitment to the belief and values of an existentialist

environmentalism. In contrast to Jarrett's and Owens's suggestion that the boys should conform to the conventions of Cartesian society, an ecocritical reading views their failed efforts as acts of non-complicity in the alienation of humans from the rest of nature and the destruction of the environment.

Developing further the ideas of Jarrett and Owens, George Guillemin discusses the pastoral elements in The Border Trilogy and reaches approximately the same conclusion. Guillemin argues that "the trilogy's narrative voice develops a deep-seated nostalgia for a pastoral lifestyle closely associated with the southwestern lifestyle and clearly recognized as being anachronistic" (95). In the end, he concludes, "the trilogy as a whole tacitly acknowledges the obsolescence of utopian pastoralism" (116). At the same time that Guillemin discounts the value of the boys' quests, he suggests a more sensitive ecocritical reading that appreciates the environmental aspects of their quests. He argues that "the novels seem to reconceptualize literary pastoralism along posthumanist ecopastoral lines" (95). Drawing on Tim Poland's idea of the ecopastoral and the ecohero, Guillemin argues that the egocentric self of the traditional pastoral, as defined by Leo Marx, is replaced by an ecocentric self who "is aligned with its environment instead of imposing self on the environment" (118). Even further, Guillemin identifies this extension of self as an example of deep ecology: the ecohero is "a synthesis of . . . [the] image of the heroic Self with the image of the relational Self emergent in deep ecology, or *ecosophy*"(117). Despite this appreciation of The Border Trilogy in ecocritical terms, Guillemin concludes that McCarthy's environmentalism is weak:

The environmental critique contained in the Border Trilogy goes hardly beyond a negative assessment of all pastoralism "as of some site where life had not succeeded" because its ecological statement consists of little more than a

metaphysical flirt with nature. Indeed, McCarthy's ecopastoral allegoresis may well exhaust itself in reinstating nature as a literal fact and liberating it from its anthropocentric reduction to an object of human appropriation. . . . [T]he trilogy does little more than ground man and nature equally in the absolutely indifferent and absolutely shared materiality of existence. (126)

Though Guillemin is more sympathetic to the possibility of an ecocritical reading of The Border Trilogy that affirms McCarthy's deep-seated environmentalism, he dismisses it as a modern version of the classic pastoral that is "culturally constructed as an imaginary or poetic escapism and not as an effective ideology" (126). While diminishing the environmental aspects of the novel, Guillemin's view that McCarthy's treatment of "man and nature" affirms the "materiality of existence" is another way of confirming Bell's existentialist/nihilistic thesis of McCarthy's philosophical orientation.

Contrary to Jarrett, Owens, and Guillemin's discounting of The Border Trilogy in ecocritical terms, a number of other critics have engaged in more substantive and positive environmental readings of the three novels. Diane Luce, in her article "The Vanishing World of Cormac McCarthy's Border Trilogy," links Billy Parham's environmental transformation to the experiences and writings of twentieth-century environmentalists Aldo Leopold, Barry Lopez, and James Burbank (168). Like Guillemin, she identifies the connection between the ecoheroes of The Border Trilogy and deep ecology, but she further links John Grady Cole and Billy Parham with the protagonists of McCarthy's screenplay Whales and Men; just as Peter Gregory "echoes the voice of deep ecologists" in his role as a marine biologist, so do John Grady and Billy ask the same of us in regard to the wolf and all the endangered creatures of the border (men and women included). . . . Billy is not articulate and does not fully

formulate even his own tale but he does listen—to wolves and to men. In that he is our surrogate. (188)

Besides Luce, Edwin Arnold has also noticed that McCarthy's western books have "a greater emphasis on the natural world" and that "in moving west McCarthy [has] developed a worldview more in keeping with Native American cosmology" ("McCarthy and the Sacred" 216). Arnold argues that McCarthy's latest work reveals a belief "in a source of being and order deeper than manifested in . . . the pretense of human individuality" (216). Such a reading suggests a deep ecological appreciation of McCarthy's Border Trilogy in that the definition of the self extends beyond the bounds of the individual to include the rest of nature.

A thorough ecocritical examination of The Border Trilogy is beyond the scope of this study and would require analysis of each of the three novels as well as detailed character studies of the environmentalist heroes, John Grady Cole and Billy Parham. However, to appreciate the trilogy's deep ecological ties to McCarthy's earlier southern novels as well as to see the growing environmental sensibility in McCarthy's southwestern novels, one need go no farther than Part One of The Crossing. As the structural center of The Border Trilogy, it portrays the environmental transformation of Billy Parham that results from his experience with a she-wolf. Though there are other elements in Part One that warrant ecocritical consideration, it is this relationship that hints most directly at the need for additional ecocritical study of The Border Trilogy.¹ The rare appearance of the wolf in this area of Texas during this time, as a number of older characters note, emphasizes the degree to which the wolves have been hunted almost to extinction (24, 60). Because the wolf has killed a number of calves, Billy is instructed by his father to capture her. During the subsequent attempts, the wolf not only evades him but springs the traps that he has so deliberately and thoughtfully set. Over time, he realizes that he is

engaged with an intelligent being whose worth greatly out-values the price of the livestock she kills. The change in how Billy thinks of the wolf resembles Arne Naess's description of an ecological field worker: Billy "acquires a deep-seated respect, even veneration" for her, reaching "an understanding from within, a kind of understanding that others reserve for fellow men and for a narrow section of ways and forms of life"; Billy realizes the she-wolf's "equal right to live and blossom" (Naess 28). Upon finding her trapped, Billy immediately looks at the trapchain "with disgust" (53) and winces "to see her bloodied foreleg stretched in the trap" (54). At the same time that McCarthy portrays Billy's environmental awakening, he endows the wolf with a consciousness usually reserved only for humans; as Billy secures the noose around her muzzle during the process of freeing her from the trap, the wolf "looked up at him, the eye delicately aslant, the knowledge of the world it held sufficient to the day if not to the day's evil" (55). McCarthy carefully portrays her discerning the difference between what she knows (being trapped) and what she does not (the intentions of the human in front of her). It is this kind of discernment that transforms her from an animal to a full-fledged character.

Even before Billy begins to develop his environmental sensibility, McCarthy introduces the wolf as a character with her own past and her own sorrows. She, and McCarthy is careful never to call her "it," even bears the mark of the father of the litter she now carries

a scabbedover wound on her hip where her mate had bitten her two weeks before somewhere in the mountains of Sonora. He'd bitten her because she would not leave him. Standing with one forefoot in the jaws of a steeltrap and snarling at her to drive her off where she lay just beyond the reach of the chain. (24).

Though some may argue that such behavior is instinctual, that both wolves know that she is pregnant and are acting on instinct to preserve the chances of the litter, McCarthy's description

here suggests these two wolves have a relationship that involves love, empathy, and altruism (Lilley 156). This is a tragic and sorrowful parting of two beings in a relationship, a trope that McCarthy has heretofore reserved only for humans in Suttree and All the Pretty Horses. McCarthy also endows the wolf with consciousness by giving her volition; the reason that she leaves her native mountains and heads north is “not because the game was gone but because the wolves were and she needed them” (25). While wolves are pack animals by nature, McCarthy’s terse assertion that “she needed” other wolves indicates more than an instinctual drive, giving her a need for an emotional life and a sense of community that is usually reserved for humans.

