Myth, Legend, Dust:
The Southern Literary Influences of Cormac McCarthy and How They Portend the Evening Redness in the West

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*As promised, a late, day-before-deadline shout out to the boys for hooking me up with 3am coffee. I love you all.
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Abbreviations

Creveceour- *Letters from An American Farmer* (LFAAF)

Faulkner- *The Bear* (TB)

Faulkner- *The Old People* (TOP)

Jonas- *The Gnostic Religion* - (TGR)

O’Connor- *The Violent Bear It Away* (TVBIA)

McCarthy- *Blood Meridian* - (BM)

McCarthy- *Child of God* (CG)

McCarthy- *Outer Dark* - (OD)

McCarthy- *The Orchard Keeper* - (TOK)

Twelve Concerned Southerners- *I’ll Take My Stand* - (ITMS)
Chapter One. Something in the Soil: Southern Agrarianism and
the Influence of Faulkner in *The Orchard Keeper*

“They are gone now. Fled, banished in death or exile, lost, undone. Over the land sun and
wind still move to burn and sway the trees, the grasses. No avatar, no scion, no vestige of
that people remains. On the lips of that strange race that now dwells there their names are
myth, legend, dust.”

*The Orchard Keeper* (1965)- Cormac McCarthy

To begin a study of Cormac McCarthy one must first contextualize his works within
the framework of his biographical experiences. Scholars have conventionally examined his
works through a geographical lens that situates the novels in relation to McCarthy’s
contemporaneous residence. His first four novels comprise his Southern works that are set
in his boyhood Tennessee, while subsequent novels encompass his Southwestern works that
coincide with his move to Texas in 1976. Unique to McCarthy’s Southern period are two
novels, *The Orchard Keeper* (1965) and *Suttree* (1979) whose characters are atypical within
the McCarthy canon. The archetypical McCarthy character is violent, unmoored, and opaque-
the kid from *Blood Meridian* (1985). “One of the novelistic traditions which McCarthy
consistently subverts... is his apparent refusal to grant any sense of interiority to his
characters, a refusal to provide any kind of psychological motivation or ordering principle.”¹
McCarthy’s refusal to grant interiority evokes the classical, for his characters are mythic
characters who “do not exist to be repositories for psychological motivation. They are

¹ Walsh, 2009, 2
representative of large generalized ideas, values, and aspects of culture.” When the hulking demoniac Judge Holden of Blood Meridian chronicles specimen in his ledger and declares “Whatever in creation exists without my knowledge exists without my consent” (BM 198) it is evident that the Judge is representative of a philosophy and theology that transcends any individual character of the Glanton Gang. John Wesley and Suttree, the protagonists from The Orchard Keeper and Suttree respectively, provide marked differences from this McCarthy archetype. They are the keepers of a slowly fading Southern autonomy, and their deeply introspective and reflective search for authenticity is the uniting narrative arc for The Orchard Keeper and Suttree.

The Orchard Keeper is a bildungsroman, rich with autobiographical vignettes from McCarthy’s own lived experience. It follows the boyhood of fatherless John Wesley Rattner in the Appalachian backwoods of Tennessee. John Wesley’s boyhood is an elegy to the authentic heroes of Red Branch, manifest in the father figures of Marion Sylder and Arthur Ownby, who are characterized by their adherence to principles that ultimately align with those of the Southern Agrarians. This driving conflict, between the agrarian and the industrial, the moral and the corrupt, the authentic and the inauthentic, is illustrated through the juxtaposition of Appalachia and Knoxville that are the shared landscapes of McCarthy’s “Southern” Tennessee period. This dichotomy in the Tennessee landscape is mediated by the isolated community of Red Branch that lies in both the “city and the wilderness... however it is neither a pastoral ideal in the literary, Arcadian sense nor the Jeffersonian hope of an agrarian utopia in the new world, but rather a micro-frontier where mechanized civilization and ‘official’ progressive culture meet and combat both what is left of

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2 Cant, 2008, 11
the natural environmental matrix and the mountain pastoral world.” The “mountain pastoral world” is the last remnant of a defeated pastoral resistance beset by a hostile natural world and invasive modernity. This underlying tension between those clinging to ideals of a fallen agrarianism against encroaching and arrogating modernity is the central conflict that dominates John Wesley’s boyhood, that is ultimately evocative of Faulkner and the Southern Agrarianism of *I’ll Take My Stand*.

**I’ll Take My Stand.**

Published in 1930 by twelve concerned Southerners, *I’ll Take My Stand* would become the manifesto for the Southern Agrarian movement. Though prompted by the perceived encroachment of Northern culture upon its Southern counterpart, the arguments from Southern Agrarianism can be traced to “the 150-year-old debate between Hamilton and Jefferson [The Federalist Papers and Notes on the State of Virginia].” Questions that have dominated the American political sphere, federal against local, manufacturing against agrarianism, and later, North against South dominate the opening lines of *I’ll Take My Stand*. “But how far shall the South surrender its moral, social, and economic autonomy to the victorious principle of Union?” In rapid succession, the “moral, social, and economic autonomy” of the South is situated in a conflict that rages from “younger Southerners, who are being converted frequently to the industrial gospel” (ITMS x), to the “enslavement [of] our human energies... labor is hard, its tempo is fierce, and his employment is insecure.” (ITMS xi, xii) The legitimacy and morality of religion has been usurped, and the sacred space of nature, whether manifest in the pristine pastoral or the physical and contemplative

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3 Luce, 2009, 29
4 Winchell, 2006, 4
agricultural have become “industrialized, transformed into cities and artificial habitations, manufactured into commodities… we lose the sense of nature as something mysterious and contingent” (ITMS xiv). In enmity are “two worlds, one identified with rural peace and simplicity, the other with urban power and sophistication.” This is apocalyptic war, one that sees a way of life, hurled, flaming in hideous ruin to bottomless perdition, and its last vestiges choked by callous modernity.

To stake the claims of this conflict is to face the indomitable capitalism of Industrial Revolution Era New England. In the wake of the Civil War and the subsequent inundation of carpetbaggers, *I'll Take My Stand* is the South’s rebuttal to an antithetical way of life, a cry against the relentless machine of commodity culture. To define the Southern Agrarian’s “New England” is to recognize that New England's way of life is composed of two parts. The first, industrialism, defined in this essay through a capitalistic, technological, and mechanized lens, “the factory system of Watt... [with its] high rate of labor, the want of a sufficient number of hands- the scarcity and dearness of raw materials, and its unfavorable effects on the health of the people.” This manifests in the transformation of the South’s economy, from agricultural to industrial that catalyzes domestic migration from rural farms to urban centers of industry. The construction of railroads and highways facilitate this movement and coerces interaction between the isolated rural and an increasingly changing and depersonalizing urbanized world.

The second component of industrialism is the cognitive dissonance that accompanies industrialism- modernity. “Industrialism is meant not by the machine and industrial technology as such, but the domination of the economic, political, and social order by the

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5 Marx, 1964, 19
6 Ibid. 146, 153
notion that the greater part of a nation's energies should be directed toward an endless process of increasing the production and consumption of all goods.” (ITMS 148) When Lanier writes of “industrialism” as the “domination, of the economic, political, and social [composed primarily of the religious]” he anticipates Berman’s definition of modernity, and he foretells the global and ongoing struggle of conservative tradition against inevitable industrial revolution. Embedded within the Southern Agrarian’s protest, found in the literature of Faulkner, O’Connor, and early McCarthy, is the South’s embattled response to unfettered modernity. Modernity brings “unity of disunity it pours us all into a maelstrom of perpetual disintegration and renewal, of struggle and contradiction, of ambiguity and anguish.”

The industrialism outlined by the Southern Agrarians is the process of modernity, and it begins with the overarching conflict between tradition and modernity. This separates into three underlying conflicts, rural against urban, religion against secularism, and authentic agrarianism against capitalistic industrialization. These underlying conflicts are the symptoms of modernity, for in industrialization, a nation and its people are “capable of the most spectacular growth, capable of appalling waste and devastation, capable of everything except solidity and stability.” In a changing world, from “Baudelaire’s 'swarming city, city full of dreams / where the spectre in broad daylight accosts the passerby’ to Eliot’s ‘Unreal City’ where crowds of people shuffle to work ‘under the brown fog of a winter dawn’... modernity is the breeding ground of a vapid, anonymous existence- a death in life.” The Southern Agrarians stand for all of us, alienated individuals who have lost community and a sense of place, and are trapped in Weber’s iron cage.

7 Berman, 1988, 15
8 Ibid. 19
9 Lears, 1981, 32-33
Are these characterizations of the North and industrialization fair? An economist would say no. In the wake of a morally indefensible war that left a million dead, the remnants of an antiquated and outdated plantation economy without labor, and a ruined manufacturing base, it is a country’s responsibility to promote industrialization. For what is the modernization of the South but provision of public education, the construction of factories for more jobs, and an increase in wages, that stems from the human desire to help those in need. Perhaps the Southern Agrarians are they people who puzzled Freud. They are the epitome of fantasy-making, “[I am] puzzled by the amazing tendency of presumably civilized men to idealize simple and often primitive conditions of life... the implication that mankind would be happier if our complex, technical order could somehow be abandoned”. Yet, the Southern Agrarian arguments against the factory, against the capitalist, and against the secular are the criticisms of Kafka, Soyinka, Tolstoy, and Lu Xun roared in a global challenge against modernity.

Modernity’s assault upon the South’s agrarian tradition is ultimately facilitated through the economic shift from the agricultural to the industrial. The language of agrarianism is associated with the pastoral garden, “the soft veil of nostalgia that hangs over our urbanized landscape is largely a vestige of the once dominant image of an undefiled, green republic, a quiet land of forests, villages, and farms dedicated to the pursuit of happiness.” This “pursuit of happiness” originates from the soil. It is a life grows from a philosophy of leisure and self-sufficiency, ”the theory of agrarianism is that the culture of the soil is the best and most sensitive of vocations.” (ITMS xix) The “culture of the soil” echoes a foundational text from American literary canon- Crevecoeur’s American Farmer. “If he [The

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10 Marx, 1964, 8-9
11 Ibid. 6
American Farmer] thinks usefully, why should not he in his leisure hours set down his thoughts? I have composed many a good sermon as I followed my plough.” (LFAAF 47) Through the “sermon” and “plough,” Crevecoeur conflates “leisure” with both physical labor and the cultivation and contemplation of the spiritual. This spiritual relationship enriched through agrarianism is threatened through the dull repetition of industrialism’s mentally stagnant assembly. For not only is the ideal agrarian “the most industrious farmer in the country, but [he is] one of the best writers.” (LFAAF 47) Thus, the diligent farmer from Letters from an American Farmer and I’ll Take My Stand works his farm- his personal garden- and cultivates from the soil: piety, virtue, and morality.

The Southern Agrarian’s focus upon the intimacy of the soil, and one’s personal relationship with their garden, pits the Southern Agrarians in opposition to the plantation economy- a soulless and extractive system of oppression. “It is time for Southerners to say affirmatively that the South must cultivate its provincial soul and not sell it for a mess of industrial pottage.” (ITMS 199) Industrialism’s shift from the soil to the machine removes the personal industry from one’s labor, turning vocation into a systematized and perfunctory job. If the “economy is the secular image of religious conviction” (ITMS 175) then the industrialization of the South signals that “the modern man has lost his sense of vocation.” (ITMS xiv)

For The Orchard Keeper’s John Wesley, the machine has overrun the garden, and within a world devoid of vocation and authenticity, all that is left are the encroaching agents of modernity, with “the strange idea that human destiny is not to secure an honorable peace with nature, but to wage an unrelenting war on nature. Men, therefore, [is] determined to conquer nature to a degree which is beyond reason.” (ITMS 7) This “unrelenting war” of industrialism and nature has altered the landscape of the Mountain South. There has been an exodus from the rural to the urban, and the once cultivated gardens and orchards are now
overrun by wilderness. The self-subsistent farmer has departed and they have been replaced by the Whisky Rebellion’s bootlegger. Sylder’s dogged resistance against modernity is the multigenerational conflict that dominates John Wesley’s childhood. Sylder’s imprisonment and Ownby’s involuntary commitment are modernity’s final encroachment into the last resistance composed of residual heroes and squatters that remember the values of the Southern Agrarians.

Accompanying the death of agrarianism is the disappearance of religion and faith. *I’ll Take My Stand*’s essays on religion recognize the erosion of the religious and the totality of rationalism. Allen Tate’s defense entitled “Religion as Time: and History as Time” begins “in the spirit of irreligion.” (ITMS 155) By situating his argument in the secular, Tate, like the residents of Red Branch, has realized that authentic belief and the agrarianism of the cultivated orchard and farm has vanished. For what place, can “religion hold with logical, abstract instruments, which of course tend to put religion in some logical system or series, where it vanishes.” (ITMS 163) The nature of religion, is faith, perceived from belief rather than by the support of evidence. “Religion can hardly expect to flourish in an industrial society. Religion is our submission to the general intention of a nature that is fairly inscrutable... We receive the illusion of having power over nature, and lose the sense of nature as something mysterious and contingent.” (ITMS xiv) Reflecting humanity’s search for meaning within the cosmos, the religious is “a primordial experience, homologous to [the] founding of the world.”12

The conception of religious and sacred space was popularized by Mircea Eliade’s *The Sacred and Profane* (1957) that interprets humanity’s awareness, interaction, and confirmation of the religious experience through an environmental lens. For Eliade, genuine

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12 Eliade, 1957, 20-21
religious experience is descended “from the act of [the] manifestation of the sacred-hierophany... the history of religions is constituted by a great number of hierophanies, by manifestations of sacred realities.”¹³ These hierophanies are the moments when humanity touches the face of God, and the religious, the sacred, is apparent through the majesty of nature. When situated in the history of the Southern Agrarians, there was first “God's own plenty of undeveloped land on a scale [of] beauty and majesty unsurpassed in the known world.”¹⁴ After the conquest and settlement of land, there was a belief that “to settle in a territory is to consecrate it.”¹⁵ Though settlement clears away the virgin land, the settlers consecrate their fields through the ritual of cultivation. Through the farmland’s use during an eternal present of cyclical seasons, authenticity is bestowed upon the land through Crevecour’s “culture of the soil.” Yet modernity discards and neglects the farmland, ultimately making it into a waste land.

Industrialism, like the plantation economy, is a “religion of the workable [that] has no altars. It has no formal ritual.” (ITMS 164) The individual “regards himself solely as the subject and agent of history, and he refuses all appeal to transcendence... Man makes himself”¹⁶ With modernity comes the desacralization of the cosmos- the rejection of religion. Tate asks, “How may the Southerner take hold of his Tradition? The answer is, by violence.” (ITMS 174) Tate’s call for violence, for resistance, is futile. Echoing the fate of the Southern Agrarians, Tate notes that “it [religion] can always be defended, but a recovery and restoration is a more difficult performance.” (ITMS 166)

¹³ Eliade, 1957, 11
¹⁴ Gatta, 2004, 3
¹⁵ Ibid, 34
¹⁶ Ibid, 203
In the essays of *I'll Take My Stand* we see the articulation of the Southern Agrarians, and John Wesley’s recognition of the Southern Agrarian’s absence. Arthur Ownby and John Wesley begin *The Orchard Keeper* as the last residents with any memory of the Southern Agrarian legacy. Just as Ownby and Sylder wage dogged resistance against that which has already triumphed, they reflect Tate’s sentiments, that the ideals defended by the Southern Agrarians cannot be recovered and restored. They have been defeated and the wilderness has overrun the pastoral.