Besides endowing the wolf with a past and describing her plight with great sympathy, McCarthy also depicts her as an intelligent being capable of learning new processes. As she travels in search of other wolves, she practices new behaviors that she has learned through experience: “She would not return to a kill. She would not cross a road or a rail line in daylight. She would not cross under a wire fence twice in the same place. These were the new protocols. Strictures that had not existed before. Now they did” (25). Throughout Billy’s tracking of her, she seems to study the placement and concealment of traps in order to understand the mind of the human who is tracking her. When Billy begins to think like her, he succeeds in trapping her, but he also learns to empathize with her—a fact evident in his decision to return her to the mountains from which she came. Along the way, both wolf and human learn “new protocols” in order to survive and establish a relationship that will define the rest of their lives.

At the same time that McCarthy establishes the wolf as a character, he is careful not to anthropomorphize her; this she-wolf is not human and does not relinquish her suspicion of humans or her willingness to attack. Not until the very end, when Billy enters the ring to free her from being attacked by dogs, does he approach her without her being muzzled and even then “he

had no way to know if she would bite him or not” (117). McCarthy avoids “humanizing” the wolf by identifying her much more closely with the rest of the nonhuman world than with humans. Like the “game [that] was slaughtered out of the country” and “the forest [that] was cut to feed the boilers of the stampmills at the mines” (25), the wolves have been driven to the brink of extinction. She, like the game and the trees, is a victim of anthropocentrism.

Another way that McCarthy avoids anthropomorphizing the she-wolf is by associating her with the actions of other wolves, who, because of the loss of native herbivores,

had been killing cattle for a long time but the ignorance of the animals was a puzzle to them. The cows bellowing and bleeding and stumbling through the mountain meadows with their shovel feet and their confusion, bawling and floundering through the fences and dragging posts and wires behind. The ranchers said they brutalized cattle in a way they did not the wild game. As if the cows evoked in them some anger. As if they were offended by some violation of an old order. Old ceremonies. Old protocols. (25)

Using the perspectives of wolves, ranchers, and the narrative voice, McCarthy emphasizes the difference between humans and wolves but still endows wolves with consciousness, volition, and values. The wolves are puzzled by the cattle’s clumsy stupidity—the cattle would not last long as wild, unprotected prey in this environment. McCarthy relates the wolves’ puzzlement to the ranchers’ observation that wolves more viciously kill cows than antelope. Then the narrative voice speculates that the wolves harbor disdain for the cows because, as Diane Luce argues, they are not “a wily prey who might realistically evade the hunter” (“Vanishing World” 171). The wolves, for whom the hunt is as important as the food, are inherently different from the ranchers, who essentially grow meat in the pastures. While McCarthy’s she-wolf is capable of learning

new protocols necessary for survival in an increasingly human-dominated and machine-dominated world (a world of roads, rails, and wire fences), the meaningfulness of her life—like Ownby’s, John Grady Cole’s and Billy Parham’s—is diminished because of modern culture. She is persecuted just as McCarthy’s other environmentalist characters. The story of the she-wolf shows that modern human society has not only separated people from nature but has altered the relationships that nonhumans have with one another.

In the end, Billy chooses to shoot her instead of allowing her to continue to be tortured in a dog-fighting ring. After fighting two dogs at a time for almost two hours, “she was a sorry thing to see” (122). About to face two airedales, she “lay in the dirt and her tongue lolled in the dirt and her fur was matted with dirt and blood and the yellow eyes looked at nothing at all” (122). Billy trades his rifle for her corpse and returns her to the the Pilares Teras mountains as he intended. With her blood soaking through his pants as he rides, “he put his hand to his leg and tasted the blood which tasted no different than his own” (125). Reaching the mountains at night, “he cradled the wolf in his arms” (126). Closing his own eyes, he envisions her

running in the mountains, running in the starlight where the grass was wet and the sun’s coming as yet had not undone the rich matrix of creatures passed in the night before her. Deer and hare and dove and groundvole all richly empaneled on the air for her delight, all nations of the possible world ordained by God of which she was one among and not separate from. (127)

Regardless of whether or not Billy romanticizes her, the narrative voice behind that vision is one that shares the deep ecological philosophy of biological egalitarianism.

There is much more to The Crossing and to Billy Parham’s story than his experience with the wolf in Part One. However, what the episode shows is McCarthy returning to the dynamic

relationship between a heroic human character and an animal. Such relationships occurred in The Orchard Keeper and then largely disappeared as McCarthy focused his narratives on characters engaged more with other humans than with specific animals. Billy Parham's relationship with the she-wolf combines Arthur Ownby's relationship with Scout and John Wesley Rattner's experience with the hawk. In the characters of Billy Parham and the wolf, McCarthy distills the deep ecological thinking suggested in his southern novels. Certainly, All the Pretty Horses and Cities on the Plain are equally important for their illustration of the growth of McCarthy's environmental sensibility, but the episode of Billy and the wolf provides the strongest example that human relationships with nonhumans are an essential to understanding the environmentalism in McCarthy's novels.

The ecocritical themes presented in these chapters further illustrate McCarthy's aesthetic and thematic complexity. As Bell indicated in the preface of The Achievement of Cormac McCarthy:

[o]ne strength of McCarthy's novels is that they resist the imposition of theses from the outside, especially conventional ones, and they seem finally to call all theses into question. With such a novelist critical discourse is hard to get started, but once it is started it seems destined to go on. (xiii)

Bell's words written in 1988 were prescient; McCarthy criticism continues to flourish. The extant scholarship has demonstrated that McCarthy's art engages a wide range of literary, linguistic, historical, philosophical, and metaphysical ideas. Yet, the critical consensus remains focused on the existentialist/nihilist thesis that Bell developed in The Achievement of Cormac

McCarthy. This study begins to reassess McCarthy's work as well as McCarthy criticism. Certainly, McCarthy's work is not as narrowly or boldly focused on environmental issues as are the novels of Edward Abbey; they are not environmentalists' texts that baldly advocate for preservation and conservation through legal or political activism; such activism would be antithetical to all of McCarthy's environmentalist characters. McCarthy's environmentalism focuses on the effect of social and environmental change on the lives of individuals who do not live typical American lives. John Wesley Ratter, Cornelius Suttree, and Billy Parham do not represent a sizable minority. They are men who live outside of mainstream in an attempt to maintain a meaningful co-existence within a natural place. In all these cases, their attempts are either ambiguously successful or clear failures because of the power of Cartesian society, its institutions, and the people who enforce its authority. However, these environmentalist heroes still provide a model of deep ecological living that has largely been unacknowledged or undervalued. McCarthy identifies the root of the environmental crisis in a mode of thinking that is so pervasive and so fundamental that the prospects of reforming human society are slim. In this way, McCarthy's environmentalism is a negative environmentalism—cognizant of the place of humans within the environment and of the value of close contact but always aware of the rapaciousness of a Cartesian society that consumes and destroys natural resources to perpetuate the anthropocentric, hierarchical machine of modern living.

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NOTES

Preface

1 As Lilley notes, a copy of “Whales and Men” is part of the Southwestern Writers Collection in the Albert B. Alkek Library at Southwest Texas State University (now known as Texas State University—San Marcos). Because of a reference in the of “Whales and Men” to Barry Lopez’s Arctic Dreams, which was published in 1986, and because the phrase “Beware gentle knight” appears in both the screenplay and All the Pretty Horses (1992), Lilley guesses that McCarthy wrote screenplay sometime between those two books. Lilley also points out that McCarthy’s title seems to be an allusion to Lopez’s book Of Wolves and Men (1978). While the Alkek Library lists the text in its online catalogue, the library’s website indicates that “Cormac McCarthy has requested that none of the materials in this collections, whether an entire work or a single page, be photocopied.” I am relying on Lilley’s quotation and interpretation of the text. Lilley acknowledges his indebtedness to Edwin Arnold for bringing “Of Whales and Men” to his attention.

2 All references to Bell come from *The Achievement of Cormac McCarthy* unless otherwise indicated.

3 All references to Naess come from *Ecology, Community and Lifestyle* unless otherwise indicated.

Chapter One

4 University of Arizona, University of California-Davis, University of Montana-Missoula, University of Nevada-Reno, University of Oregon-Eugene, <http://www.asle.umn.edu/pubs/handbook/programs.html>.

5 Roderick Nash provides a brief but thorough explanation of the etymology of “wilderness” as it descended from the old European languages (2-7).

9 Thoreau’s anthropocentrism is evident in his most studied work, Walden, but in his more recently published work—such as Faith in the Seed: The Dispersion of Seeds and Other Late Natural History Writings and Wild Fruits: Thoreau’s Rediscovered Last Manuscript—he shows an increasing interest in the natural world devoid of Thoreau’s ego. As an indication of where his intellectual interests were developing, if he had lived long, E.O. Wilson, argues, Thoreau might have become a significant nineteenth century naturalist. His promise as such was especially clear in his writing on forest succession (191).

10 It is worth noting that the effect of human alteration of the environment was significant even in the Paleolithic era. Though Paleolithic societies “seem to have lived in greater harmony with nature than agricultural societies or urban civilizations, they still appear to have wrought major changes in their environments” (Sheldrake 36). Among the changes were species extinctions through overhunting and habitat alteration through intentional burning. Most surprisingly, “much of the world’s desertification may have been aggravated by the activities of prehistoric man” (36). The difference between then and now, however, is the vast increase in human power fueled by the development of technology.

11 For further discussion of the presence of Agrarian ideas in McCarthy's fiction, see the unpublished article by Paul Quick entitled "Suttree: The Fruition of Agrarian Prophecy."

12 To support this idea that humans are not very important in the functioning of the global ecology, Christopher Manes points out that if "fungus, one of the 'lowliest' of forms on a humanistic scale of values, were to go extinct tomorrow, the effect on the rest of the biosphere would be catastrophic, since the health of forests depend on Mycorrhizal fungus, and the disappearance of forests would upset the hydrology, atmosphere, and temperature of the entire globe. In contrast, if Homo sapiens disappeared, the event would go virtually unnoticed by the vast majority of Earth's life forms" ("Nature and Silence" 24).

13 Warren also includes bioregionalism in her list of radical environmental ethic and stresses "the importance of place in environmental ethics," referring "both to geographic spaces and cultural contexts in which humans and nonhumans live" (84). Obviously, the fact that McCarthy delves deeply into the two regions in his work, the Southern Appalachians and the desert Southwest, indicates that he is also interested in bioregionalism. However, deep ecology, ecofeminism, and social ecology are most appropriate as theoretical approaches to this southern novels.

15 In such works as The Advancement of Learning, Novum Organum, and The New Atlantis, Bacon advocated for the control of nature's power for the sole benefit of the human race. Known as the "Father of Modern Science," Bacon used Genesis, particularly Adam's naming of the animals, as justification for the new scientific endeavor to root out nature's mysteries for the benefit of the human race (Sheldrake 40, Craige 97). In The New Atlantis, Bacon describes the centerpiece of a technocratic utopia, Salomon's House—"the noblest foundation . . . that ever was upon the earth . . . dedicated to the study of the works and creatures of God" (20).

Salomon's House included "inclosures of all sorts, of beasts and birds; which we use not only for view or rareness, but likewise for dissections and trials, that thereby may take light what may be wrought upon the body of man" (sic) (33). Besides vivisection, the scientists of Salomon's House "try all poisons, and other medicines upon them" (33). Dividing the study of nature into discrete and separate departments, Salomon's House is Bacon's vision of the modern research university, which until very recently, was structured around strict division between departments for the purpose of accurately studying nature. Such a view that separates humans from the rest of nature is characteristic of the mechanistic and atomistic perspectives of Cartesian thinking.

16 The story of the world-wide flood relates the primacy of human obedience to God as a condition for the world to exist. All of humanity is destroyed except Noah's family and all of non-human nature is destroyed except those saved by Noah. While pairs of the unclean animals—those unfit for human consumption by Jewish dietary laws—are saved, the story describes tremendous collateral damage to non-human nature because of human ethical shortcomings. The deaths of non-human animals are of no consequence in God's quest to destroy the unrighteous of humankind. Whether or not the story is regarded as true, its message communicates the anthropocentrism characteristic of western religious tradition (if not monotheism). Additionally, God's covenant with Noah after the flood reestablishes the primacy of human authority over the rest of creation (Genesis 9:2-4).

17 Besides its role as a place of evil, wilderness in the Judeo-Christian tradition paradoxically has status as a place of redemption. Throughout the Old and New Testaments, prophets, holy men, and Christ himself retreat to the wilderness for spiritual purification. Even in this more positive view of nature, its value is still tacitly anthropocentric; nature exists for the benefit of

humans to renew their own connections with God (Nash 13-17). For all religions to some degree, one of nature's most important values was as an escape from corrupt society (18).

Christopher Manes argues that in the Middle Ages, the curious effect of the doctrine of *scala naturae* (the Great Chain of Being) was "a theological restraint against abusing the natural world, at least within the hushed, abstracted cells of the cloister" (20). Both McKibben and White criticize the institutional version of Christianity while noting that there are traditions within Christianity that are more environmentalist. In particular, both point optimistically to the life and teachings of St. Francis of Assisi (McKibben 76, White 13-14). McKibben, a practicing Methodist, also acknowledges the story of Job as a lesson in respecting the sanctity of the land (76). While McKibben and White recognize the possibility of reforming western religious thought, Craige argues that the Judeo-Christian tradition is fundamentally dualistic and therefore incapable of adopting an holistic perspective essential to sustainable environmental practice. Throughout McCarthy's novels, characters interactions with the institutions of organized religion suggest that McCarthy finds the church irredeemable; however, the characters interactions with individual religious figures suggests that Christian thinking is not completely incompatible with an environmental existence.

21 Craige points out that Darwin was still a product of the Victorian age in that when it came to his ideas of sexual and racial superiority, he still employed a dualistic and hierarchical stance. The observations that he made, however, were not based on natural selection but on the effect of laws, customs, and culture. The problem, Craige concludes, is that Darwin confused culture with nature.

23 Deep ecology calls for a recognition that our boundaries of self are illusory and that only by understanding all of the elements that make up the environment can we preserve our sense of self.

24 Naess's use of the term "vital need" in his third principle is intentionally vague to allow for "differences in climate and related factors, together with differences in the structures of societies as they now exist, need to be considered" (30).

25 E.O. Wilson in The Future of Life (2002), "For every person in the world to reach present U.S. levels of consumption with existing technology would require four more planet Earth's" (23).

26 The aphorism for this idea of worldwide fulfillment of humanity's vital needs is "Live simply that others may simply live."

27 In terms of deep ecology, technology, and Cormac McCarthy, the use of the automobile is more important. Naess writes, "The private car is "the simplest and most irresponsible form of transportation" (210). As will be pointed out throughout this dissertation, where appropriate, the automobile has a profound impact on the environment and upon the individuals who both drive and do not drive.

28 Naess alludes to the appalling treatment of animals in product testing (171), but the treatment of animals in factory farms has been widely publicized. See Schlosser's Fast Food Nation (2001).

29 This and other objections to deep ecology will be discussed in more detail in chapter three.

30 As evidence of the contemporary environmental crisis, Naess offers scientific studies as IUCN's World Conservation Strategy (1980) and Gerald Barney's Global 2000 Reports to the President of the United States (1980). More recent reports confirm update Naess's references, such as those that fill the notes of E.O. Wilson's The Future of Life (2002)—including the

United Nations' report World Resources 2000-2001: People and Ecosystems: The Fraying Web of Life.