**Plain Folk of the Mountain South.**

Characteristic of McCarthy’s southern novels, *The Orchard Keeper* opens with a one page prologue akin to a parable. “The tree was down and cut to lengths, the sections spread and jumbled over the grass.” (TOK 3) A close reading of the prologue hinges upon the interpretation of the logging. The motivation for the felled tree is ambiguous. Is the purpose for settlement, farming, maintenance of property? These reasons feature actively in the phases of Frederick Jackson Turner’s frontier thesis that informed twentieth century popular and academic interpretation of American conquest and settlement. Turner suggests that American colonization and westward advance began with a first wave consisting of backwoodsman and mythologized frontier figures like Daniel Boone and Kit Carson. Subsequent settlement progressed in a series of waves, “the pioneer, who depends for the subsistence of the family chiefly upon the natural growth of vegetation and the proceeds of hunting... the next class of emigrants purchase the lands, add field to field... plant orchards and exhibit the forms of plain, frugal, civilized life... Another wave rolls on. The men of
capital and enterprise come... the small village rises to a spacious town or city; substantial edifices of brick, extensive fields, orchards, gardens, colleges, and churches are seen.”

Turner’s thesis elicited numerous endorsements and rebuttals, including an interpretation by Southern Agrarian Frank Lawrence Owsley in *Plain Folk of the Old South* (1949) that situated the arguments of the Southern Agrarians within Turner’s thesis. In the South, “there were usually two distinct waves of settlers rather than the three generally ascribed to the Northern frontier. The first wave consisted of [seminomadic] herdsman, who subsisted primarily in a grazing and hunting economy; and in the second wave were the agricultural immigrants, coming to possess the land.” Owsley’s framework explains the absence of industrialism in the South. By 1840, “those who had not desired to settle as planters and farmers but preferred their occupation and the frontier with its plentiful game, fresh cattle ranges, and scarcity of neighbors, took up their abode in the pine forests and mountains... the herdsman and hunters found sanctuary from the pursuing agricultural settler.”

*The Orchard Keeper* takes place in the aftermath of the retreat by the herdsman and hunters towards the less fertile and rugged lands of Appalachia. Per Owsley’s theory, the felled tree pertains to the first wave of herdsman who have retreated further into the highlands. Three men stand around the log, a “stocky man with three fingers bound up in a dirty bandage with a splint. With him were a Negro and a young man.” (TOK 3) The trio are the three figures that comprise the Mountain South, the man with “three fingers in a splint” representing the generation of *The Orchard Keeper’s* Marion Sylder, the inheritor and

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17 Turner, 1950, 44-45
18 Owsley, 1949, 24
19 Ibid. 34
practitioner of Southern Agrarian values. The pairing of the black and young man, anticipate the uncertain future of the Mountain South in the face of modernity. During the prologue, the young man does not help crosscut and is silent except to ask “all the way up here?” Dialogue is conducted through the man and the African American, who crosscut the elm reflecting the isolation of *The Orchard Keeper’s* John Wesley and Owsley’s ‘plain folk.’ After cutting, the trio discover that “the twisted wrought-iron, the mangled fragment of the fence, and shook it. It didn’t’ shake. Its grewed through the tree, the man said. We cain’t cut no more on it. Damned old elum’s bad enough on a saw. The Negro was nodding his head. Yessa, he said. It most sholy has. Growed all up in that tree.” (TOK 3) Embedded and choked into the tree is a wrought iron fence, that has made the lumber unusable. Both ‘Plain Folk’ and African American must work through the dogged resistance of the wrought iron that chokes the growth of the Mountain South.

The first chapter of *The Orchard Keeper* introduces two holdovers from the era of the Southern Agrarians, John Wesley’s itinerant father Kenneth Rattner, and the claimed Mountain South cultural space of Green Fly Inn. Rattner’s presence is parasitic to the surrounding community. Upon his first meeting with Sylder, Rattner is characterized as “something loathsome about the seated figure [Rattner]... was a profound and unshakable knowledge of the presence of evil.” (TOK 33) Both Rattner and the Green Fly Inn dominate the opening pages of the first chapter, defining the Red Branch that John Wesley inherits, but both disappear and become mythologized into the region’s memory by the time John Wesley is introduced. Reflecting social construction of myth and past, “the conception of the past is construed from the standpoint of the new problems of today.”20 John Wesley’s reconstruction of the Southern Agrarian past begins with the absence of his father, and

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20 Mead, 1929, 353
culminates in surrogate father figures. This initially manifests through the mythologized figures, symbols, and institutions of an absent past, but are later replaced through the surrogate paternal figures of Sylder and Ownby that embody the authentic values of the Southern Agrarians.

*The Orchard Keeper* opens with Kenneth Rattner wandering a “blighted land” (TOK 12)- the new modernized Mountain South. Reinforcing the Southern Agrarian criticisms of the inauthentic and soulless disease of modernity is the incorporation of Arthurian Grail imagery with the characterization of “blighted land.” The imagery is startlingly appropriate, for within the conception of the Grail are the three underlying conflicts of the Southern Agrarians. In the Fisher King’s kingdom is the decay of the agrarian in an infertile land, the absence of the religious through the kingdom’s inability to purify and regenerate its soil, and the alienation of the individual in each knight’s quest in a barren and endless labyrinth. The narrator’s attribution of this “blighted land” merits digression to explore McCarthy’s allusion to the conception of waste land.

The original etymology of “blight” began in the agricultural sense- to describe farmland stricken by disease. This etymology carries over to the farmland around Red Branch depicted in agrarian decline. “The red dust of the orchard road is like powder from a brick kiln... By late July the corn patches stand parched and sere, stalks askew in defeat. All greens pale and dry. Clay cracks and splits in endless microcataclysm... the infernal sky” (TOK 10-11) Encoded in a series of images is a landscape and people condemned to Biblical ruin. The orchard road leading to the once idyllic garden is “powder.” The Biblical symbolism is twofold, the negligent garden is evocative of the Fall and the “powder” is the Lord’s curse from Deuteronomy 28. The Lord shall “make the rain of thy land powder and dust: from heaven shall it come down upon thee, until thou be destroyed.” (KJV Deut 28:24) The land exists in state of “microcataclysm” and Red Branch is condemned to Dante’s “infernal” inferno.
McCarthy’s sources of influence for his blighted land are derived from the whispers of modernity in the grail cycle of Tennyson’s *Idylls of the King*, and Eliot’s appropriation of the grail legend’s symbolism of the Fisher King’s blighted land in *The Waste Land* (1922). From Tennyson comes the Southern Agrarian criticisms of the “basic cleavage between the earthly and the spiritual. They depart the earthly city to seek the grail, which belongs to the spiritual city.”21 Evoking the modernity of Victorian England, Tennyson depicts the knight’s departure from Camelot as “the departure from the morally corrupt Camelot towards a spiritually elusive countryside that transforms into a waste land.”22

Southern Agrarian echoes are similarly found in *The Waste Land*. The two facets that comprise the Southern Agrarian’s modernity, both industrialization and alienation, are embodied in what “Joseph Schumpeter terms the ‘creative destruction’ of modernity- the unceasing cycles of development, destruction, and redevelopment that fuel wealth creation in capitalist societies.”23 “[Eliot’s] goal is to revivify the Waste Land of contemporary life, or make relevant, ‘the intense panorama of futility and anarchy’ of the present day by returning to its anthropological and mythic roots, and reveal the ‘savagery’ at the heart of our literature... the sequence of images coincides and concentrates into one intense impression of barbaric civilization.”24 This “return to its anthropological and mythic roots” is the crux of the opening chapter of *The Orchard Keeper*, with McCarthy introducing the mythic roots that direct and influence John Wesley. The impact of Eliot’s *The Waste Land* upon McCarthy will be extensively studied in the *Suttree* section of this paper specifically through the depiction of modernity in the urban Knoxville. Both competing heritages are introduced with the true

21 Haghofer, 1997, 111
22 Haghofer, 1997, 111
23 Morrison, 2015, 25
24 Ullyot, 2016, 57
nature of John Wesley’s lineage in Rattner and the Green Fly Inn and the paternal figures of Sylder and Ownby.

McCarthy’s narrative eloquence enables him to employ “high passages [that] speak up for values the characters could not express; for regions, places, landscapes.” In doing so, McCarthy’s opening passages introduce the setting of the novel encoding moral symbolism into environmental landscape. Rattner’s wandering follows a literary tradition extending from Shakespeare, Milton, and to Eliot wherein “the wilderness setting can be employed not merely as a geographical or scriptural detail but as a means of constructing an internalized landscape of the mind.”

This manifests in the opening scene of The Orchard Keeper, “For some time now the road had been deserted, white and scorching yet, though the sun was already reddening the western sky. He walked along slowly in the dust... Far down the blazing strip of concrete a small shapeless mass had emerged.” (TOK 7) The road, a continuation of the railroad seen in Faulkner’s The Bear (1942) and noted by Leo Marx in The Machine in the Garden (1964) is the “counterforce in the American archetype of the pastoral design” that similarly opens Robert Penn Warren’s All The King’s Men (1946) as the relentless symbol of modernity and progress. Stranded and isolated by modernity is the ‘Plain Folk’ Rattner, unmoored from the familial and ancestral, as modernity passes in pickup truck and trailer.

Rattner is the manifestation of “the failure [of] domesticity [that] spurs characters to the road.” He continues to wander through both rural and urban settings manifest in his crossings through the waste land and Knoxville. He is an absent father and a displaced World

25 Ellis, 2006, 2
26 Kean, 2007, 429
27 Marx, 1964, 26
28 Ellis, 2006, 17
War I vet, he had “taken up quarters in an abandoned log house with his wife and son, and left there four days later with twenty-six dollars in his pocket.” (TOK 23) Rattner catches a ride with the bootlegger Sylder, a more principled mirror of the displaced drifter. While Rattner is a man without values, Sylder retains some values of the Southern Agrarians.

While Rattner is introduced without biography, Sylder is a native of Red Branch, “He was born in Red Branch in 1913... he left school to work briefly as a carpenter’s apprentice... labored with hammer and saw until late September and then he quit, knowledgeable in purlins and pole plates, and with his savings bought some clothes and a pair of thirty dollar boots mail ordered out of Minnesota and disappeared.” (TOK 12) Though Sylder is similarly introduced as a drifter, only working for a few months before disappearing, his moral code is the antithesis to the unprincipled Rattner. While Rattner steals twenty-four dollars from his wife and newborn son, Sylder works as a carpenter to earn thirty.

Upon returning to Red Branch, Sylder returns “in a sweep of lights, watched a glistening black Ford coupe pull up across the road. It was brand new... the shirt creased thrice across the back in military fashion... took from his picket a handful of silver dollars and stacked them neatly before him. All right now! Sylder is payin!” (TOK 13-14) Despite embracing modernity in the form of the “black Ford coupe,” Sylder redeems himself through his sponsorship of drinks for the patrons of the Green Fly Inn. The final characterization of Sylder is his dismissal that leads to bootlegging, “He lost his job at the fertilizer plant. Aaron Conatser needled him into a fight and he fought, not out of any particular dislike toward Conatser or even in any great anger, but only to get the thing over with, settled.” (TOK 30) Sylder’s fight with Conatser underlies the code of the Mountain South. Rattner’s death and Sylder’s bootlegging coincide with a reclamation of the Appalachian authentic that sees the best of the Mountain South triumph over the worst, and leads to Sylder’s mentorship of John Wesley.
The last remnants of Appalachian culture are sheltered in the Green Fly Inn. It is unstable, but rambunctious and eccentric, rickety and swaying. Despite its ramshackle appearance, “inside there was a genuine bar, purportedly of mahogany that been salvaged from a Knoxville saloon in 1919, done service in a laundry, an ice cream parlor, and briefly in a catacombic establishment several miles from Red Branch.” (TOK 13) The inclusion of the Knoxville bar illustrates a reclamation of the authentic Mountain South. The bars “salvaging” during 1919 coincides with its recovery in the face of government overreach in the form of Prohibition in 1920. Its journey through Appalachia anticipating the movement of its drifting patrons while underscoring the mobility available in contemporary Red Branch. This mobility is the movement afforded by the machine that signals continued and ultimate encroachment and the defeat of Sylder and Ownby.

In this remnant of the Mountain South gather “crowds marshalled there beyond the domain of laws either civil or spiritual.” (TOK 16) Those “stubbornly unsocialized east Tennessee mountain people about whom he [McCarthy] writes but also to the environment they inhabit, which is altogether inhuman… [the] theme is the conviction each has that one should be able to live as one chooses- independent of society’s conventions and expectations.”\(^\text{29}\) The assembled crowds “beyond the domain of laws” form a mythic space, beyond “the reach and regulation [of] modernity and the bureaucratic state.”\(^\text{30}\) Inside this sacred space are storytellers, “Hobie was a favorite and carried on a running monologue of anecdotes.” (TOK 23) Reflecting the eternal institution of the Green Fly Inn is Hobie who tells a “running monologue of anecdotes. It is revealed that Hobie is the family name for Red Branch’s legendary moonshine distiller, “they [the Hobie family] were a whiskey making

\(^{29}\) Bell, 1988, 24

\(^{30}\) Walsh, 2009, 46-47
family before whiskey making was illegal, their family history mythical, preliterate, and legendary.” (TOK 95) The Hobie family as the moonshine distillers are the “mythic, preliterate, and legendary,” that share, propagate, and mythologize the surrounding valley in storytelling. It is a homosocial space where everyone “rocked away with those old boozers to the last man.” (TOK 29) In contradiction to the anonymous bars of Knoxville crowded with anonymous strangers, the Green Fly Inn is comprised of intimate neighbors. Yet concluding the chapter, the Green Fly Inn burns down, “By now the entire building was swallowed in flames rocketing up into the night with locomotive sounds” (TOK 47) and with the “locomotive sounds” of encroaching modernity, the literal machine in the garden has entered Red Branch. As the crowd sees the Green Fly Inn fire, it “divided the onlookers into two bands, grouped north and south out of harm’s way.” (TOK 48) This final segmentation are the divisions that arise from the loss of this space, with some electing to pursue the modernity and industrialism promised in Knoxville, while others retreat in further isolation to the highlands of the Mountain South.

The mythology of the past is constructed by John Wesley’s mother, who romanticizes Kenneth Rattner. Instead of sharing stories in the homosocial and masculine Green Fly Inn, the realm of storytelling has been displaced towards the “barren fireplace.” The house that Rattner left his wife and son, “some supposed it to be the oldest house in the county... they paid no tax on it, for it did not exist in the county courthouse records, nor on the land, for they did not own it.” (TOK 63) The absence of tax confirms the ‘plain folk’ nature of the inhabitants of Red Branch. They are forgotten and live in decrepit wilderness. Despite the old house, overrun with “summer wasps... trailed down cobwebs, heavy yellow sheets of them opaque with dust and thick as Muslin” (TOK 63) it is an authentic log cabin, that seems the most durable in wooded Appalachia. Above the fireplace is “the scrolled and gilded frame [of]
Captain Kenneth Rattner, fleshly of face and rakish in an overseas cap abutting upon his right eyebrow, the double barred insignia wreathed in light, solider, father, ghost.” (TOK 61)

John Wesley believes he can remember his father, and his mother provides two anecdotes that mythologize Rattner. “If he’d lived, you wouldn’t want for nothing. And him disabled in the war with that platinum plate in his head and all- turned down the govmint disability, he did. Too proud. Wouldn’t’ take no handout from nobody.” (TOK 72-73) The absence of handout is a crucial summation of the ‘plain folk.’ Living in old house on untaxed land, they embody a spirit that predates any form of modernity. Ironically the characterization of Rattner as “proud” in a positive light, is later grouped with Rattner’s absent piety, “You daddy’d knowed how. He was a Godfearin man if he never took much to a church meetin… the Lord’ll show you, boy.” (TOK 66) John Wesley’s mother has constructed a mythologized version of Rattner, “for the persons of the myth are not human beings; they are gods or culture heroes” 31 However it is not these inflated myths that stay with John Wesley. The cultural mode of storytelling and myth that was effective in the Green Fly Inn is ineffective at home, partially due to its exaggeration.