31 The preoccupation with the environment can be seen not only in the “toxic novels” of Don Delillo and John Updike, as discussed in Deitering’s essay on “The Postnatural Novel,” but also in the proliferation of the nature writing of authors such as Annie Dillard and Barry Lopez.

32 In “The Ambiguous Nihilism of Cormac McCarthy,” Bell introduces arguments that reappear practically unaltered in the introduction of *The Achievement of Cormac McCarthy*. In both, he argues that in “McCarthy’s world, existence seems both to precede and preclude essences. . . . He is Walker Percy turned inside out—intuitive, unideological, oblivious to teleological fashions, indifferent if not hostile to the social order, wholly absorbed in the strange heterocosm of his own making” (31). McCarthy has no metaphysics: “no first principles, no foundational truth; Heraclitus without logos” (“Ambiguous Nihilism” 32, *Achievement* 9).

In justifying his claim that McCarthy’s nihilism is ambiguous and not dialectical, Bell shows that while binaries are juxtaposed throughout, they are ultimately irresolvable (38-39).

At the same time that Bell set the philosophical perspective by which McCarthy has generally been viewed, he was also the first to note the overwhelming importance of the physical world in McCarthy’s work.

His world stands forth vividly. His scrupulous reproduction of detail (reflected in the precision of his language), his casual command of the right names for things—for parts of things, for aspects of various processes, and how things get done—his respect for the taxonomic specificity of the natural world, are like Joyce’s in that they give his work a deep cohesion that mere shape and plot cannot. And this method has its point, too—that the raw materiality of the world is both charismatic and overpowering: the ego is as fragile and as transient, and perhaps as illusory, as any imagined form. (39)

Finally he concludes his essay, saying:

In Cormac McCarthy’s novels, adjusting a notion of the self to an understanding of the nature of the world is a baffling and precarious enterprise, since it is the essence of that world, in all of the novels, that form and meaning refuse to coincide. (41)

Bell’s statement reflects the anthropocentrism of McCarthy studies specifically and English studies in general.

33 As an explanation of what Bell means by “Heraclitus without logos,” I offer a quote in Oelschaeger’s The Idea of Wilderness: “Heraclitus’s claim was that only by understanding the natural order of the world, and accommodating their own action to it (the Logos), could human beings achieve a good, ordered, and balanced life” (56). Simply put, Bell sees the *modus operandi* of McCarthy’s characters very much in terms of that of Hemingway’s characters: they live by a code of their own making.

Chapter Two

35 All italics in quotations are original unless otherwise indicated.

36 Quoting historian Durwood Dunn, Berry links the state of the abandoned orchards with an actual drop in post-war agricultural prices: “The 1920’s witnessed a sudden regression as agricultural prices—high before and during the war—suddenly dropped, leaving many cove farmers in desperate financial straits” (63).

37 This scene shows that Ownby is no Wordsworthian character. His standing as an environmentalist character does not make him immune to the wrath of nature. Earlier in this scene, Ownby is struck by a branch felled by lightning. The difference between him and a Cartesian character is his acceptance of the power of nature and the attitude with which he awakens from the incident.

38 For additional examples of such descriptions of nature, see 89-90, 190, and 201.

39 As with many of Ownby's thoughts and actions, this pre-Christian metaphysic is further emphasized by McCarthy's consistent use of religious rhetoric to describe Ownby's actions. In his conversation with John Wesley and Warn in his cabin, McCarthy uses the following words in reference to Ownby: "satyric," "hierophant," "prophetic translucence." When Ownby offers them wine, he holds "the cup before him in both hands like a ciborium" (156) and they referred to as "communicants" (150). McCarthy's word choice clearly indicates that there is more weight and substance in their encounter than simply the sharing of old stories and of homemade wine.

40 As an analogue, John Grady Cole—the protagonist of All the Pretty Horses and Cities of the Plain—also believes in the intellectual consciousness of horses.

41 Anomy (anomie, anomic): social instability, resulting from a breakdown of standards and values; also: personal unrest, alienation and uncertainty that comes from a lack of purpose or ideals.

42 Bill Bryson describes such government programs in A Walk in the Woods: "Until the 1940s, many eastern states had well-publicized 'varmint campaigns,' often run by state conservation departments, that awarded points to hunters for every predatory creature they killed, which was just about every creature there was—hawks, owls, kingfishers, eagles, and virtually any type of large mammal. West Virginia gave an annual college scholarship to the student who killed the most animals; other states freely distributed bounties and other cash rewards. Rationality didn't often come into it. Pennsylvania one year paid out \$90,000 in bounties for the killing of 130,000 owls and hawks to save the state's farmers a slightly less than whopping \$1,875 in estimated livestock losses. (It is not very often, after all, that an owl carries off a cow)" (203).

43 Besides Ballard, other men watch for cars at these turnabouts. In fact, there seems to be an established turf for voyeurism as indicated by Ballard's comment to Darfuzzle concerning the Frog Mountain turnabout: "That's your all's look out" (47).

44 Another such road will befuddle Culla Holme at the end of Outer Dark.

45 The best contemporary example of this "bullheaded" drive to live in places unsuited for humans, or unable to sustain large human populations, is Las Vegas. The fastest growing city in America, Las Vegas draws water from as far away as the Colorado river in order to sustain an ever-expanding human demand.

46 There are other instances of Ballard abusing animals. This abuse is significant because it is an intermediary stage before Ballard begins to abuse women. Besides the story of a cow's neck, another story tells of him shooting Waldrop's cattle because they had muddied the creek where he was trying to shoot fish (33-34). His giving of a robin to the retarded toddler of Ralph Lane's house shows his disregard for the value of animal life. Though this scene is discussed more fully in its relation to ecofeminism in the next chapter, it is appropriate to note that when the child's mother worries that the toddler might kill the bird, Ballard's response is "It's hisn to kill if he wants to" (77). Yet another story extols his shooting ability by explaining that Ballard once had shot "a spider out of a web in the top of a big redoak" (57). His malevolence toward animals is seen on one of his trips to Ruebel's junkyard; first he levels his rifle at "a small blue bird" and

then pantomimes shooting one of the cats that populate the junkyard. In both cases, the human sense of superiority and domination is countered by the narrator's inclusion of the animals' consciousness—a detail that suggests deep ecology. Ballard decides not to shoot the bluebird because some “old foreboding made him hold. Mayhaps the bird felt it too. It flew. Small. Tiny. Gone” (25). Likewise the cat seems to have a heightened consciousness; when Ballard passes it by, the cat “seemed to think him not too bright” (26). This animal consciousness is further deepened when the narrator makes a number of extended comparisons between the dumpkeeper's daughters and the cats (26-27), thus illustrating McCarthy's leveling of the human and the nonhuman.

47 His abhorrence of nature is found elsewhere: “Lying with his fingers plugged in the bores of his ears against the strident cheeping of the myriad black crickets with which he kept household in the barren cabin” (23).

Chapter Three

48 Drawing on Daniel Goleman's Emotional Intelligence, Warren explains that the human brain contains two minds, one that thinks (neocortex) and one that feels (limbic). While these two parts of the human mind reside in separate parts of the brain, they are connected and constitute two intertwined ways of knowing.