In John Wesley’s flashback, his memory reminisces of his ancestral home and banjo, and despite his mother’s pleas, “You won’t never forgit. No. Never long as you live... I won’t forgit neither... He never forgot. From somewhere in the darkness came the sound of a banjo, tentative chords... a message... what news? And silence, the music fled in the seeping amber warmth of innumerable dreams laid to death upon the hearth, ghostly and still.” (TOK 66) In a recollection far into John Wesley’s future, all that remains is home and banjo, and none of his mother’s inflated and inauthentic stories of his absent father. This “ghostly” motif recurs and haunts the Appalachian valleys and mountains. The ghostly ethereal evokes

31 Eliade, 1957, 98
temporal memory, and the last fragments of Southern Agrarian memory are embodied in the remembered personified history and tradition of the titular orchard keeper named Arthur Ownby.

Ownby is the last remnant of the authentic Mountain South. Though Sylder embodies values of family, masculinity, and resistance to government, his visits to Knoxville in his newly purchased Ford and his occupation as a bootlegger instead of woodsman or farmer illustrate his preference for embattled resistance rather than the return to Owsley’s ‘plain folk’ lifestyle.

Ownby is the embodiment of Owsley’s ‘plain folk’ of the South. Though labeled “the orchard keeper,” he is more akin to Owsley’s nomadic first frontiersmen than the agrarian settler. Embedded within the backdrop of a first chapter that sees the profound disruption of the community of Red Branch in the form of the murdered Rattner and burning of the Green Fly Inn, Ownby is a vestige and reminder of the cyclical eternal nature of the Tennessee backwoods. Ownby is first introduced “from his porch... with one foot he tapped out the time of some old ballad... from under the brim of the roof he studied the movements of the stars. A night for meteors tonight. They cannonaded the towering hump of Red Mountains.” (TOK 20-21) Like the banjo from a dying John Wesley’s memory, Ownby’s “old ballad” is a cultural remnant, the ballad’s name and lyrics are forgotten like those innumerable dreams and memories that have been lost to time. Ownby looks up to the sky and reads the stars, evocative of the astrology of the tragic cosmos of a past disproved.

Ownby’s Tennessee Shangri-La is set at “night the coombs of the mountain fluted with hound voices, a threnody on the cooling air. Flying squirrels looped in feathery silence from tree to tree above the old man sitting on a punk log, his feet restless trampling down the poison ivy, listening to Scout and Buster flowing through the dark of the flats below him, a swift slap slap of water where they ghosted through the creek, pop of twig or leaf scuttle
brought to his ear arcanely- they were a quarter mile down- and the long bag throated trail call again.” (TOK 44) The hound voices meld to form a “threnody on the cooling air,” a wailing lament for the death of an agrarian hunting past. The hunting that occurs in *The Orchard Keeper* is conducted in tandem with hounds, a characteristic unique to Southern culture. This partially revises Turner and Owsley’s thesis, instead of an encompassing wave of settlement, there are pockets of frontier left for ritualized hunting. Thus the forested woodlands in Blount county are an untapped frontier hunting landscape, akin to the landscape of Faulkner’s *The Bear*. Still untouched by modernity, Ownby is accompanied by his hunting hounds, his feet are resistant to poison ivy, and his “ghostly movement” and the symbols he interprets with his “arcane” ear evoke a ghostly displaced phantom that eternally wanders the valley.

Ownby’s characterization as the last remnant of a fading Southern Agrarianism is further underscored by his own familial history as a Confederate soldier, his own dreams of a log cabin, and his prior occupation as railroad worker. As a mythic figure, his past is constructed from anecdotes from neighbors and friends of John Wesley. Though none of these anecdotes are confirmed, they are a part of the mythic fabric of the Tennessee backwoods. It is revealed that before the Civil War Ownby once belonged to the second wave of agrarian farmers, “He owned a lot of land in Knox County and when the war was over they took it away from him on account of him bein a Confederate... on account of back then this was the North I recokon.” (TOK 145) Ownby’s ownership of land in “Knox County” implies a relative urbanity, a farm close to Knoxville. It is revealed that he had a wife and unborn child that have since been lost and his ancestral home expropriated by the state. Consequently, Ownby’s retreat towards Blount County, in the rural hills of Tennessee is a partial response to governmental interference and his retreat to frontier.

Later, Ownby reflects on his past, “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.” (TOK 55) Ownby’s ideal “log house with a fireplace” evokes Owsley’s first wave of farmers, however the use of the “bees” draws upon the Southern Agrarian influence of Crevecoeur, and by extension Mandeville’s *The Fable of the Bees* (1723). Yet the characterization of “black mountain honey” places the bees in opposition to organized society. If Ownby was a young man like John Wesley, he would continue his retreat into further highlands, to stake a claim for his own portion of Appalachia. Ownby’s desire to retreat and his inability to do so reveal that the second wave of Owsley’s thesis, those agrarians that settled and planted orchards and farmland are myth, legend, and dust.

Chapter two begins with Ownby watching over his fallen orchard. Older, and embodying the authentic first wave of settlers, he has retreated into the foothills of Tennessee. Ownby sits in the abandoned orchard, “curled in a low peach limb the old man watched the midmorning sun blinding on the squat metal tank that topped the mountain. He had found some peaches, although the orchard went to ruin twenty years before when the fruit had come so thick and no one to pick it that at night the overborne braches cracking sounded in the valley like distant storms raging.” (TOK 51) Representing the state of Southern Agrarianism, the orchard is in a state of disrepair and even ruin. Though there may be some form of Tate’s “recovery and restoration” (ITMS 166) it is evident that this garden is lost. Ownby is a vestige of the South, but he himself has contributed to its fall. His hidden betrayal through the construction of the railroad into Tennessee has led modernity to invade and devastate his garden. Ownby’s wanderings “suggest that Ownby’s participation in the building of the railway was a crime against the wilderness that cost him his livestock, his unborn child, and his marriage.”32 The abandoned orchard still bears fruit but it has been

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32 Luce, 2009, 40
invaded by the government tank, a symbol of federal invasion and emblematic of the distant raging storms of John Wesley’s adulthood.

The Modernity of Knoxville.

Though covered extensively in the *Suttree* chapter of this thesis, *The Orchard Keeper* anticipates the waste land setting of urban modernity through John Wesley’s periodic visits to Knoxville. In the first chapter Kenneth Rattner and Sylder’s visits to Knoxville culminate in the moral corruption of modernity manifest through Rattner’s death and Sylder’s acquisition of his defective car for bootlegging. Knoxville’s degenerating influence upon the ‘plain folk’ of the South illustrate the warnings of the Southern Agrarians. In later chapters, John Wesley’s experiences within Knoxville act as the ultimate formative interaction that pushes John Wesley away from urban modernity towards an appreciation for the authentic Mountain South. In a vignette that introduces Knoxville to John Wesley and foreshadows the disillusionment arising from the isolating effects of modernity, a young John Wesley encounters an injured baby sparrow hawk on a mountain road. In an act of compassion “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.” (TOK 77) Despite his treatment and care for the baby sparrow hawk it passes away. John Wesley’s initial care for the sparrow hawk anticipates a resistance to a legacy of governmental exploitation of the environment. His respect for habitat and life place him at odds with an industrializing world.

After John Wesley’s redemption of the dollar bounty he travels through Knoxville and is confronted with a series of characters that evoke the modernity of Flannery O’Connor’s *The Violent Bear It Away* and McCarthy’s *Suttree.* *The Orchard Keeper’s* Knoxville represents the complete absence of nature and the totality of the industrial. The environment of Knoxville is first described through the “warm wind of the summer forenoon fused with a
scent of buckeyes, swirling chains of soot about on the stone steps.” (TOK 79) Though there is the initial “scent of buckeyes,” the trees are absent in this unreal city, replaced by the choking dirty “swirling chains of soot.” In juxtaposition to the unpolluted frontier in Ownby’s cabin, John Wesley “walked past the grimy trees” (TOK 80) that populate the urban wasteland. Continuing there is a “vapor of exhaust fumes” (TOK 80) and the last holdouts from Tate’s “Religion as Time” arrive “in a canopy of heat, sweaty and desperate looking... in an enormous shudder of sound and the then the buses came, laborious in low gear, churning out balls of blue smoke... Long paper banners ran the length of the bus proclaiming for Christ in tall red letters, and for sobriety, offering to vote against the devil when and wherever he ran for office” (TOK 81) Evoking the death of the religious are the marchers “proclaiming for Christ” who must vocalize what is lost in an increasingly secular world. The vices of modernity manifest in the calls for “sobriety” in the wake of Prohibition, anticipating the futility of Prohibition and the overreach of the government’s encroachment. In Red Branch this manifest through the government tank that invades the orchard that leads to Ownby’s shotgun resistance and his subsequent involuntary commitment.

John Wesley continues his trek through the Knoxville, and then “he was still standing on the sidewalk and now he saw the city, steamed and weaving in heat, and rising above the new facings of glass and tile the bare outlandish buildings, towering columns of brick adorned with fantastic motley; arches, lintels, fluted and arabesque, flowered columns and crowstepped gables... On the corner a man was screaming incoherently and brandishing a tattered Bible.” (TOK 81-82) The “man screaming incoherently” is the urban prophet of O’Connor’s Old Tarwater and Suttree’s crazed evangelist. In an image that anticipates the hallucinations of Suttree, the “steam and weaving in heat” foreshadows the alienation of the individual. The urban prophet’s appearance underscores this reality, with those that share traits with the Southern Agrarians increasingly marginalized within society.
Ultimately, John Wesley’s dollar from the sparrow hawk bounty is invested into hunting traps, “I am to get a dozen but I cain’t get all of em together at the same time. So I wonder if I couldn’t get four of em today and then get the rest later on? The man looked at him for a minute and then he smiled. Well I reckon you could... The boy took it [the pledge] and folded it, then took the dollar from his watch pocket and smoothed it on the counter... Then he was gone, out into the blinding sunshine among the high shouldered crowds, sped and well wished by an old man’s smile.” (TOK 84-85) John Wesley’s return to Red Branch continues the juxtaposition of the urban, with the untouched frontier “a shelf of limestone where periwinkles crowded and watercress swayed in the current” (TOK 86) untouched by the soot and exhaust of the city. A rejuvenated John Wesley, finds that “by the time he got home he was chilled and shaking but he had his four sets laid.” (TOK 86) His return to the Mountain South provides him the opportunity to engage in a Mountain South boyhood evocative of Faulkner’s *Go Down, Moses.*

Faulknerian Influences.

If the first chapter of *The Orchard Keeper* is defined by the remaining vestiges of the Southern Agrarians the second is devoted to the primary influence in *The Orchard Keeper,* one that every Southern writer has faced, and very few have surmounted- Faulkner. The initial New York Times review for *The Orchard Keeper* was entitled “Still Another Disciple of William Faulkner” (1965) and characterized McCarthy’s work as “derivative of Faulkner,” with its “wandering pronouns with no visible antecedents; the recondite vocabulary and coined words; the dense prose packed with elaborate figures of speech; the deliberate ambiguity, the hints and withheld information; the confusion in time and place, and the
flashbacks that fail to shed much light into the intermittent gloom.”\textsuperscript{33} Despite the stylistic similarities, the most compelling comparisons arise from comparing John Wesley to Isaac McCaslin, who echoes the Southern Agrarians in his tragic relationship with the South. “Isaac McCaslin, [is] often read as the protagonist [of \textit{Go Down, Moses}], [Isaac] is not another Quentin Compson. By 1942, Faulkner had stopped romanticizing his inheritance of southern history, tradition, legend, and myth. \textit{Go Down, Moses} is, in many aspects, a representation of the way the South must relinquish its arcane values.”\textsuperscript{34}

To see the undercurrents of Faulkner one must compare \textit{The Orchard Keeper} with the hunting trilogy in \textit{Go Down, Moses} (1940) that is comprised of the short stories \textit{The Old People}, \textit{The Bear}, and \textit{Delta Autumn}. \textit{Go Down, Moses} is a multigenerational history that follows the McCaslin family in Yoknapatawpha County. In Faulknerian fashion, the McCaslin family grapples with the legacy of its exploitative plantation past and the mixed race familial relationships between the McCaslins and past slaves. Despite its depiction of the exploitative and extractive plantation economy, the hunting trilogy initially focuses upon the Post-Abolition boyhood of Isaac McCaslin. Isaac spends his time trapping, hunting, and learning from the wise Sam Fathers, the African American and Native American blacksmith. Though \textit{Go Down, Moses} focuses extensively upon legacy of extractive plantation upon race relations in the South the hunting trilogy is initially concerned with the environmental degradation that accompanies modernity. Parallels in setting, narrative, and character in the hunting trilogy evidence Faulkner’s influence upon a young McCarthy, specifically through its depiction of Southern Agrarian values and Arthur Ownby’s resemblance to Sam Fathers.

\textsuperscript{33} Prescott, 1965

\textsuperscript{34} Wagner-Martin, 1996, 5
The hunting trilogy begins *The Old People*, an independent short story depicting the summative ceremony in Isaac’s passage from boyhood to manhood that simultaneously serves as a prologue introducing the characters and themes that are expanded upon in *The Bear*. *The Old People* opens on the last day of a two week long hunting expedition with Isaac getting his first kill under the mentorship of Sam Fathers. As a boy, Isaac remembers “when the boy [Isaac as a child] shot his first running rabbit with his first gun.” (163) This formative experience distinguishes the small game found around the plantation agricultural and the big game in the remnants of the frontier that Isaac currently hunts. The hunting trips follow a Southern tradition descended from medieval venery that focused upon chasing one’s quarry with hounds. Despite this medieval and antebellum legacy, the hunt is presented as an esteemed annual tradition stretching from time immemorial. “The action is set in the Big Woods... but these are the last days and final square miles of this mythic layer.”35 Despite the eternal nature of the hunt, the Big Woods are not ancient woods of medieval England or even the vast expanse of untamed frontier of Daniel Boone or Natty Bumppo. Rather they are last vestiges, pockets, of the Tennessee woods that Ike and Arthur Ownby will wander.

The Big Woods are still formidable, for as the annual sojourn moves into the interior, “towards the tremendous gums and cypresses and oaks where no axe save that of the hunter had ever sounded, between the impenetrable walls of cane and brier...” as the hunters move deeper within the Big Woods they retreat into the unsettled remnants of Turner’s frontier. In the frontier is the reclamation of Owsley’s initial first wave of frontiersman and their authentic mode of life. “Wherein the artificial wants and the uneasy restraints are not known... solely on the bounty nature and the strength of his own arm.”36 Yet, reflecting the

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35 Hagood, 2008, 66
36 Smith, 1950, 55
encroachment of civilization, “Then they would emerge, they would be out of it, the line as sharp as the demarcation of a doored wall. Suddenly skeleton cotton- and corn-fields would flow away on either hand, gaunt, and motionless beneath the gray rain there would be a house, barns, fences.” (TOP 176) The sudden exit “line as sharp as the demarcation” from the Big Woods visualizes Turner’s frontier thesis as a singular westward moving line. Anticipating the future of the Big Woods are the “skeleton cotton- and corn fields... house, barn, [and] fences” that foreshadow the second wave of Turner’s thesis- the settlement of the frontier and the Big Woods.