49 DesJardins acknowledges that the strongest connection between nature and women today are in less developed countries (LDCs) where women are still responsible for domestic chores, childcare, and tending domestic crops and livestock. In such countries, women are less mobile and therefore less able to escape pollution and unsanitary conditions. Because of their traditional tasks of gathering fuelwood and water, not only are they exposed to higher levels of pesticides but are also more adversely affected by the loss of access to forestlands and water sources. Lastly, in LDCs, population policies typically burden women in ways not experienced by men. In relation to the novels, it is appropriate to compare the conditions of the LDCs to the conditions of Appalachia—otherwise known, along with the Mississippi Delta, as America's third world.

50 Karen Warren has identified a number of these women-nature connections in language, images, and examples of male-perpetrated violence against women and nonhuman animals. Warren explains that “In the literature of ecofeminism, ten types of women-other human Others-nature [sic] interconnections tend to be discussed: historical (typically causal), conceptual, empirical, socioeconomic, linguistic, symbolic and literary, spiritual and religious, epistemological, political, and ethical interconnection” (21)

Specifically, in terms of linguistic interconnections in Western languages that are meant to demean both women and nature, she offers the following examples: “Women are dogs, cats, catty, pussycats, pussies, pets, bunnies, dumb bunnies, cows, sows, foxes, chicks, bitches, beavers, old bats, old hens, old crows, queen bees, cheetahs, vixen, serpents, bird-brains, hare-brains, elephants and whales. . . . [Nature is routinely feminized as seen in the following examples]: Mother Nature is raped, mastered, controlled, conquered, mined. Her (not his) secrets are penetrated Virgin timber is felled, cut down. Fertile (not potent) soil is tilled, and land that lies fallow is useless or barren, like a women unable to conceive a child.” She concedes that not “only are female humans . . . denigrated by the use of animal language” (27), but the pattern with Western languages is clear. The point is that “*within patriarchal contexts*, the vast majority of animal terms used to denigrate women and the vast majority of female terms

used to describe animals and nature function differently from those animal terms used to denigrate men (28).

⁵¹ In the case of the prostitute, she is literally held captive by her pimp. There is no question that John Wesley's happiness and the happiness of the prostitute are thwarted by the domination of a Cartesian male. While some may argue that Alfonsa has more influence over Alejandra's than Don Hector, the fact is that John Wesley is considered socially unacceptable as a husband for Alejandra, a judgment that values only his ability to preserve the family's social standing. As such, Dona Alfonsa operates with the same patriarchal biases as Don Hector or the pimp; Alejandra is a commodity who will be married a man who will continue the patriarchal control of the family over the hacienda.

⁵² Another graphic example that illustrates society's conjoining of sex and violence is seen at the dump; as the dumpkeeper watches a couple copulate, he realizes that the female is his daughter. After shooting at the offending male, the dumpkeeper employs a curious form of discipline—he rapes her: “The old man began to beat the girl with the stick he carried. She grabbed it. He overbalanced. They sprawled in the leaves Next thing he knew his overalls were about his knees and he was mounting her. Daddy quit, she said. Oooh. Did he dump a load in you? No. He pulled it out and gripped it and squirted his jissom on her thigh. Goddamn you” (28).

⁵³ In several occasions, McCarthy bestows animals with judgment, specifically a kind of disgust with Ballard. When Ballard takes aim at a cat at Reubel's junkyard, McCarthy writes, “the cat looked at him without interest. It seemed to think him not too bright” (26).

⁵⁴ Nor is Ballard the only person who uses the deadends in the woods as lookouts for copulating couples. Upon hearing that Pless was arrested in connection with the prostitute found at the turnabout, Ballard acknowledges, “That's your all's lookout. I didn't have nothing to do wit her” (47). Once again, though we would like to distance ourselves from Ballard by believing that he is exceptional, McCarthy includes others engaged in similar activities that Ballard enjoys.

⁵⁵ As if to mitigate the fact that the woman he rages at is dead, McCarthy adds, “Who could say she did not hear him?” (88-89).

⁵⁶ By describing a log as having “something of animate ill will,” McCarthy gives volition not just to nature but to dead nature, the log itself seeming to have conscious desire to punish Ballard for his crimes against nature.

⁵⁷ From a historical vantage point, ecofeminists hold capitalism culpable for the change in the status of women under the Western society. Carolyn Merchant implicates early capitalism as an important factor in removing women from active participation in Western society. If the Sevier County described in *Child of God* is viewed as emblematic of general Cartesian society, then the total absence of women in positions of authority or even in the public sphere indicate the dominance of men.

⁵⁸ Luce's linking of economics and domination also points to another recurring ecofeminist theme: as Mary Mellor explains, women, other subordinated groups and nature disproportionately “bear the destructive ecological consequences of high levels of production, consumption, and mobility” (viii). Though not readily apparent in *Outer Dark* and *Child of God*, there are examples of the economic burdens placed upon women in a male-dominated market economy. Most of the women in *Outer Dark* and *Child of God*, as well as in McCarthy's other works, are found in the domestic sphere of the home where, more often than not, they are responsible for childcare. Women's inability to participate in the market economics in the books is illustrated by the fact that whereas Culla is able to find work in order to survive, Rinty—

because of the fact that she is a woman—must rely on the hospitality and goodwill of others for her survival. In Suttree, the theme of women, subordinated groups, and nature disproportionately bearing the destructive ecological consequences of capitalism will be central to my social ecological approach.

For a fuller treatment of how capitalism led to the domination of women and nature, see Carolyn Merchant's The Death of Nature.

⁵⁹ While the OED includes some nineteenth-century references to “dope,” they refer to either “any thick liquid or semi-fluid use as an article of food, or as a lubricant” or “a preparation, mixture, or drug which is not specifically named.” Its first use in reference to a drink, Coca-Cola or some other carbonated drink, is recorded in 1915.

⁶⁰ The descriptions of plant life are quite specific; species named include sawgrass, tule, tufted hummocks, alder, duckwort, watercress, cottonwood (16-17), bracken (a kind of fern) (19), blackhaws (trees) (24), etc.

⁶¹ I use the terms “masculine” and “feminine” values and perspectives as opposed to “male” and “female” in order to emphasize that there is nothing essentialistic about these values. As Janis Birkeland points out, “What matters is that men and women have shown the capacity consciously to choose other values and behavior patterns. We have seen women adopt ‘masculine’ personal processes to varying extents when they wish to be part of a power structure, and, more optimistically, we have seen some men become caring, gentle, and nondominating” (22-23).

⁶² In fact, this seeming contradiction within ecofeminism has led other critics to accuse ecofeminism of dualistic thinking itself—a charge that Birkeland answers by saying: “The misunderstanding that ecofeminism is dualistic probably derives from the ecofeminist suggestion that alternatives to Patriarchy are possible, as evidenced in women’s and tribal cultures” (21).

⁶³ Throughout his journey, when Culla is described in the proximity of birds, they are either birds of prey or birds of carrion. While Rinthy is also associated with songbirds, so Culla is always associated with hawks or vultures. This distinction strengthens the case that Rinthy represents the more “integrative” impulse of nature while Culla represents the more self-assertive, more violent impulse of nature.

⁶⁴ Besides the farmers, other people instantly dislike Culla and suspect him of wrongdoing. As Winchell has noted, “Culla encounters considerably greater peril in his travels” than Rinthy (298). In Cheatham, Culla is inexplicably implicated for grave robbing, a crime that the marauders probably did and which figures in his identification with them later in the book. As the townsmen stand looking at the exhumed corpses, the crowd simply turns on Culla and chases him from the square (88-89). Days later, he is run off from his job of painting a barn roof by a group of four men who have come looking for him: “One had a shotgun and the other carried slats, their faces upturned brightly, watching him” (92). Escaping through a hoglot, Culla flees a mob that pursues him for a crime he did not commit. Later, in perhaps the most bizarre and Biblically allusive scene, Culla is blamed for a pig stampede that results in the death of livestock and a drover. Only by jumping off the cliff into the river does he save himself from being hanged (226).

Chapter Four

⁶⁵ Of the four southern novels, Bell asserts that The Orchard Keeper, Outer Dark, and Child of God “are cartographically much vaguer [than Suttree], but that is a main difference to begin with

between the city and the country, where the contours of both space and time are more generous” (4).

⁶⁶ For a further examination of Suttree and the Nashville Agrarians, see “Suttree and the Realization of Agrarian Prophecy” by Paul Quick.

⁶⁷ Jarrett continues to say that Suttree, along with Child of God, “merge Southern literature with modernism’s dominant imagery and thematics of social and psychological disconnection. In its twin themes of alienation and death, in its provocative style, in its superimposition of the imagery of the underground man on a modernist wasteland, Suttree is a post-Southern equivalent to Ellison’s Invisible Man, Eliot’s The Waste Land, and Joyce’s Ulysses” (35).

⁶⁸ Matthew Guinn agrees that “the central conflict in Suttree is the protagonist’s struggle with nihilism” (112).

⁶⁹ In his early article on McCarthy, Bell says of Suttree: “He is obsessed with the arbitrariness of identity, of how even that minimal coherence erodes when reassuring reflectors or the conventions of social roles or homes and families fail” (“Ambiguous” 40).

⁷⁰ Young quotes the passage found in Walden (343).

⁷¹ Just Arne Naess is credited for being the father of deep ecology, so Murray Bookchin is identified as “the main architect of social ecology” (Mathews 200). The most basic premise of social ecology is that the dominations of nonhuman nature and human Others are interconnected. The focus of social ecology is to “look to society to find the underlying causes of the environmental crisis” (Des Jardins 235). While deep ecology views anthropocentrism as the main cause of the environmental crisis, social ecology views “specific human institutions and practices—*unjust* institutions and practices” as the main causes. (Des Jardins 235). Ecofeminism is a form of social ecology that focuses on issues relating to women. Social ecology’s context is wider and includes the study of ethnic and racial minorities as well.

⁷² Jarrett and Bell disagree about what the river represents. Jarrett sees it as “a symbol of life’s fecundity, of the will to live, the river functions as an antipode to the image of the McAnally slum that stretches along the banks” (48), whereas Bell sees it as “an oppressive lowest common denominator of being Suttree’s world” (A 73). What Bell continues to say about the river is a further example of how anthropocentric criticism fails to see the ecological value of the nature even though it acknowledges nature’s the importance in literature: “The river’s function for the novel is pointedly overdetermined—it embodies that which calls everything into question—but it is also a metaphorical condensation of the authority of the physical world in Suttree generally, and the sheer presence, in weight and mass, of the physical world of Suttree is in itself a powerful thematic pressure” (74). Such a comment comes extremely close to an ecocritical understanding of the importance of the novel without understanding the very real problem of the role of human activity in the river’s degradation.

⁷³ The difference between his relationship with his father’s side of the family and his mother’s can perhaps be explained in ecofeminist terms, though these relationships are minimally developed in the novel.

⁷⁴ The conception of the world as composed only of human society, along with its places and institutions, is a conception evident in more anthropocentric criticism as well as well in the thinking of the conventional characters in Suttree. Bell refers to “the world” in very much the same terms as Suttree’s father. This anthropocentric view of the world has many implications for the environment and for the way that humans view the environment. By viewing the nonhuman world as necessarily sharing the same characteristics as humans society, humans are

able to absolve themselves of culpability of some practices by saying it is “the way of the world” when in actuality it is the way of human society. This point is particularly well illustrated in the film “The Mission.” In the film, a slavetrading Portuguese aristocrat attempts to salve the guilt felt by a Catholic Cardinal who has finally allowed slave trafficking within his mission’s territory for political reasons. The aristocrat explains, “Thus is the world.” “No,” the Cardinal responds, “Thus have we made the world.” The scene illustrates the Western tradition of projecting Western cultural practices onto nature.

⁷⁵ It could very well be that Suttree does not eat fish because he knows the polluted waters from which they are pulled. This certainly is the case for USDA personnel who inspect factory farming operations. As environmental musician Moby quotes in the liner notes of his CD “Everything is Wrong,” 80% of USDA chicken inspectors no longer eat chicken because of the crowded, unsanitary, and unethical treatment of not only the animals but also of the workers.

⁷⁶ Suttree’s fascination with fossils and other relics of the ancient past can be seen both in his city walks (7, 82) and also in his trips to the mountains. Besides the scarab fossils, which are large beetles, in the stone walls (3), and the fossil woodknots in the bridge (8), there are also fossils in a retaining wall on which Suttree sits to steady himself the morning after his second binge: “Looking under his hand he saw dimly the prints of trilobites, lime cameos of vanished bivalves and delicate seaferns. In these serried clefts stone armatures on which once hung the flesh of living fish” (82). Suttree is more interested in birds, and he identifies them by species (83, 89, 121, 244-25, 227, 238, 321, 344, 385, 400, 403, 448). The breadth of Suttree’s knowledge supports the conjecture that he represents a fictionalization of McCarthy. As Woodward writes, “McCarthy estimates that he owns about 7,000 books; nearly all of them in storage lockers. ‘He has more intellectual interests than anyone I’ve ever met,’ says the director Richard Pearce, who tracked down McCarthy in 1974 and remains one of his few ‘artistic’ friends” (30).

⁷⁷ For Butterworth, Suttree’s fascination with fossils is part of McCarthy’s dehumanizing view of human subjects: Humans “are trapped in time, space, social, and economic circumstances, as living fossils, as empty containers in the surrounding sediment of the world” (100).

⁷⁸ One of the most important and oft-cited studies in which the term “environmental racism” was first used is Toxic Waste and Race, a study compiled by the United Church of Christ Commission for Racial Justice in 1987 (Chavis “Foreword” Confronting Environmental Racism 3-4). The study did groundbreaking research on environmental injustice, showing the pattern of locating “toxic sites and other ecological hazards in minority communities” (Bennett and Teague “Urban Ecocriticism” 7). As Michael Bennett notes: the 1987 report “superseded a 1983 General Accounting Office report that discovered that three out of four hazardous waste landfills in the southeastern United States were located in predominantly black communities. The United Church of Christ report revealed that this pattern was consistent across the nation and that race was more significant than socioeconomic status in determining the placement of such facilities. In 1990, the Environmental Protection Agency also released a study indicating that racial minorities are disproportionately exposed to environmental toxins. Academics, notably Robert Bullard, have provided independent corroboration of the existence of environmental racism” (185 n. 1). See Bullard’s Confronting Environmental Racism (1993) and Dumping in Dixie (1990).

⁷⁹ In addition to the lumberyard and slaughterhouse, McCarthy locates sand and gravel companies on the riverbank as well (§ 9). It is important to remember that perhaps the most important argument of the environmental justice movement is the revelation of the pattern of

placing toxic industries in predominantly minority communities (Chavis “Foreword” 3). Despite the fact that some of these industries might not be considered environmentally harmful in themselves, their placement near people necessarily affects human health: “Who benefits from and who pays for our modern industrial society? Environmental and health costs are localized: risks increase with proximity to the source and are borne by those living nearby . . .” (Bullard “Introduction” 11).