To begin a comparative study of The Bear and The Orchard Keeper, one must first consider the legacy of the biracial Sam Fathers, who is the grandson of a Native American chief Ikkemotubbe and an unnamed African American slave who was purchased by Ikkemotubbe. Despite being an ex-slave, his African American heritage is frequently overshadowed and ignored in favor of his Native American identity associated with a mystical and attuned sense, wisdom concerning nature, the hunt, and the Big Woods. Sam “knew things that had been tamed out of our blood so long ago that we have not only forgotten them, we have to live together in herds to protect ourselves from our own sources.” (TOP 167) His biracial identity is a source of tension “that was betrayed through the black blood which his mother gave him.” (TOP 168) McCaslin Edmonds, the older cousin of Ike similarly viewed as a source of wisdom characterizes Sam as, “himself his own battleground, the scene of his own vanquishment and the mausoleum of his defeat” (TOP 168) In contrast to the ex-slaves that are tenants on the McCaslin lands, Sam “farmed no allocated acres of his own, as the other ex-slaves of old Carothers McCaslin did, performed no field-work for daily wages as the younger and newer negroes did.” (TOP 169) Sam Father’s lifestyle parallels the first wave of Owsley’s ‘plain folk’ that is embodied by Ownby in The Orchard Keeper.
Sam Father’s mentorship of Ike and his older cousin, Edmonds, is the consequence of himself as a racial “battleground” that is unable to pass on the knowledge and traditions that maintain and honor the remnants of the Big Woods. Reminiscent of *The Orchard Keeper’s* John Wesley and the ways in which mythology and story are shared, Sam Father’s articulates his culture and mythology through his native language learned from Ikkemotubbe. It is the tongue of ceremony that Ike and Edmonds are taught after “speaking in that tongue which the boy had learned from listening to him and Joe baker in the blacksmith shop.” (TOP 184) Sam Fathers is the facilitator of a specific ceremony and ritual, that is grounded in values that predate and anticipate those of the Southern Agrarians.

The diminishing frontier and the Native American heritage exclusive to Sam Fathers culminates in an instance of religious ceremony during Ike’s hunt. “He was running. Then he was standing over the buck where it lay on the wet earth still in the attitude of speed and not looking at all dead.” (TOP 164) Isaac’s first deer kill is marked in ritualistic and ceremonial episode, “the boy did that- drew the head back and the throat taut and drew Sam Father’s knife across the throat and Sam stooped and dipped his hands in the hot smoking blood and wiped them back and forth across the boy’s face.” (TOP 164) Sam’s ceremony evokes the baptismal, and the ceremony marks “hunting as a quasi-religious activity of mythic and spiritual meaning connected to the wilderness.”\(^{37}\) Returning to Eliade’s *Sacred and Profane* previously discussed in relation to the reclamation of sacred space through the ritualization of the agrarian, Faulkner’s hunting trilogy is concerned with the conception of the prior pristine and untouched sacred space of nature. The baptismal ceremony is echoed through the deer blood indicating that it “attains the sacramental power of sanctification... to renew

\(^{37}\) Prewitt Jr, 1999, 207
eternal.” 38 Evoking a universal belief, “human beings are born of the earth... and there is a mystical solidarity with his native soil and nature.” 39

In *The Orchard Keeper*, the communion scene is imitated by Ownby after his first conversations with John Wesley. The informal ceremony is marked by Ownby’s eager storytelling of a series of vignettes and anecdotes that highlight the Mountain South. From old hunting tales, his appreciation for nature, and stories of Old Scout, John Wesley hears a mythology of Red Branch that was previously inaccessible. This exchange of stories that is a regional heritage, is marked through the dispensing of homegrown wine that parallels the brown liquor of the hunters in *The Bear*. The ceremony is marked by “two glasses and a cup, a mason jar of some dark red liquid... A heavy and evil looking potion the color of iodine. Muskydine wine, he said. Bet you-all ain’t never had none. It beaded black and sinister in the soft lampglow. He settled himself in his rocker and filled his cup, watching them taste it. Mighty fine, Warn said. Yessir, said the boy. They sipped their wine with the solemnity of communicants, troglodytes gathered in some firelit cave. The lamp guttered in a draft of wind and their shadows onerous and bearlike upon the wall, weaved in unison.” (TOK 150) McCarthy’s description of the “troglodytes” evokes Eliade’s primordial ceremony, that illustrates the eternal nature of this intimate exchange of storytelling. It marks the inheritance of knowledge that is deeply intertwined with nature.

Returning to *The Old People*, the sacramental scene is further expanded through the bond that Isaac and his cousin McCaslin share. They have both been ritualized into the cult of the hunt, that remembers the “vanished and forgotten people” (TOP 182) of Sam Fathers while participating in an activity that is both primordial and eternal. “They were the white

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38 Eliade, 1957, 132
39 Eliade, 1957, 140 citing Dieterich, 1925, 239
boy, marked forever, and the old dark man sired on both sides by savage kings, who had marked him, whose bloody hands had merely formal consecrated him to that which under the man’s tutelage, he had already accepted, humbly and joyfully, with abnegation and with pride too; the hands the touch, the first worthy blood which he had been found at last worthy to draw, joining him and the man forever, so that the man would continue to live past the boy’s seventy years and then eighty years, long after the man himself had entered the earth as chiefs and kings entered it; the child, not yet a man, whose grandfather had lived in the same country and in almost the same manner as the boy himself would grow up to live, leaving his descendants in the land in his turn as his grandfather had done, and the old man past seventy whose grandfathers had owned the land long before the white men ever saw it and who had vanished from it now with all their kind, what of blood they left behind them running now in another race and for a while even in bondage and now drawing toward the end of its alien and irrecoverable course” (TOP 165) In a ceremony that evokes the hierophanies of Eliade, the religious and sacred stems from untainted and authentic nature that in the moment of ceremony transcends the plantation and racial legacy of the South. Ike and Edmonds have been “formally consecrated,” into a lifestyle that is authentic and eternal. Yet, even within this moment there is recognition of the uncompromising legacy of the selling and purchase of land by Sam Father’s grandfather that corrupted both ceremony and cycle. All that is left is to “alien and irrecoverable course” of The Bear and Delta Autumn.

Sam’s transfer of his culture and ceremony is finalized after the ritual kill. Sam takes Ike further into the forest to encounter the spiritual manifestation of the hunt, “they saw the buck. It was coming down the ridge, as if it were walking out of the very sound of the horn which related its death… Then it saw them. And still it did not begin to run... its head high and eye not proud and not haughty but just full wild and unafraid, and Sam standing beside the boy now, his right arm raised in full length, palm outward, speaking in that tongue which
the boy had learned from listening to him and Joe Baker... ‘Oleh, Chief,’ Sam said, ‘Grandfather.’ (TOP 183-184) The “buck” is an instance of the manifestation of the spiritual, “its head high and just full wild and unafraid.” Its presence and Sam Father’s use of his Native American language accompanied by “Oleh, Chief, Grandfather” articulates the transference of story and ceremony in a cycle of renewal that is tinged by loss. Reflecting on the incident afterwards it is revealed that Edmonds has also participated in both ceremonies, that of the physical hunt marked by one’s killing of their first deer and the spiritual hunt that culminates in the spiritual vision of the buck. In a scene of naivety that anticipates The Bear, Edmonds muses, “Suppose there is enough room for us and them too.” (TOP 187) Edmond’s comments anticipate the inability for the McCaslin family to reconcile the South’s legacy of conquest and extractive plantation economy. As the hunting trilogy progresses, the land of ceremony is stripped and cleared echoing the encroachment found in The Orchard Keeper.

The Bear illustrates the moment of modernity’s advance symbolized through the fading frontier, and nature’s resistance to conquest embodied in the mythical grizzly nicknamed Old Ben. It is an animal, that is “too big for the very country which was constricting its scope... [it left] a corridor of wreckage and destruction beginning back before the boy was born, through which sped, not fast but rather with the ruthless and irresistible deliberation of a locomotive, the shaggy tremendous shape.” (TB 193) But what is Old Ben destructive towards? Old Ben is antithetical to its comparison with the “locomotive.” The locomotive signals progress in the form of industrialization and modernity, the dominating and relentless manifest destiny of conquest that attempts to displace the remnants of the frontier. Old Ben is the locomotive of nature’s resistance, an unstoppable force that leads wreckage and destruction of the agricultural, “corn cribs broken down and rifled, of shoats and grown pigs and even calves carried bodily into the woods and devoured and traps and
deadfalls overthrown.” (TB 193) If *The Old People* ended with the spiritual manifestation of the buck and the eternal nature of the hunt, Old Ben is the embodiment of nature’s reaction to the onslaught of Turner’s frontier thesis, “The doomed wilderness whose edges were being constantly and punily gnawed at by men with plows and axes who feared it because it was wilderness, men myriad and nameless even to one another in the land where the old bear had earned a name.” (TB 193) In a seeming response to Old Ben who was “not even a mortal beast but an anachronism indomitable and invincible out of an old dead time, a phantom, epitome and apotheosis of the old wild life” (TB 193) Old Ben’s characterization as a “phantom” recalls the “ghostly” wanderings of Ownby in the Appalachian valleys whose ghostly movement parallels “the epitome and apotheosis of the old wild life.”

*The Bear* continues with the characters from *The Old People*, following the homosocial society of hunters, “men, not white nor black nor red but men, hunters, with the will and hardihood to endure and the humility and skill to survive.” (TB 191) It is within this society that the mythology and stories, like those dispensed in the Green Fly Inn or by Ownby are dispensed, “concentrated and distilled into that brown liquor which not women, not boys and children, but only hunters drank... some condensation of the wild immortal spirit” (TB 192)

From *The Old People* and *The Bear* comes the Faulknerian focus of the Southern Agrarians and the ‘plain folk’ of the frontier. Ownby is a source of local mythology, in contrast to John Wesley’s mother, there is an exchange of stories akin to the hunting stories distilled in whiskey from *The Bear*.

*The Bear* culminates in Isaac’s training of a young hound to hunt Old Ben, that continues the tradition of medieval venery. The young hound and Sam Fathers find Old Ben and confront it, “for an instant they almost resembled a piece of statuary: the clinging dog, the bear, the man stride its back, working and probing the buried blade.” (TB 241) Despite the successful hunt of Old Ben, Sam Fathers and the young are killed, signaling the death of
the nature in the form of Old Ben and the death of Sam Father's way of life. Though Isaac and Edmond possesses the legacy of Sam Fathers they are corrupted through their ownership of the McCaslin plantation, their ancestor’s conquest of Ikkemotubbe’s land, and the absolute destruction and settlement of the virgin land. “Himself and his cousin juxtaposed not against the wilderness but against the tamed land which was to have been his heritage, the land which old Carothers McCaslin his grandfather had bought with white man’s money from the wild men whose grandfathers without guns hunted it, and tamed and order or believed he had tamed and order it for the reason that the human beings he held in bondage and in the power of life and death had removed the forest from it and in their sweat scratched the surface of it to a depth of perhaps fourteen inches in order to grow something out of it which had not been there before and would could be translated back into the money he believed he had bought it had had to pay to get it and hold it and a reasonable profit too.” (TB 254) This legacy haunts Isaac throughout the rest of the hunting trilogy. McCaslin's reflection is the articulation of the underlying conflict within The Orchard Keeper. There is emphasis placed upon money, and the payment, possession, and profit of the Mountain South. The heroes of Red Branch: John Wesley, Sylder, and Ownby all live on unowned land and attempt to live authentically in the Mountain South.

The Orchard Keeper’s middle and end are the culmination of a resistance to the encroachment of modernity that ends with the arrest of Sylder and the institutionalization of Ownby. Sylder is the first of John Wesley's mentors to be apprehended. The local police officer Legwater embodies governmental encroachment through his arrest and incarceration of Sylder and Ownby respectively. In an act of finality anticipating Sylder's arrest, Sylder walks through the orchard to pick up moonshine. He reflects “There were apples on the trees the size of a thumbnail and green with lucent and fiery green, deathly green as the bellies of bottleflies. He plucked one down in passing and bit into it... venomously bitter, drew his
mouth like a persimmon. If green apples made you sick, Sylder reflected, he would have been
dead long ago. Most people he knew could eat them. Didn’t take poison ivy either. The boy
John Wesley, he was bad about poison ivy. Bad blood.” (TOK 182-183) Sylder’s recognition
that John Wesley is weak to the poison ivy is juxtaposed by the immunity that Ownby has,
implying previous generations are more attuned with the Mountain South than John Wesley.
Despite John Wesley’s boyhood with Ownby and Sylder, he is susceptible to the poison ivy,
and he is not fully a ‘plain folk’ of the South.

After Sylder’s car breaks down in an episode symbolizing his betrayal of the ‘plain folk’
through his engagement with modernity, John Wesley visits Sylder in prison, on the pretense
to give Sylder the two dollars he owes him for hunting traps bought in Knoxville. “Slyder. He
loant me money for traps when Gifford got mine. Id doen signed a paper to buy em uptown-
on account of the man let me have those first ones I bought at lot price.” (TOK 207) Reflecting
on Sylder’s arrest, John Wesley vows to avenge Sylder, “I’m goin to get that son of a bitch
[Legwater]… The smile had fallen from Sylder’s face. Wait a minute, he said. You don’t get
nobody. Him, the boy said. No, Sylder said. He was looking very hard at the boy but the boy
knew he was right.” (TOK 211-212) John Wesley’s desire from revenge echoes Sylder’s earlier
fight in the factory that aligns with the Mountain South’s own code and morality. This
manifests in Sylder’s attempt to save John Wesley from arrest by disavowing their value
system, thereby freeing him from the responsibility to attack Legwater. But internally Sylder
has not renounced his code, “That’s not true what I said. It was a damned lie ever word. Hes
a rogue and a outlaw hisself and youre welcome to shoot him, burn him down in his bed, any
damn thing, because hes a traitor to boot and maybe a man steals from greed or murders in
anger but he sells his own neighbors out for money and its few lie that deep in the pit, that far
beyond the pale.” (TOK 214-215) Legwater’s betrayal of his fellow ‘plain folk’ underscores the
fracturing of the Red Branch community, that is supposed to be “far beyond the pale” of
civilization and modernity. Yet, modernity's encroachment has led to The Orchard Keeper's conclusion, the inability of the Mountain South's way of life to exist.

Ownby's arrest similarly happens in disparaging manner. His insistence on living a woodsman life is irreconcilable with the laws of society and so he is institutionalized. “They [the police] came three times for the old man” (TOK 188) to evict him from the land that he resides on. “Ownby, the Sheriff called, come out if you are able... Two deputies were moving down from the south end with drawn pistols... he marked their position wiggled back out from under the stove and shot at them both in quick succession, aiming low.” (TOK 187) Ownby retreats further into the frontier, departing on the road with his “dog [that] started for the road, hobbling stiffly, and they set out together, south along the road, until they were faint and pale shapes in the rain.” (TOK 188) After Legwater arrests Ownby and institutionalizes him, John Wesley visits Ownby in the asylum. Ownby advice for John Wesley is to “Get older, he said, you don’t need to count. You can read the signs. You can feel it in your ownself.” (TOK 225) Unlike Sylder there is no pretense of repudiation of the Mountain South. Instead, Ownby, who has lived his life retreating into the backwoods advises John Wesley to do the same. To “read the signs” and to exit from Red Branch.