⁸⁰By far, the number one contributor of oil pollution in rivers is runoff from roads polluted by cars. According to Jane Holtz Kay in *Asphalt Nation*, cars are responsible for the release of 100 million gallons of oil into waterways a year (95). According to the EPA, “Roads, highways, and bridges are a source of significant contributions of pollutants to our nation’s waters. Contaminants from vehicles and activities associated with road and highway construction and maintenance are washed from roads and roadsides when it rains or snow melts. A large amount of this runoff pollution is carried directly to water bodies. . . . As [runoff pollution] flows over [impervious surfaces], the water picks up dirt and dust, rubber and metal deposits from tire wear, antifreeze and engine oil that has dripped onto the pavement These contaminants are carried to our lakes, rivers, streams, and oceans.” <http://www.epa.gov/owow/nps/roads.html>.

Most scientific papers refer to petroleum-based pollutants in runoff, which include residues from asphalt and rubber, as Polycyclic Aromatic Hydrocarbons (PAHs). Representative articles on this subject are: Smith et al. “Occurrence and Phase Distribution of Polycyclic Aromatic Hydrocarbons in Urban Stormwater Runoff.” *Water Science and Technology*. 42 :383-88; Vaze and Chiew. “Experimental Study of Pollutant Accumulation on an Urban Road Surface.” *Urban Water*. 4 : 379-89.

⁸¹For Harrogate, the small patches of agriculture remind him of the life he left and refocus him on the task of becoming an urban dweller, which he does through his multiple get-rich-quick schemes.

⁸²What distinguishes Rufus’s operation for the packinghouse is scale. Rufus’s accounting of pigs comes down to a single shoat as evidenced by his tracking down a pig that Harrogate has captured and eaten (141).

⁸³While poverty and deprivation are not part of the deep ecological vision for communities, the characteristics of McAnally Flats that are part of Naess’s idea of a green community include: a small population and geography who “know each other by acquaintance” and who can travel without cars, local production of goods, a “high degree of local color” in “culture and entertainment,” and narrow income disparities (Naess 144-45).

⁸⁴Suttree recognizes Harrogate’s innocence and his need of assistance throughout the novel, checking on him when the boy first comes to Knoxville (116-18) and searching for him for four days in the caves beneath Knoxville after Harrogate’s failed attempt to blast into a bank vault (277).

⁸⁵As yet another example of Cartesian ambivalence to the suffering of others, when the trolley gets to the end of the line, the driver insists that Suttree pay a second fare: “I thought you could ride as far as you wanted on one token,” Suttree says. “Not on this streetcar.” Juxtaposed to the generosity and compassion just illustrated by the residents of McAnally Flats on this same night, the driver’s callousness is notable. As Suttree stands in the gutter under a streetlight with his thumb out, the trolley “hove from the carbarn and sucked by [,] the soft yellow bore of a headlamp went trundling past.” The street car is headed toward the city: “The lights of Knoxville quaked in a faint penumbra to the west as must the ruins of many an older city seen by

herders in the hills by barbaric tribesmen shuffling along the roads. Suttree with his miles to go kept his eyes on the ground . . ." (179). The driver, his trolley, and the city are all part of the same Cartesian system that exacerbates the suffering of those unable to pay.

⁸⁶ Though the goatman is insufficiently developed to substantiate his specific theology, his relationship with animals—treating them very much like equals—suggests that he could represent an eco-Christianity based on the writing of St. Francis of Assisi and the medieval mystics. Lynn White acknowledges the alternative worldview that St. Francis expressed in his essay “The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis” (The Ecocritical Reader 3-14). In Deep Ecology, Bill Devall and George Sessions identify a Scandinavian movement committed to “a new natural theology for Christianity” and identify John Carmody’s book Ecology and Religion: Toward a New Christian Theology of Nature as a starting point for such a theology (33). Even Naess attempts to reconcile deep ecology with a nontraditional form of Christianity (183-89).

⁸⁷ In much the same way, in The Crossing Billy Parham goes to an old Mexican, el Señor, to ascertain the ingredients of a foul-smelling scent bait meant to attract wolves (45-47).

⁸⁸ Adapted from “vagrant” as defined in Webster’s Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary.

⁸⁹ New Urbanists such as James Howard Kunstler and Andres Duany speak of the lack of architectural coherence in urban areas as having a lack of syntax.

⁹⁰ Though Harrogate’s objective in blowing the banks is greed, Suttree’s half-hearted wish that Harrogate succeed in destroying the whole city can be seen as in terms of the ecoterrorism in Abee’s The Monkeywrench Gang.

⁹¹ When talking about his play, The Stonemason, McCarthy’s remarks that “Stacking up stone is the oldest trade there is. Not even prostitution can come close to its antiquity. It’s older than anything, older than fire. And in the last 50 years, with hydraulic cement, it’s vanishing. I find that rather interesting” (Woodward 40). In the play, the narrator, Ben, speaks of the house he helped his grandfather rebuild; it “was built long before the introduction of portland cement made it possible to build with stone and yet know nothing of masonry For true masonry is not held together by cement but by gravity. That is to say, by the warp of the world. By the stuff of creation itself. The keystone that locks the arch is pressed in place by the thumb of God” (9).

⁹² Besides the references to concrete listed above, a number of other references reinforce my argument that McCarthy using concrete as an emblem of Cartesian thinking: 7, 8, 9 (the sand and gravel company), 45, 50, 89, 96, 97, 116, 338, 379, 380, 383, 411, 470.

⁹³ Diane Luce has identified and photographed many of the remaining places mentioned in Suttree, including the Henley Street Bridge. See “Suttree’s Knoxville/McCarthy’s Knoxville: A Slide Presentation.” Proceedings of the First European Conference on Cormac McCarthy (1998).

⁹⁴ Suburbanization has been connected to a host of environmental and social problems. See James Howard Kunstler’s The Geography of Nowhere and Andres Duany’s Suburban Nation: The Rise of Sprawl and the Decline of the American Dream.

⁹⁵ Naess asserts that deep ecologists “should not have general slogans against technology or belittle its importance. The diversity of human cultures through history shows a tremendous diversity of technologies, and without this diversity we would not have had deep cultural diversity” (155). He proposes ten questions to help evaluate whether a technical change in society is compatible with the society’s social and cultural goals. Among these questions are: Is the technical advance conducive or dangerous to health? How much energy does the technique require? What is the amount of waste? What kind of energy [does the technology use]? Does the

technique pollute directly or indirectly? Does it promote equality or class differences at the place of work or more generally? (95-96).

⁹⁶ Naess contends that the private car is “the simplest and ecologically most irresponsible form of transportation” (210). Despite this recognition, “there is seldom much discussion of car-dependency in the literature” of environmental ethics (Brennan 335).

⁹⁷ See The Orchard Keeper (245-46). The liveliness of the workhouse is reminiscent of the film “Cool Hand Luke.”

⁹⁸ Eksteins quotes Roland Barthes as saying, “I think cars today are the cultural equivalent of the great Gothic cathedrals” (xiv).

⁹⁹ Among those killed or harassed out of town by the police in the last section of the book are: Clarence Raby and Lonas Ray Caughorn (416), Callahan (376), Hoghead (403), Harrogate (439), and Ab Jones (447). The old railroader Watson is placed in a mental institute along with Suttree’s aunt, sparking Suttree to comment, “What perverted instinct made folks group the mad together?” (434).

¹⁰⁰ While every character from McAnally Flats who migrates north is black, both whites and blacks were forced to northern industrial centers to find work. The phenomenon of poor whites from Appalachia migrating north is clear in Steve Earle’s song “Hillbilly Highway” from his recording Guitar Town. Getting his inspiration from Loretta Lynn’s book Coal Miner’s Daughter, Earle co-wrote the song with Jimbeau Hinson. The lyrics tell of grandparents leaving Appalachia with a “beat-up truck and a dream of a better life / Grandmama cried when she waved goodbye, never / Heard such a lonesome sound / Pretty soon the dirt road turned into blacktop / Detroit city bound / Down that Hillbilly Highway.” Economics, not race, is at the heart of the displacement of the citizens of McAnally Flats.