After the incarceration of his two mentors, John Wesley wanders the streets of Knoxville. In his last act of defiance, he enters the courtroom where he had exchanged the dead sparrow hawk for a dollar, beginning his trapping life in the Tennessee backwoods. “He had the dollar out in his hand... I was figuring on trading back with ye... It wouldn’t be here. Last August? Why... What all do you do with em? He asked somehow figuring still that they must be kept, must have some value or use commensurate with a dollar other than the fact of their demise. Burn em in the furnace... He smoothed the dollar in his hand again, made a few tentative thrusts, pushed it finally across the counter to her. Here, he said. Its okay. I cain’t take no dollar.” (TOK 232-233) “The law's harsh treatment of his mentors confirms
John Wesley in his resistance to any order that functions without conscience; and the recognition that the hawk bounty is paid simply because the county prefers that the hawk not exist shatters his own complacency about nature.”40 The county’s irrational disregard for nature, for the wanton destruction and invasion of the Mountain South and its way of life leads to John Wesley’s exit from Red Branch.

_The Orchard Keeper_ ends with John Wesley’s return to Red Branch decades after his departure. His return is marked by the ruins of his ancestral cabin, “he paused and looked back and he could see the roof of the house deep-green with moss, or gaping black where patches had caved through. But it was never his house anyway.” (TOK 244) His disavowal of his childhood home illustrates his displacement after his exodus. His exile into an alienating world foreshadows Suttree’s search for authenticity. John Wesley’s rejection of home confirms his love for the Tennessee backwoods. Ultimately it signifies his repudiation of Rattner in favor of his surrogate fathers of Ownby and Sylder. John Wesley’s exodus signals the departure of the memory of the Southern Agrarians, of the ‘plain folk’ of the Mountain South from Red Branch. “They are gone now. Fled, banished in death or exile, lost, undone… on the lips of the strange race that now dwells there their names are myth, legend, dust.” (TOK 246)

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40 Luce, 2009, 60
Chapter Two. A Walking Shadow: The Southern Gothic of Flannery O’Connor and McCarthy’s Gnostic Direction in *Outer Dark*

While *The Orchard Keeper* follows a quintessentially Southern literary legacy descended from Faulkner, *Outer Dark* (1968) is McCarthy’s continuation of the legacy of alternative figure of the Southern literary canon- Flannery O’Connor. *Outer Dark* is the violent culmination of the Southern Gothic, a genre that “is [traditionally] fascinated with transgression.” Transgression is immediately introduced with the incestuous relationship between Culla and his sister Rinthy who is pregnant with his unnamed child. Whilst the conventional Gothic novel would culminate in the “Gothic hero or heroine confront[ing] the horrifying monster or uncover[ing] the dark history of murder, incest, and/or usurpation” McCarthy begins the novel after the transgressive act has been committed and the hero and heroine continuing their taboo. The grotesque birth is quickly overshadowed by Culla’s abduction and subsequent infanticidal abandonment of their baby in the neighboring woods. In a fantastic and nightmarish parody, the baby is rescued by a deformed and gnome like itinerant tinker. Confronted by an empty grave, Rinthy departs their log cabin in search of the child. Guilty and without direction, Culla flees their ancestral home, ostensibly to search for his sister, but ultimately wandering in search of a home through an alien and hostile rural landscape. In his wake are three horsemen, the triune, that exact aimless violence upon all who encounter them. In *Outer Dark* the triune are the ultimate avatars of the genre’s grotesque that force *Outer Dark*’s conclusion. McCarthy’s introduction of the triune are the

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41 Weinstock, 2017, 2 Citing Botting, 1996, 6-12

42 Weinstock, 2017, 1 bold my emphasis
beginnings of McCarthy’s characteristic gratuitous amplification of the violent that culminates in the bloody frontier of *Blood Meridian*.

*The Gnostic Religion.*

*Outer Dark* is a journey narrative that focuses upon the four interwoven paths of Culla, his sister Rinthy, a tinker, and the triune. To understand *Outer Dark* requires the identification and study of three components: The continuation of McCarthy’s overarching waste land imagery that dominates the rural Tennessee landscape, an outline of the Southern Gothic tradition originating with Flannery O’Connor that influences *Outer Dark*, and the undercurrent of nihilistic and ultimately gnostic thought that was inspired by the scholarship of Han Jonas in *The Gnostic Religion* (1958). McCarthy appropriates and subverts the Southern Gothic literary tradition of Flannery O’Connor by replacing an active God that grants salvation with the silent Gnostic Deity who allows the various demons of Gnostic theology to devastate the waste land landscape. Although already outlined in the previous chapter it is important to note the continued retreat and absence of Southern Agrarian values within the Southern Gothic landscape that manifests in the abandoned and dilapidated countryside and the retreat and replacement of the Christian.

It is tempting to read McCarthy’s novels through a Christian lens. His narration is written in the elevated high tongue of the King James Bible that utilizes esoteric and archaic diction. McCarthy’s novels are rich in the symbolic language and allegory of Christian literature. Despite substantial scholarship devoted to pursuing and uncovering Biblical source and allusion an ultimate explanation for McCarthy’s novels eluded all theological explanation. The critical breakthrough of McCarthy scholarship was achieved by Leo Daugherty in “*Gravers False and True: Blood Meridian as Gnostic Tragedy*” (1999) and popularized by Harold Bloom in *How to Read and Why* (2000) that applied Hans Jonas’s *The
Gnostic Religion (1958) to Blood Meridian’s Judge Holden. Gnosticism, a term derived from the Greek gnosis meaning knowledge, has since been applied to Outer Dark and number of McCarthy’s works in Dianne Luce’s Reading the World: Cormac McCarthy’s Tennessee Period (2009) that provides the best explanation for the theology and philosophy of Outer Dark.

Gnosticism was a religion founded contemporaneous with Christianity. Since Gnosticism’s inception its stories, images, symbols, and theology are oftentimes viewed as a seemingly familiar inversion of Christianity rich in symbolism that has influenced authors like Yeats, Kafka, and Melville and literary critics like Harold Bloom. The two religions vied for dominance throughout the Roman Empire, with early Christian texts demonizing the rival religion, “The Church Fathers considered Gnosticism as essentially a Christian heresy and confined their reports and refutations to systems which had either sprouted already from the soil of Christianity or had somehow adapted the figure of Christ.” (TGR 32) Jonas points to the unique history of Gnosticism that is descended from two distinct cultural entities, the Western Latin half of the Roman Empire and the Roman Empire’s Eastern Macedonian half. Within the Eastern Macedonian was a further division defined by the “Hellenistic” Grecian west and Asiatic East. (TGR 3) The proximity and relationship between the three culturally independent regions facilitated the transmission and exchange of each culture’s religion, mythology, and rite that developed the varying sects of Gnosticism that encompassed an impressive geographic range from France to Xinjiang.

Gnosticism “represents a crossroads of creeds. Its glow throws light upon the beginnings of Christianity, the birth pains of our world.” (TGR xiv) Jonas notes that the contemporaneous religious climate for the founding of Gnosticism and Christianity was unique for “the general religion of the period is a religion of salvation. All of them exhibit an exceedingly transcendent (ie., transmundane) conception of God and in connection with it an equally transcendent and other worldly idea of salvation. Finally, they maintain a radical
dualism of realms of being.” (TGR 34) Though the language of Gnosticism echoes that of Christianity it is fundamentally different.

The “salvation” offered by Gnosticism is not Christianity’s deliverance from sin. Similarly, a Gnostic follower’s “enlightenment” and “transcendence” is not the transcendence of Christianity that elevates the believer from the realm of the physical to a higher spiritual plane. Rather salvation arises from the ‘knowledge’ of Gnosticism. This knowledge is referred to as “faith rather than reason…. Gnosis meant knowledge of God [referred to as the Deity], radical transcendence of the Deity, is the knowledge of something naturally unknowable and therefore not a natural condition.” (TGR 34) The Deity’s characterization as one that “is naturally unknowable and therefore not a natural condition” echoes the Christian negative theology of Karl Barth. However unlike the Barthian negative theology that embraces the Christian belief in salvation, the negative theology of McCarthy’s Gnosticism underpins an unknown and seemingly absent Deity, that provides no salvation and no hope for the denizens of Outer Dark.

The parallels between Gnosticism and Barth’s negative theology merit digression. The comparison is critical in the study of Outer Dark because negative theology is used by Flannery O’Connor in her depiction of Catholicism. Like T.S. Eliot’s The Waste Land, Barth’s The Epistle to the Romans (1919), a commentary on Saint Paul’s Epistle to the Romans that first detailed Barth’s negative theology, was written in the aftermath of World War I. In the wake of the senseless violence of war came “the idea that the ‘world of Jesus’ is present in the world whose character had been disclosed by the war as godless and evil, and that it grows somehow organically from small beginnings to conquer godlessness and evil.”43 For Barth, this “world of Jesus” that had wrought cataclysm upon Europe was incompatible with

43 Schwöbel, 2000, 20
the grace of the New Testament. This did not mean the rejection of Christianity in the vein of Nietzsche’s nihilism but rather from this “disturbance [came] the recognition that there is between God and the world a contrast, even a contradiction, that cannot be resolved from the human side by appeals to religious experience.”

There is “a sense in which God is known as the one who is unknown... the pure origin of everything that is not God.”

Barth writes that God “is always both positive and negative, and he is the first because he is the second... religion is scarred with the dualism of ‘There’ and ‘Here’”

The dualism of “positive and negative” and “there and here” reflects the aforementioned Gnostic “radical dualism of realms of being.” (TGR 34) For negative theology and Gnosticism there is distinct separation between the Deity and humanity expressed through the language of dualism. The divide demands irrational faith, and Barth concludes that the greatest sin “being ignorant of the true situation rather than bondage to sin and evil.”

Barth’s “ignorance of the true situation” applies to Christianity but critical to Barthian theology is the belief that humanity’s ignorance provides the opportunity for salvation. For Gnosticism, the “ignorance” of negative theology that is inherent to humanity is comparable to the gnosis. Yet the “ignorance” that Culla and Rinthy display is their inability to gain access to the knowledge of Gnosticism.

A comprehensive understanding of Gnostic theology and symbolism is required to apply a Gnostic reading to *Outer Dark*. The surviving Gnostic canon and secondary Apocryphal literature originates from the sole living followers of Gnosticism- the Mandaean sect from the lower Euphrates that are particularly influenced by the Hellenistic and Asiastic schools of Gnostic thought. For contemporary scholarship, this means a large proportion of

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44 Schwöbel, 2000, 20
45 Ibid. 21
46 Barth, 1968, 231
47 Hart, 2000, 54
surviving Gnostic theology is partially removed from the explicitly Gnostic Christian sects like those that followed Simon Magus whose followers appropriated large sections of Christian Scripture.48

Despite the surviving literature of Gnosticism being overwhelmingly Mandaean, the entirety of Gnostic thought contains these fundamental tenets, “The Deity is absolutely transmundane, its nature alien to that of the universe, which it neither created nor governs and to which it is the complete antithesis: to the divine realm of light, self-contained and remote, the cosmos is opposed as the realm of darkness. The world is the work of lowly powers which though they may mediately be descended from Him do not know the true God and obstruct the knowledge of Him in the cosmos over which they rule.” (TGR 42) In every Gnostic text, there is an absence of any definitive characterization of the Deity that is replaced by glimpses of what the Deity is not. The “lower powers” that war against the Deity are the creators of the world and are collectively known as the Archons (rulers) who act as the warders of their earthly prison. Their “tyrannical world-rule is called heimarmene, universal Fate... it aims at the enslavement of man. As guardian of his sphere, each Archon bars the passage to the souls that seek to ascend after death, in order to prevent their escape from the world and return to God [the Deity]” (TGR 43)

48 Simon Magus or Simon the Sorcerer was a false prophet featured in Acts 8:9-24 who Biblically was a Christian convert who sought the power of healing by purchasing the power through Paul. This rather innocuous incident that ended with Simon repenting his sin has been given multiple treatments. Simon varies in the apocryphal works that depict him as a levitating malevolent sorcerer and later in Gnostic texts and in the Magus sect he is the Messiah who travels the Roman countryside with a woman named Helena, “I am God. And I have come.” (TGR 104) This follows a tradition of Gnostic appropriation of rivalrous religions and their stories that culminated in the numerous sects of Gnosticism that continue to challenge Gnostic scholars. (TGR 103)
Within the cosmology of Gnosticism, “the universe, the domain of the Archons, is like a vast prison whose innermost prison is the earth, the scene of man’s life.” (TGR 43) The cosmic stakes for the Archons rests upon “Man, the main object of these vast dispositions, [who] is composed of flesh, soul, and spirit.” (TGR 44) Despite the flesh and soul being a creation of the Archons and animated with their physical and corrupt forces, there is a remnant of the divine hidden inside the spirit. “Within the soul is the spirit, or ‘pneuma’ [called also the ‘spark’ or ‘divine spark’], a portion of the divine substance [from the Deity] which has fallen into the world; and the Archons created man for the express purpose of keeping it [the spark] there.” (TGR 44) The essence of Gnostic theology is the ignorance of humanity’s imprisonment, their vulnerability to the archons, and the separation between the divine spark and the Deity. Chained and manipulated by omnipotent beings, humanity faces the physical bounds of its mortality, the entrapment of the divine spark encased in soul and flesh. Condemned to wander their earthly prison, everyone that has fought for pieces of the true ‘knowledge’ inches closer to salvation that “penetrates the barriers of the spheres [worlds], outwits the Archons, awakens the spirit from its earthly slumber, and imparts to it the saving knowledge [Gnosis].” (TGR 45) This divine drama plays about in an eternal, universal scale that seeks the entire “restoration of the Deity’s own wholeness, which in pre-cosmic times has become impaired by the loss of portions of the divine substance [that is embedded and chained within humanity].” (TGR 45) Gnostic readings of McCarthy have been applied to all his novels after Outer Dark, with the interplay between the reader’s expectation of the Christian and McCarthy’s knowledge of the Gnostic transgressing and disconcerting the reader’s expectations. This is particularly seen in Outer Dark that employs its Gothic landscape to depict a world in ruin.
O’Connor’s Southern Gothic and Grotesque.

Before applying a Gnostic reading to *Outer Dark* one must outline the Southern Gothic tradition particularly through an examination of Flannery O’Connor. O’Connor wrote two novels *Wise Blood* (1952) and *The Violent Bear It Away* (1960) that detail crises of faith for the religious protagonists, Hazel Motes and Young Tarwater respectively. The pair are unique for their conviction. Despite living in a world of secularizing modernity their religious faith is questioned but ultimately confirmed.

O’Connor’s Southern Gothic, like Faulkner, has influenced many Southern writers. While McCarthy borrowed from Faulkner in *The Orchard Keeper*, *Outer Dark* similarly draws upon a rich Southern literary tradition inspired by Flannery O’Connor’s Southern Gothic. For this thesis, the Gothic is a genre of American literature fixated upon transgression, “[American Gothic fiction] is evocative of a sublime and picturesque landscape, of an animated nature to which man is related with affective intensity. Gothic fiction is a fascination with time, with the dark persistence of the past in sublime ruin, haunted relic, and hereditary curse... a world in ruins that signals a counter enlightenment.”

American Gothic fiction can be divided into two categories that detail the protagonist’s internal conflict. The first category is focused upon “the individual contending against impersonal forces directly. [The other category is] the individual contending with a specific other or others (a human villain or monster) that itself is the symptom or reflection of larger impersonal forces. Impersonal forces against which Gothic protagonists must contend directly include weather, war, pandemics, and in some cases, God.” For O’Connor and McCarthy, their protagonists engage with impersonal forces that encompass both categories. This arises from their

49 Kerr, 1979, 4
50 Weinstock, 2017, 3
protagonist’s participation in the eternal and cosmic conflict arising from O’Connor’s God and McCarthy’s Deity that send physical adversaries and impersonal metaphysical forces to test and torment the protagonists.

In addition to representing the Southern Gothic tradition, Flannery O’Connor’s Gothic and use of the grotesque anticipates the stylistic violence of McCarthy and the heinous and abhorrent conclusion of *Outer Dark*. The grotesque was initially defined as “that [which] transforms objects into something bizarre- otherworldly, transcendent, demoniac- to reveal the sublimated and the mysterious.” Yet this understates the shock effect of O’Connor’s Southern Gothic that encompasses “excess, perversion, extremity, monstrousness, freakishness… we witness shocking acts of violence, such as self-blinding and cold blooded murder; we discover, often, the darkest of human desires.” O’Connor famously asserted that “violence is never an end itself but the extreme situation that best reveals what we are essentially.” Anticipating the grotesque violence of *Outer Dark*, O’Connor’s violence ultimately elicits a spiritual response from Motes and Young Tarwater.

While “early reviewers tended to misread *Wise Blood* as an attack upon southern religious fundamentalism” O’Connor’s works are notable for her ultimate defense of the Christian. In O’Connor’s works this manifests in “the pervasiveness of her faith, her desire for a Christ-centered world, not one haunted by Christ from the fringes.” In the vein of the Southern Agrarians, O’Connor articulates her own protest to modernity’s rejection of religion

51 Cooper, 2013, 41
52 Lloyd, 2016, 82
54 Kilcourse, 2001, 46
55 Driskill, 1971, 5
through Hazel Motes and Young Tarwater who are alienated in an unfeeling and nihilistic world. O’Connor depicts a society in spiritual ruin, whose characters must confront the impersonal force of a secular and alienating modernity in the form of false prophets and rationalist educators. Continuing the Gnostic echo of negative theology, *The Violent Bear It Away* and its use of grotesque violence draws upon what Edward Schillebeeckx calls ‘negative experiences of contrast.’ “By Christ’s absence [evidenced through the violent], we imaginatively arrive at the presence of the human essence. Flannery O’Connor reminds us... through the fiction writer’s use of symbolic violence, The man in the violent situation reveals those qualities least dispensable to his personality, those qualities which are all he will have to take into eternity with him.”56 One can apply this framework to O’Connor’s Hazel Motes and Young Tarwater, who are confronted with the secularism and accompanying isolation of modernity. This manifests in the symbolic blindness of Hazel Motes and Young Tarwater’s baptismal murder of his disabled cousin Bishop.

O’Connor’s symbolic processes of violence recur in *Outer Dark*. As Culla and Rinthy wander a landscape seemingly defined by Christ’s absence there is the arrival of the violent and grotesque in the form of the triune. Through the Triune may evoke the trinity, they are Gnostic Archons that are a marauding impersonal and dominating force. They are the manifestation of the Gnostic appropriation of Christian symbolism and are the violent demonstration of a hostile prison. The triune are the critical component of *Outer Dark* that links O’Connor’s Gothic, Eliot’s *The Waste Land* imagery, and Gnostic theology. The triune are where Barthian negative theology and Gnosticism converge. While Barthian negative theology and O’Connor see violence and that envisions and secures salvation, the Triune

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enact a grotesque and appalling violence that challenges and denies the potential for salvation.

*Outer Dark* takes place in rural Tennessee detailing Culla and Rinthy’s journey through a landscape that is both Gothic and evocative of Eliot’s waste land. McCarthy’s adoption of Eliot’s waste land imagery and grail legend will be examined later but it is important to note the complementary and interchangeable role that the ruined Gothic landscape and waste land imagery share. The Tennessee countryside is dotted with farmsteads in sublime ruin and its inhabitants reflect their setting through hostility and weariness. The inhabitants are “people who are poor, who are afflicted in both mind and body, who have little- or at best a distorted- sense of spiritual purpose, and whose actions apparently do not give the reader a great sense of the joy of life.”57 It is tempting to read the inhabitants through this O’Connoresque lens. McCarthy’s denizens are a disparate group, oftentimes violent and skeptical of any claims to faith or religious miracle. But in Gnostic theology humanity is not a people in willful disbelief but rather a humanity populated in dichotomy. Though most of the population are imprisoned and ignorant humanity, Culla and Rinthy are those that journey in a struggle for gnosis, and the triune are the hostile otherworldly Archons that hound and prevent their journey.

*Outer Dark* opens with Culla’s nightmare that employs the Christian imagery and symbolism of Flannery O’Connor that is quickly subverted and ultimately declared absent through Gnostic symbolism. Culla’s nightmare is populated by “the clamorous rabble under a black sun.” (OD 5) What initially characterizes the image as Gothic, and later Gnostic, is its grotesqueness. “Otherworldly, transcendent, demoniac” 58 the mass anticipates the

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58 Cooper, 2013, 41
darkest of human desires. A reading of *The Orchard Keeper* or *Suttree* would interpret the “clamorous rabble” as the anonymous crowd of urban modernity but the masses from Culla’s nightmare are a choking disparate assembly of the diseased and damned, an inversion of those that are healed by Jesus in Galilee.

The Christian imagery begins by evoking the masses condemned to Dante’s circles of Inferno, the nightmare continues with the “delegation of human ruin [who] attend him [the unnamed prophet] with blind eyes upturned and puckered stumps and leprous sores.” (OD 5) Afflicted with disease, the great multitudes swarm around the “prophet standing in the square” but this unnamed prophet is no Messiah. The diseased crowds are “human ruin” and Culla is outcast because he is physically well. Despite his physical health, Culla’s soul is sick. His symptoms are his nightmares and existence, “from dark to dark” and the product of his sin is that “unnamed weight in her [Rinthy’s] belly.” (OD 5)

In his Freudian subconscious he searches for redemption, for any form of absolution. “Me, he [Culla] cried. Can I be cured? The prophet looked down as if surprised to see him amidst such pariahs. The sun paused. He said: Yes, I think perhaps you will be cured. Then the sun buckled and dark fell like a shout.” (OD 5) Using language that recalls the great multitudes of sinners cured by Jesus, the prophet “thinks you will be cured.” In his dreaming subconscious, the prophet’s promise of a cure is the Gnostic divine spark that calls for Culla to search for gnosis. The “sun [that] buckled and dark[ness] fell” parallels Jesus’s crucifixion on Calvary that saw the world plunged into darkness. But in Culla’s dream there is no glorious resurrection, and “the sun did not return.” (OD 6) Now within the dark recesses of his mind are the swelling number of ghostly figures that populate Culla’s symbolic landscape of ruin and decay anticipating his own cursed wanderings through the Tennessee countryside. “They grew seething and more mutinous and he tried to hide among them but they knew him even in that pit of hopeless dark and fell upon him with howls of outrage.” (OD 6) The howling
masses pull Culla into a type of Hell, and Culla awakens to realize that he is sick with an unforgivable transgression of incestuous sin. Culla’s nightmare has been a subject of debate for scholars due its placement at the beginning of the novel and its emblematic treatment of the religious. The Biblical tongue and Christian symbolism of the waste land calls for the arrival of a Messianic figure to restore the land but this is a McCarthy novel with Gnostic theology, and there is no messianic figure to redeem and save.

When Culla awakens “hollerin” after a lucid dream, he is roused “from dark to dark.” His existence reflects the seeming indistinguishable reality of his nightmare and the waste land that he inhabits. The “night more dolorous” continues McCarthy’s incorporation of Grail imagery. Yet there is no savior to be found in *Outer Dark*. Like Eliot’s waste land there is no Messiah to restore the land. Instead of Knoxville’s waste land of modernity, Culla awakens to a metaphysical rural landscape condemned by an unknown dolorous stroke. Is this damned landscape the judgment of God dispensed unto a sinful world? Unlike *The Orchard Keeper* that evoked *The Waste Land* to illustrate the corruption of modernity and the degradation of the values of the Southern Agrarians, the waste land of *Outer Dark* has ambiguous connotation. The fountainhead of McCarthy scholarship, *The Achievement of Cormac McCarthy* (1988) by Vereen Bell contended that *Outer Dark* is “a world bereft of God, or at least of grace”\(^59\) and thus the waste land that Culla and Rinthy wander is the product of the nihilistic. For later scholars, the waste land illustrates “the elements of the gnostic tragedy of the flesh bound human spirit, one set against a proto-southern dreamscape.”\(^60\)

The disappearance of the prophet is critical for it anticipates the theology of *Outer Dark* as being Gnostic. Culla’s immersion in darkness, “from dark to dark” and awakening to

\(^59\) Bell, 1988, 52  
\(^60\) Luce, 2009, 66
a “dark sun” is characteristic of gnostic theology that employs the “radical dualism of realms of being- God and the world, spirit and matter, soul and body, light and darkness, good and evil, life and death- and consequently an extreme polarization of existence affecting not only man but reality as a whole: the general religion of the period is a dualistic transcendent religion of salvation.” (TGR 31-32) Emblematic of the assembly of characters encountered during Culla and Rinty’s separate journeys in Outer Dark, the “black sun” is borrowed from the gnostic and Christian conception of the “divine spark of man.”

The Gothic landscape of Outer Dark is frequently characterized by darkness, aligning the Gothic with a Gnostic world. In Gnostic theology, the earth “is the world of darkness” (TGR 57) characterized by being “utterly full of evil... full of devouring fire... full of falsehood and deceit... A world of turbulence without steadfastness, a world of darkness without life.” (TGR 57) This “evil” and “turbulence” reflects the dualism of Gnosticism, that in Mandaean thought situates the earthly kingdom of darkness in opposition to the celestial kingdom of light. The dualism of light and darkness begins with “the first alien Life [that is] the ‘King of Light,’ whose world is a ‘world of splendor and of light without darkness,’ ‘a world of mildness without rebellion, a world of righteousness without turbulence, a world of eternal life without decay and death, a world of goodness without evil... a pure world unmixed with ill.” (TGR 57) Though “the King of Light” has Messianic connotation, like the prophet in Culla’s nightmare, the Deity’s light is incapable of reaching the earth and is ultimately absent. Thus, even the light that illuminates is false light, with the true light trapped within the individual. Humanity is left to be imprisoned by the dark vengeful masses of the earthly Archons.

This metaphysical darkness and actual darkness envelop the landscape, and this is first illustrated when the malformed tinker and child wander “past a mill where a wheel

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61 Hinde, 2000, 67
rumbled drunkenly... Past stores and shops, dark clustered houses, heralded and attended by the outcry of dogs down the empty streets and on again into the patched farmland.” (OD 21) Though populated the town is a ruined and foreboding landscape that anticipates the arduous journeys of Culla and the triune. The siblings embody those without Gnostic knowledge, those that are ignorant and “inhabit[ing] a world that the other cannot be aware of and that each to some extent makes”62 and they inhabit “a world as bereft of God, or at least of grace.”63

In their respective journey narratives Culla and Rinthy are polarities of Gnostic being. While Culla is shrouded in darkness, reflecting his fall and wandering in a nightmare wasteland, Rinthy is frequently characterized in terms of light. Despite its beneficent Christian connotation, the role of light in Gnosticism is more nuanced, reflecting an internalized struggle of the self. Thus, though Rinthy may exude physical worldly light, it is false earthly light and has neutral symbolism. Problematically, Rinthy’s radiance could evoke the false light that entices and traps, “the whole tragedy of the Pistis Sophia64 all her wanderings, distress, and repentance in the world of darkness, followed from the one initial fact that she mistook the light she saw below for the ‘Light of Lights’ for which she yearned” (TGR 164)

62 Bell, 1988, 35
63 Ibid. 52
64 Pistis Sophia follows the Gnostic appropriation of Christian religious texts previously noted with Simon Magus. Sophia takes a variety of forms within different texts, but the most popular and noteworthy text is one aligned with the Christian Coptic-gnostic Valentinian school (TGR 39) descended from the Egyptian Hellenistic strain. In Pistis Sophia, Jesus relates the story of Sophia who was the last Aeon, a divine abstraction who attempted to comprehend the Deity and was banished to wander the earth. The story follows her wanderings through the earth, that are both her search for her divine spark and to rejoin the Deity. After Jesus successfully navigates through the cosmic realms and is reunited with the Deity, Sophia is redeemed.
This false light culminates in her final confrontation with the Tinker, who rejects and extinguishes Rinthy's seeming innocent light by condemning her for her sins.

**The Labyrinth of the Grail Legend.**

The last of McCarthy’s influences manifest in the continuation of Eliot’s *The Waste Land* imagery. The use of Eliot’s imagery within O’Connor’s Southern Gothic has been noted in scholars grouping “O’Connor in the company of apocalyptic poets like Blake and T.S. Eliot.”65 O’Connor’s Hazel Motes and Young Tarwater wander landscapes that similarly utilizes “allusions to Eliot’s *The Waste Land* (death by water)”66 While McCarthy employs Eliot’s waste land imagery in *The Orchard Keeper*, *Suttree*, and *Blood Meridian* in *Outer Dark* he returns to the original Grail legend of the waste land. Through the return to Arthurian legend McCarthy draws upon setting and mythology rich in religious symbolism. Like his treatment of O’Connor, McCarthy’s waste land acts as the subversion of the salvation of the Grail legend.

The original Grail legend evokes two general themes of Gnosticism- the Stranger’s sojourn and homesickness. Hans Jonas notes that the Stranger’s sojourn derives from “the sojourn ‘in the world’ that is called ‘dwelling,’... that has two aspects: on one hand it implies a temporary state, something contingent and therefore revocable- a dwelling can be exchanged for another, it can be abandoned and even allowed to go to ruin; on the other hand, it implies the dependence of life on its surroundings- the place where he dwells.” (TGR 55)

The Gnostic sojourn arises from the nature of mortal existence- humanity’s wandering through their earthly prison. Rinthy’s movement through her landscape mirrors this

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65 Kessler, 1986, 7
66 Driskill, 1971, 42
rootlessness, but her separation from her child with its own divine spark provides purpose to her quest. This is contrasted by Culla whose journey is one linked to homesickness. Through his wanderings Culla is unable to find a sense of home that echoes Sophia’s movement through her earthly prison. As will be explored, Culla’s journey is notable for its lack of direction and quest that echoes belief that the divine sparks reunion with the Deity is the only homecoming.