¹⁰¹ The connection between the three orders and Cartesian thinking is clear in H.W. Jansen’s discussion of the orders in History of Art: “To the nonspecialist, the detailed terminology may seem something of a nuisance, yet a good many of these terms have become part of our general architectural vocabulary, to remind us of the fact that analytical thinking, in architecture as in countless other fields, originated with the Greeks” (167).

Conclusion

¹⁰² The move has also had a tremendous impact on McCarthy criticism, which has widely been recognized as being divided between his southern critics and his western critics. As Dana Philips has argued, those who read McCarthy as a ‘Southern’ writer see him as the heir of William Faulkner and Flannery O’Connor” (434) and wish to find “something redemptive or regenerative, something affirming mysteries similar to those O’Connor’s fiction is suppose to affirm (mysteries of a Christian or Gnostic variety)” (435). “Western” readers, on the other hand, view McCarthy within a wider context of not just Faulkner and O’Connor but also Melville, Hemingway, Dostoevski, and Conrad, and they view McCarthy’s later novels as evidence of the author’s “move toward wider relevance and broader worldview” (435).

¹⁰³ Though a minor detail in the brief description of the kid’s life in Tennessee, the disappearance of predator mammals, such as wolves and panthers, is for McCarthy negatively associated here and elsewhere with the loss of a connection with the natural environment. Other instances of the disappearance of predators signaling a loss of meaning for an environmental character frame McCarthy’s career. In The Orchard Keeper, Arthur Ownby recalls the last panther (or “painter”

as he calls them) and Billy Parham in The Crossing unsuccessfully tries to return a wolf back to the mountains of Mexico.

¹⁰⁴ Another point of contact between the southwestern and southern novels is the shared experience of environmentalist John Grady Cole from All the Pretty Horses and the demented Cartesian Lester Ballard—both characters are forced from family land.

¹⁰⁵ Philips argues that the kid “is a remarkably reduced version of Ishmael” (440). Both characters are often absent from the more disturbing violence and seem to periodically disappear from the narrative.

¹⁰⁶ White is a fictional creation in a novel filled with people McCarthy gleaned from history; as such, he is an amalgam of the more popular ideas of Manifest Destiny. Even though White’s company of irregulars represents the filibuster expeditions that functioned outside of the legitimacy of the United States government, his works express the racist jingoism inherent in the doctrine of Manifest Destiny. White tells the kid that the soldiers will be “the instruments of liberation in a dark and troubled land” (BM 34):

What we are dealing with . . . is a race of degenerates. A mongrel race, little better than niggers. And maybe no better. There is no government in Mexico. Hell, there’s no God in Mexico. Never will be. We are dealing with a people *manifestly* incapable of governing themselves. (emphasis added) (34)

White’s words are strikingly similar to Stephen Austin’s, who viewed the conflict between Mexico and the Texas as one between a “mongrel Spanish-Indian and negro race” and “civilization and the Anglo-American race,” and declared that violence was inevitable: “War is our only recourse. There is no other remedy” (qtd in Takaki 174). White also articulates the religious aspects of Manifest Destiny that makes him feel invincible. Such self-righteousness and a false sense of security are characteristics that one Mexican noticed about Americans:

The idea these gentlemen have formed for themselves is, that God made the world and them also, therefore what there is in the world belongs to them as sons of God. These Americans are so contriving that someday they will build ladders to touch the sky, and once in the heavens they will change the whole face of the universe and even the color of the stars. (qtd. in Takaki 171-72)

McCarthy’s characterization of White reveals a man whose racial and nationalistic biases results in the quick and horrific death of himself and all but two of his men. As if McCarthy wanted to juxtapose the feebleness of White’s beliefs with the more lethal capabilities of the Judge and the Glanton gang, he has White killed within the first fifty pages; we are left with the vision of his head floating in a jar of mescal in the town square of Mexican town where the kid and Toadvine are taken after their arrest. Soon after, the kid joins a different band of renegades.

¹⁰⁷ Besides his ability to do just about everything well (speaking multiple foreign languages, being an excellent draftsman, fiddler, and dancer), the Judge is able to speak with seeming authority on the range of topics, such as race (84-84), geography (116), law (239, 292-93), architecture (224), and phrenology (238), not to mention war.

¹⁰⁸ The Glanton gang, like the crew of the Pequod, is a multicultural group. Though mostly white, the group also includes an African-American, at least one Mexican (strangely named McGill), a changing number of Delaware Indians, and one Vandiemerlander (a person from present-day Tasmania). Despite this fact, the judge and Glanton still harbor a belief in the superiority of whites over nonwhites. The judge shows his contempt for Native Americans in his lecture about the Anasazi Indians; disparaging their structures made of wood and animal skins,

he says, "For whoever makes a shelter of reeds and hides has joined his spirit to the common destiny of creatures and he will subside back into the primal mud with scarcely a cry" (147). In the judge's mind, the efforts of some Native American tribes to live sustainably within an ecosystem makes them like animals; therefore, they are subhuman. Likewise, Glanton reveals his racism by voicing an uncharacteristic pity on a German hermit living in the ruins of an old church, saying, "I dont like to see white men that way Dutch or whatever. I dont like to see it" (226).

¹⁰⁹ While the unabashedly savage descriptions of bands of Comanche and Apache Indians certainly discounts the possibility that McCarthy views Native American as Rousseauian Noble Savages, he balances his depiction by including scenes in which peaceful bands of Indians find themselves victims of the Glanton gang's violence, such as the Tiguas. Other tribes show mercy on whites, such as the Diguenos (302). McCarthy portrays the Diguenos as fearing both other Indians and white Americans. When they discover that the kid and Tobin have survived the Yuma attack on the ferry, one of them says of the Yumas, "Son muy malos." The Dieguenos, who "eked a desperate living from the land" watched the east for the arrival of the next challenge, watching "each day for that thing to gather itself out of its terrible incubation in the house of the sun and muster along the edge of the eastern world and whether it be armies or plague or pestilence or something altogether unspeakable they waited with a strange equanimity" (300-01). It is the Diguenos, Edwin Arnold reminds us, who save the kid and Tobin from dying in the desert ("Knowing" 62).

⁹Other aspects of Part One of The Crossing that warrant ecocritical consideration include: Don Arnulfo's articulation of the limited perspective of humans, Jane Ellen's compassion for the shewolf juxtaposed with her husband's anthropocentrism, and the role of alguacil (as an agent of Cartesian authority) in the torture and destruction of the she-wolf.

Don Arnulfo's critique of human perception alludes to the shortcomings of anthropocentrism: "Between their acts and their ceremonies lies the world and in this world the storms blow and the trees twist in the wind and all the animals that God has made go to and fro yet this world men do not see. They see the acts of their own hands or they see that which they name and call out to one another but the world between them is invisible to them" (46).

At Billy's last stop before crossing the border with the shewolf, he stays at a ranch where the woman, Jane Ellen, insists that the shewolf gets medical attention. Her husband on the other hands reveals both his commodification of nature and his anthropocentrism. First, he asks Billy, "What would you take for her cash money?" (70), then he exclaims that if "[p]eople hear about me givin first aid to a damn wolf I wont be able to live in this county" (71).

The "young and halelooking alguacil" (97), is the governing official who confiscates the wolf as "contraband" (99). He views the wolf as an object. What makes the official worse than the usual representation of Cartesian authority is his subsequent use of the wolf in dogfighting.