Culla and Rinthy’s departure from their ancestral home begins with diverging paths, evoking the multitude of Arthurian quests pursued individually but with overlapping paths. Consumed by guilt, Culla attempts to remove the evidence of his sin from the world, and so upon his son’s birth he leaves his child in the forest to die. The topography of the Tennessee landscape returns the waste land imagery to its original grail legend. Culla, like Lancelot, is guilty of unforgiveable sin, and his failings lead him to wander the waste land searching for fulfilment. This manifests in his ostensible search for the effulgent Rinthy. Yet this is a Gnostic world governed by Gnostic theology, and so his search and wanderings without the gnosis will be futile and meaningless. Culla begins his journey lost in a foreboding and pathless forest, “With full dark he was confused in a swampy forest, floundering through sucking quagmires and half running.” (OD 17-18) The forest is opaque and unknowable and its quagmires seek to entrap the disoriented Culla. Like the protagonists trapped in the dark sinful forest of Dante’s *Inferno* or Hawthorne’s *Young Goodman Brown*, Culla seems condemned to wander the unsolvable maze of his earthly prison. Because he is trapped, Culla’s wanderings parallel those of Lancelot, a knight who wanders a multicursal labyrinth—a maze with multiple directions and “a series of choices between paths... with frequent testing and repeated confrontations, with no apparent end to the struggle... the essence of the maze experience is confusion, doubt, and frustration as one ambiguity succeeds another
for one risks getting lose and remaining perpetually imprisoned; in such a maze one may find
no solution, center, no exit.”

Culla’s journey is through a landscape that is both the “internalized landscape of the mind” and his own purgatorial Gnostic dreamscape. Culla departs from the forest, “through the steaming woods to the road, now a flume of ashcolored loam through which he struggled with weighted shoes... mud slathered to his knees” (OD 37) Culla’s journey is one without guidance, though Culla navigates the labyrinth of the forest he is confronted with the “shadows which kept compass against all the road’s turnings,” (OD 15) so that even the roads paved by modernity provide no direction. Culla’s journey oscillates between the untamed forests of Tennessee, “Out of the kept land and into a sunless wood where the road curved dark and cool overlaid with immense ferns.” (OD 117) and an abandoned agrarian waste land that is diseased and blighted, “the town looked not only uninhabited but deserted, as if plague had swept and decimated it.” (OD 131)

Rinthy’s path is akin to Galahad. Her decision to pursue her child places her in opposition to Culla. Throughout Outer Dark she is described in terms of light and innocence aligning herself with the grail legend’s restorer, Galahad. However, unlike Galahad she is beholden to the Gnostic Deity, an absent being that does not intervene or direct. This continues the Gnostic appropriation and subversion of Barthian theology. Throughout Outer

67 Doob 1990, 46
68 Kean, 2007, 429
69 Galahad or Percival. The Grail legend was first introduced by Chretien de Troyes who focused upon Perceval in the unfinished le Conte du Graal. After de Troyes death authors would add to the unfinished work building the Grail myth. The religious aspect was refined in the Vulgate Cycle. In Le Morte d’Arthur Malory would rework the Grail myth into Book VI: The Noble Tale of the Sangreal the most famous version of Arthurian legend that relegated Percival to good but not perfect knight who was replaced as God’s Knight by the son of Lancelot, Galahad.
Dark Rinthy is presented as a source of light that appears to align herself, like Galahad, to follow a unicursal labyrinth, “with no forked paths or internal choices to be seen.” However in a Gnostic sense, Rinthy’s light is a false light like Sophia that misdirects and entraps. Despite Rinthy’s quest to find the tinker who is in possession of her child, her journey is not depicted as a chase, rather there is a sense that her journey will ultimately intersect with the wandering tinker.

Rinthy departs by “cross[ing] the river bridge, walking carefully on the ill fitted planks, looking down at the water. She nudged pebbles through the cracks and watched them diminish... she went on, resting from time to time.” (OD 53-54) The juxtaposition of the two paths anticipates the nature of the journey for the siblings. While Culla’s journey is obstructed by the Dantean woods weighted by his growing number of sins, Rinthy departs with a childlike fascination for the outside world that sees her unhindered crossing over bridges through the “nudging [of] pebbles through the cracks.” This carefree wandering leads to an opportunity to rest and she encounters an elderly couple who ask, “Are ye lost? She clutched up her bundle. Lost she said. Yes, I’m lost. I wondered could I just rest a spell... Well come in anyway... This here’s the family. Dinner be ready in just a few minutes.” (OD 58)

This linkage to the Arthurian waste land is critical for it establishes McCarthy’s engagement with Christian and quest conventions that, like the Southern Gothic, are subverted through his use of the Gnostic.

Culla’s first interaction ensuing his flight from the isolated cabin, begins with the search for work, he finds himself employed by the squire, who resides in “a large two storey house fronted with wooden columns on which the paint lay open in long fents like slashed paper and a yellow stain of road dust paling upward in the sunlight.” (OD 41) The squire’s

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70 Doob, 1990, 40
home lies in disrepair, “the columns” and ostensible employment of two African Americans, referred to as “negroes” (OD 42) throughout the episode point to the continuation of a plantation past. The squire, a local justice of the peace orders Culla to cut stovewood in the decrepit homestead. His agrarian equipment lies in a state in disrepair and disuse, “the wheel trundled woodenly. He [the negro] laid the rusted bit against it and pressed out a sheaf of sparks.” (OD 43) In a continuation of the departed agrarian from The Orchard Keeper, the squire’s farmstead and the landscape of Culla’s journey is one of dilapidated homestead. Suspicious of Culla’s wandering, the squire asks for his name “I like to know a man’s name when I hire him. I like to know that first. The rest I can figure for myself” (OD 43) and the squire’s conviction that “the rest I can figure for myself” is the justification for his hostility towards Culla. The squire believes Culla is a fugitive and lazy. What Culla needs is an industrious and hard work ethic, “what I got I earned. They’s not a man in this county will tell ye different. I’ve never knowed nothing but hard work. I’ve been many a time in the field at daybreak waitin for the sun to come up to commence work and I was there when it went down again.” (OD 47) In a self-mythologizing of his work ethic, the squire berates Culla for not working his field, ignoring the fact that Culla has no farmland to work and that the squire’s own field is worked by African American labor and lies in disrepair and neglect. Chastised by the squire and shamed for his poverty, Culla steals the squire’s boots and departs from the farm. Enraged the squire gathers his shotgun and pursues on horse. Left at the farm are the two African Americans, “The negro returned to the barn where he seated himself on a milking stool and began to shell corn, his hard hand twisting the kernels loose.” (OD 50) Returning to the barn, the African American continues the hard work that the squire purports to practice. What makes Culla’s first incident Gothic? The decrepit farmland, tools, and abode is in ruins. However, the macabre arises during the squire’s pursuit of Culla that culminates in him encountering the triune.
Though scholarship has compared the triune to the Holy Trinity, within the context of Gnostic appropriation of Christian symbol and McCarthy’s own subversion of the Christian and Gothic in Outer Dark, the triune are the violent otherworldly Archons. Diane Luce notes that the “three [act] as unholy inversions of the Father (the leader), the Son (Harmon), and the Holy Spirit (the mute, whom he also associates with the Freudian principle of the Id)... But in fact all three are associated with lawless authority (as well as cosmic law), violence, and ignorance with reference to the gnostic conception.”

The triune are described as “Marvelously armed with crude agrarian weapons, spade and brush-hook...parodic figures transposed live and intact and violent out of a proletarian mural and set mobile upon the empty fields.” (OD 35) The “parodic figures” from a “proletarian mural” anticipate a similar incident in Blood Meridian- the legion of horribles that descend upon the filibusters and later, the Glanton Gang. The triune’s murder of the squire occurs after his mistreatment of Culla, “the next one came up behind him sideways in a sort of dance and swung the brush-hook it missed his neck and took him in the small of the back severing his spine and when he fell he fell unhinged sideways and without a cry.” (OD 51) The Triune’s movement through the Tennessee landscape anticipates the violent grotesque conclusion of Outer Dark. The Triune’s embodiment of violence, importantly they are the unopposed demons in opposition to an absent Deity.

The conclusion of Outer Dark sees the culmination of the subversion of Barthian theology through the triumph of the Archon triunes. The arrival of Culla and Rinthy to their ultimate destination is the final subversion of O’Connor and the Christian in favor of the Gnostic. For Culla it manifests through his escape from his multicursal labyrinth only to discover the triune and endless waste land. “Holme came limping out of the woods and

71 Luce, 2009, 88
crossed a small field toward the light, insects rising out of the dark and breaking on his face like rain and his fingers trailing in the tops of the wet sedge. He could hear no sound save a faint moaning like the wind but there was no wind.” (OD 231) Escaping from the Dantean and Hawthornian woods Culla is confronted with ruined agrarianism, beset by a seeming plague of “insects rising out of the dark and breaking on his face like rain.” The insects are a of Biblical plague, and instead of a Messianic figure or the salvation of trinity that will cure the waste land, Culla is confronted by the Triune, “They wore the same clothes sat in the same attitudes, endowed with a dream’s redundancy. Like revenants that reoccur in lands laid waste with fever: spectral, palpable as stone.” (OD 231)

Similarly, Culla’s child the initial symbol of innocence that has been the focus of Rinthy’s quest has been tortured by the triunes in grotesque fashion. “He looked at the child. It had a healed burn all down one side of it and the skin was papery and wrinkled like an old man’s. It was naked and half coated with dust so that it seemed lightly furred and when it turned to look up at him he saw one eyeless and angry red socket like a stokehole to a brain in flames.” (OD 231-32) In the Gnostic cosmos there is no morality, no intervention, and no humanity. The Tennessee nightmare is one where demons roam in opposition to the decency of humanity. His son’s murder marks Culla’s complicity in the archon’s actions. Culla offers no intervention or resistance, rather Culla “picked up the child. It made no gesture at all. It dangled with his hands like a dressed rabbit, a gross eldritch doll with ricketsprung legs and one eye opening and closing softly like a naked owls.” (OD 235) Culla’s abandonment of the child leads to its graphic death, as one member of the triune in a gross parody and grotesque appropriation of communion, eats the child.

Culla’s journey culminates in the inversion of the original Holy Grail conclusion, with Gnostic “feelings of forlornness depicted as ‘numbness,’ ‘sleep,’ ‘drunkenness,’ and ‘oblivion’… all the characteristics of the underworld.” (TGR 68) Culla’s exit from the triune’s cannibalism
onto a “road [that] went on through the shadeless burn and for miles there were only the charred shapes of trees in a dead land where nothing moved save windy rifts of ash that rose dolorous and died down again the blackened corridors... the road brought him into a swamp. And that was all. 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.” (OD 242) Culla’s wanderings are not over and his Gnostic nightmare will never end. For the Tennessee countryside is a waste land of desolation and waste. The “garden of dead” is the final inversion of the Southern Agrarian tradition, from the cultivation of piety in Crevecoeur, to the contemplation of labor under the second wave of settlers, the countryside is now laid waste in ruin and has been devoured by the Gnostic nightmare.

In an inversion of McCarthy’s own novel, The Road (2006) that ends with a father’s sacrifice for the sake of his child who “carries the fire... its inside you. It always was there”; (TR 4) Culla has let his child be devoured by the Archons who have consumed the “fire,” the Divine spark. “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.” (OD 242)
Chapter Three. Mausoleum of Hope and Desire: Southern Influences in Suttree’s Knoxville

*Suttree* (1979) is the last of McCarthy’s four Southern novels. It is a sprawling novel that was written over the course of twenty years. Like *The Orchard Keeper*, *Suttree* is unique for its autobiographical content that details McCarthy’s adolescence and young adulthood in Knoxville Tennessee. Beginning on the banks of Knoxville’s Tennessee River, it is picaresque in its depiction of the sophisticated and reflective Cornelius Suttree and “the country mouse” (Suttree 58) Gene Harrogate. Harrogate is descended from a Southern prankster lineage beginning with George Washington Harris’s Sut Lovingood, whose repellent behavior finds appeal in the subversive. Southwestern humor was continued through Twain’s roguish Huck Finn and Faulkner’s unsympathetic Jason Compson, McCarthy’s Harrogate is the continuation of Lovingood’s rural, authentic, and humorous antics that are juxtaposed by the disconnected urban experiences of the educated Suttree.

*Suttree* is filled with autobiographical moments from McCarthy’s own life. Suttree follows McCarthy’s dropping out from the University of Tennessee, his separation from his wife, the severing of his upper class familial ties, and his life in abject squalor. As Suttree is slowly detached from relationship and connection, McCarthy grants the reader progressive access into Suttree’s tortured and alienated consciousness. For an author who is infamous

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72 Cormac McCarthy Papers
73 There are parallels to Sut Lovingood and the “Wise Fools” of Shakespeare, Stephen M. Ross notes that Lovingood acts as a “kind of backwoods court jester delighting and edifying with his stories, his wit, and his fantastic pranks... he serves the fool’s office of exposing lies and escaping unscathed, instigating pranks against pretenders... [and above all else] like his Shakespearian counterparts, a wise fool after all.” (Ross, 2001, 238)
74 Ross, 2001, 236
for “rarely [admitting] us into the sanctuaries of his character’s minds”\textsuperscript{75} this is remarkable as it “presents his [Suttree’s] settings through language not usually allowed [from] his characters, in neither their speech nor their thoughts and feelings.”\textsuperscript{76} Throughout the meandering episodes around Knoxville and up the river, “He [Suttree] prefers to live authentically, even in suffering and deprivation, rather than to live in falsehood in comfort.”\textsuperscript{77} Like Lear who is stripped of his familial relationships and mind, Suttree experiences exacerbating isolation that culminates in his descent into hallucinatory typhoid contracted madness. Despite the personal moments found in Suttree’s tragedy or Harrogate’s comic pranks, \textit{Suttree} is best envisioned through the slow movement of the polluted Tennessee River, that “reads like a doomed version of Huckleberry Finn.”\textsuperscript{78}

As previously explored, McCarthy’s \textit{The Orchard Keeper} and \textit{Outer Dark} are indebted to three Southern literary influences- the Southern Agrarians, Faulkner, and Flannery O’Connor. The Southern Agrarians provide the greatest point of influence through Suttree’s search for the authentic in a modernizing and secular world. Yet, despite detailing a thorough topography of Knoxville, there is very little that marks \textit{Suttree} as a southern novel. There are brief flashes through Harrogate, the moonlighting melonmouter and his sackful of litter-mice are two such examples, but unlike \textit{The Orchard Keeper} there is no moonshine runner or frontiersmen. Suttree is born and raised in Knoxville and is the product of the modernity that the Southern Agrarians feared. Though Suttree has managed to encode the city streets with his own mythology and sacred meaning, McCarthy’s narrator reminds the reader through a series of broken and ruined images that Suttree’s authenticity is temporal and will exist only

\textsuperscript{75} Wallach, 1995, xviii
\textsuperscript{76} Ellis, 2006, 2
\textsuperscript{77} Bell, 1988, 72
\textsuperscript{78} Charyn, 1979
in Suttree’s lifetime. Suttree’s search for the authentic in an inauthentic world is destined for failure in an urban setting that instead of cyclically renewing and rejuvenating is constantly fractured and changing. Suttree’s life on the Tennessee River, his rejection of the materialistic, and his ultimate exit from Knoxville are all attempts to locate the authenticity of John Wesley. Suttree is the reversal of John Wesley’s course, instead of being the spark of authenticity in an inauthentic world, Suttree must search for the spark that has been extinguished.

Though the Southern Agrarians stake the claims for Suttree’s philosophy, Faulkner and O’Connor provide the transference of personality and influence that situates Suttree within its Southern literary setting. Despite McCarthy’s inspiration from Faulkner through Suttree’s narrative tongue and O’Connor through the grotesque forms of the Southern Gothic, Suttree is McCarthy’s transcendence of his literary influences that permit the creation of his own literary identity. Instead of appropriating scenes from Faulkner and O’Connor, McCarthy returns to The Orchard Keeper and Outer Dark. Suttree’s engagement with McCarthy’s prior works anticipate Suttree’s legacy as the last of McCarthy’s southern works through its engagement and resolving of his Southern legacy.

The Waste Land.

Though discussed further, The Orchard Keeper provides the linkage between the Southern Agrarians and the isolating modernity of Knoxville. Suttree’s opening in a metropolis of the dead evokes the cemetery featured at the beginning and conclusion of The Orchard Keeper. Yet Knoxville’s graveyard is devoid of The Orchard Keeper’s dogged old elm that lies mangled in wrought iron. Thematically both cemetery’s highlight the “myth, legend, [and] dust.” The necropolis is cluttered with broken images and grotesque decay. McCarthy’s connections to The Orchard Keeper are underscored through John Wesley’s interaction in
Knoxville that is juxtaposed by Suttree and later Harrogate’s own experiences. John Wesley’s departure from Red Branch anticipates Suttree’s own exit from Knoxville. In both cases, the protagonists depart their inauthentic and hostile worlds in an exodus that is ultimately concerned with the departure from modernity.

*Suttree* opens with a lengthy prologue that removes itself from the character narrator of Suttree, instead positioning Knoxville as an eternal entity that will exist beyond Suttree’s lifetime. Knoxville is described in the language of the O’Connorian Southern Gothic grotesque and in the imagery of the dream state nightmare of *Outer Dark* with shadowy forms that drift through the early morning. Knoxville is decrepit and ruined, evoking Eliot’s *The Waste Land* that laments humanity’s descent into corrupting modernity. The prologue begins with a narration, that betrays the cold and inhuman. “Dear friend now in the dusty clockless hours of the town when the streets lie black and steaming in the wake of the watertrucks and now when the drunk and the homeless have washed up in the lee of walls in alleys or abandoned lots.” (Suttree 3) Like Eliot’s *The Waste Land*, Knoxville is a world in “Which symbols fail, one I which mythologies collapse in a heap of broken images... the demythologizing and desacramentalizing.”79 The collapse of symbols and mythologies recalls John Wesley’s own attempts to reclaim mythology. But unlike John Wesley, Suttree has no surrogate father figures to direct or share. The industrialization and isolation of Berman’s modernity is echoed through the soulless and isolating images of Knoxville. A study of *Suttree* reveals the culmination of The Southern Agrarians protest of modernity, and Suttree is left to search for meaning. There is “the persistence of basic human emotions and collective humane impulses against soul-deadening commodification”80

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79 Brooker, Bentley, 1990, 164
80 Holloway, 2002, xiii
The “thin dark trees through yon iron palings where the dead keep their own small metropolis.” (Suttree 3) With the “iron palings” inverting the wrought iron choking of The Orchard Keeper’s elm. The “lightwire shadows make a gothic harp of cellar doors no soul shall walk save you.” (Suttree 3) Like Outer Dark, the Knoxville is urban equivalent of Culla’s nightmarish Tennessee landscape. There is a “faint and steady rain of the same forms burnt and lifeless.” (Suttree 4) Evoking the road and trees that lie in cataclysmic waste, the narrator notes the “pavings rent with ruin, the slow cataclysm of neglect, the wires that belly pole to pole across the constellations hung with kitestring.” (Suttree 3) This is an encampment of the damned, and evoking Walter Benjamin’s violent descriptions of urbanity McCarthy echoes Benjamin, believing “there is no document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism.”\footnote{Benjamin, 1969, 256} “In the urban context, violence goes far beyond the brutal physical destruction, reconstruction, and decay of cities through their existence, or the institutionalized control or ‘administration’ of their residents. Violence is to be understood not only in terms of economic and power relations underscoring the city as a text and cultural monument, but also in the realm of the city’s symbolic representation and organization, in terms of the willful erasure of community, experience, memory, and narrative by the victorious conquerors who, as Benjamin tells us, forms a chain of succession of power.”\footnote{Benjamin, 1969, 75} For “This city constructed on no known paradigm, a mongrel architecture reading back through the works of man in a brief delineation of the aberrant disordered and mad. A carnival of shapes.” (Suttree 3-4) 

The moving Tennessee River like Knoxville is its own character indomitable and moving episodic and picaresque. Written in the polysyndetic, complex, and high tongue of
Faulkner, *Suttree* is the culmination of McCarthy’s assimilation and transcendence of his Southern literary influences. Suttree opens with the titular character on skiff oaring down the Tennessee river like Charon on the river Styx, Knoxville is the underworld, and as policeman pull another jumper from the river, it is evident that Suttree floats in a wretched land. The allegorical and aesthetic style of McCarthy, that is depicted throughout *Blood Meridian*, begins with Suttree’s hallucinations and nightmares. “He closed his eyes. The grey water that dripped from him was rank with caustic. By the side of a dark dream road he’d seen a sparrow hawk nailed to a barn door. But what loomed was a flayed man with his brisket tacked open like a cooling beef and his skull peeled, blue and bulbous and paley luminescent, black grots his eyeholes and bloody mouth gaped tongueless. The traveler had seized his fingers in his jaws, but it was not alone this horror that he cried. Beyond the flayed man dimly adumbrate another figure paled, for his surgeons move about the world even as you and I. (Suttree 86) In a vision that alludes back to *The Orchard Keeper* and *Outer Dark*, Suttree foreshadows Harrogate movement into cavernous depths. Like John Wesley, Suttree “sees a dead sparrow hawk nailed to a barn door” that alludes back to the arbitrary violence imposed by modernity. There is the tortured traveler, who like Culla’s tortured child has been tormented beyond recognition. Lastly, there is *Child of God’s* Lester Ballard, who after his death is donated as a cadaver “for surgeons who move about the world.”

It is important to juxtapose Knoxville’s depiction in *The Orchard Keeper* with *Suttree’s* depiction of Knoxville. Knoxville is first seen in the first chapter of *The Orchard Keeper* that sees Kenneth Rattner and Sylder’s independently visiting Knoxville that culminates in the moral corruption of modernity manifest through Rattner’s death and Sylder’s acquisition of his car that is used for bootlegging. Knoxville’s degenerating influence upon the ‘plain folk’ of the South illustrate the warnings of the Southern Agrarians.
Continuing the comparison between *The Orchard Keeper* and *Suttree*, Knoxville is notable for being the manifestation of all that the Southern Agrarians resisted. Modernity, industrialization, and secularization are rampant in the city. Yet this trope employed by Faulkner and *The Orchard Keeper* is subverted within *Suttree* through a type of authenticity found in the rural and itinerate Harrogate and the denizens of Knoxville’s criminals.

Before examining *Suttree* and Harrogate’s Knoxville, it is important to revisit John Wesley’s entrance into Knoxville. As previously discussed the episode draws upon the Gothic grotesque of Flannery O’Connor, particularly through *The Violent Bear It Away*. Within Knoxville is the complete destruction of the natural and the totality of the industrial. For John Wesley, Knoxville is the polluted waste land of industrialization, with its “swirling chains of soot about on the stone steps.” (TOK 79) There are religious marchers who pass “in a canopy of heat, sweaty and desperate looking... in an enormous shudder of sound and the then the buses came, laborious in low gear, churning out balls of blue smoke... Long paper banners ran the length of the bus proclaiming for Christ in tall red letters, and for sobriety, offering to vote against the devil when and wherever he ran for office” (TOK 81) Evoking the death of the religious are the marchers “proclaiming for Christ” who must vocalize what is becoming lost in an increasingly secular world.

The vices of modernity manifest in the calls for “sobriety” in the wake of Prohibition, anticipating the futility of the law. John Wesley continues his trek through the waste land, and then “he was still standing on the sidewalk and now he saw the city, steamed and weaving in heat, and rising above the new facings of glass and tile the bare outlandish buildings, towering columns of brick adorned with fantastic motley; arches, lintels, fluted and arabesque, flowered columns and crowstepped gables... On the corner a man was screaming incoherently and brandishing a tattered Bible.” (TOK 81-82) The “man screaming incoherently” is the urban prophet of O’Connor’s Tarwater and *Suttree’s* crazed evangelist.
In later chapters, John Wesley's experiences within Knoxville act as the ultimate formative interaction that pushes John Wesley away from urban modernity towards an appreciation of the authentic rural agrarian. In a vignette that introduces Knoxville to John Wesley and foreshadows the disillusionment arising from the isolating effects of modernity, a young John Wesley encounters an injured baby sparrow hawk on a mountain road. In an act of compassion “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.” (TOK 77) Despite his treatment and care for the baby sparrow hawk it dies but the resourceful John Wesley takes the dead sparrow hawk into Knoxville to redeem its corpse for the one dollar hawk bounty. John Wesley’s initial care for the sparrow hawk stems from his respect for habitat and life. Though John Wesley can hunt, he does not attempt to hunt the sparrow hawk for profit in resistance to a history of the frontier’s environmental exploitation manifest through the overhunting of buffalo and clearing of the woodlands for rural farmland.

For Suttree, Knoxville is vastly different. It is corrupt but also familiar. Through “Cornelius Suttree, the novel’s eponymous protagonist, McCarthy provides us with a central narrative consciousness who is fiercely intelligent and haunted by fear of his own death.”\(^{83}\) Yet Suttree’s intelligence promotes a symptom of modernity, an intelligence that leads him to be plagued by his hyperconsciousness, especially the crippling fear of his own morality”\(^{84}\) Like *Outer Dark’s* opening, Knoxville, the Tennessee River, and McAnally Flats are populated by diseased and tortured pariahs.

As Sutree is born in the modernity of Knoxville his experience is unique relative to the agrarian John Wesley and rural Harrogate. The reader is granted access into Suttree’s

\(^{83}\) Walsh, 2009, 179

\(^{84}\) Walsh, 2009, 180
mind through the shared experiences of middle class life and education. “Market Street on Monday morning, Knoxville Tennessee. In this year nineteen fifty-one, Suttree with his parcel of fish going past the rows of derelict trucks piled with produce and flower admired them with their hot eyes and dogeared bibles, God’s barkers gone forth in the world like the prophets of old.” (Suttree 66)

_Suttree_ sees the continuation of McCarthy’s Southern Agrarian and Faulknerian legacy from _The Orchard Keeper_, the continuation of O’Connor’s Southern Gothic from _Outer Dark_, and the continuation of Eliot’s _The Waste Land_ in its depiction of decaying urban modernity. “The Orchard Keeper as both an elegy and a eulogy, and the same reading could also be applied to _Suttree_.” For some, “Modernism in its religious context means nothing less than the betrayal of the faith, the wily machinations of overeducated men intent on tearing down the truth of the Bible, denying the divinity of Christ, and casting doubts on all we had been taught was trustworthy and true.” It is a Southern edifice for the devastating and depersonalizing effects of modernity. It focuses upon Suttree and Harrogate, victims of their struggle.

Suttree’s visit with the mussel fishing family continue the recurrence of the manifestations of _The Orchard Keeper_ and _Outer Dark_. In it is Suttree’s realization of the authentic. Like Culla his wanderings have brought him to a point of family, however the arrival of the two hunters evocative of the triune couple by the supernatural death of the family’s daughter and Suttree’s daughter forces him from the family back into Knoxville. Though not overtly Gnostic, the hunters are described similarly to the triune. McCarthy’s influences from _Outer Dark_ are evident through the Southern Gothic depiction of Knoxville.

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85 Ibid. 203
86 Cox, 1984, 181
In an inversion of *Outer Dark*’s rural Tennessee waste land populated by the grotesque and Gnostic, *Suttree* is a modern urban waste land that is similarly grotesque. The triune reappear in the form of two hunters, who portend the death of the Suttree’s girlfriend. The “two possumhunters... squatted on their haunches, side by side.” (Suttree 358) Their squatting upon their haunches evoke the triune, who were initially introduced in *Outer Dark*, “squatting on their haunches, eating wordlessly with beltknives, until the bearded one rose” (OD 3) “[They] had a curious way of turning their heads toward each other, like mechanical dolls” (Suttree 360) Similarly the hunters anticipate Suttree’s exit from Knoxville that sees him chased by hounds that similarly evoke Ownby conclusion that sees the hound shot by Legwater.

The moment of Suttree’s exit from Knoxville begins with his contraction of typhoid fever. In hallucinatory dream Suttree is exposed to a series of images “I am going out of the world, a long silent scream on rails down the dark either slope of the hemisphere that is death’s prelude.” (Suttree 452) After his crazed hallucinations Suttree is discharged from the hospital and decides to depart Knoxville. In an inversion of the opening of *The Orchard Keeper* that saw the novel open with the unfeeling and inescapable highway of modernity appropriated from Robert Penn Warren’s *All the Kings Men*, Suttree stands at the highway waiting to escape and depart away from modernity. In a conclusion that culminates in a scene evocative of *The Orchard Keeper*, Suttree departs from the city, watched by a boy and baying hounds that evokes *The Orchard Keeper*’s Arthur Ownby. “He had a small suitcase... a boy was going along the woods with a pail and he leaned to each, ladling out water in a tin dipper... They nodded to each other and the boy turned and looked toward the road.” (470-471) Across the highway, Suttree sees the reflection of himself. In this moment Suttree is confronted with the reality of modernity, for “Across the road a construction gang was at work and he watched them. A backhoe was dragging out a ditch and a caterpillar was going along
the bank with mounds of pale clay across its canted blade. Carpenters were hammering up forms and a cement truck waiting on with its drum slowly clanking. Suttree watched this industry accomplish itself in the hot afternoon.” (Suttree 470) The construction is an artifact from his previous experiences. Though Suttree comes from an educated world that would see Suttree educated, married, and respectable, Suttree has rejected that life in favor of his search for authenticity.

As Suttree departs from Knoxville he is confronted by “An enormous lank hound had come out of the meadow by the river like a hound from the depths and was sniffing at the spot where Suttree stood.” (Suttree 471) The “lank hound” evokes Ownby’s hound, representative of the Southern Agrarian way of life that has been absent from Suttree. Though Suttree is exposed to the choking modernity of urbanity and industrialization, in a mythic sense, Suttree interacts with and anticipates the authentic. Through his vision of the hound, Suttree’s hallucinations and narrative function as experiences that transcend the nightmarish to affirm the importance of The Orchard Keeper’s Southern Agrarianism. “Somewhere in the gray wood by the river is the huntsman and in the brooming corn and in the castellated press of cities. 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.” (Suttree 471)
Coda. It’s Easier to Bleed than Sweat: The Inversion of Southern Echoes in *Blood Meridian: The Evening Redness in the West*

McCarthy’s movement to the frontier is the culmination and resolution of the themes explored in his Southern novels. *Blood Meridian* follows the Kid, a stoic character, devoid of personality except “in him broods already a taste for mindless violence.” (BM 3) He is the embodiment of McCarthy’s mythic character archetype, seen in John Wesley, Culla, and Rinthy. *Blood Meridian* is set in the aftermath of the Mexican American War that materializes Frederick Jackson Turner’s definition of the frontier as the “meeting place between savagery and civilization.” It is a prospective dominion for American settlement and colonization and is the battlefield where the mythic frontier hero wages imperialist war against a hostile wilderness. Despite this setting that evokes the westward expansion of American Exceptionalism and Manifest Destiny, it is quickly replaced by a visceral and atavistic violence. There is no civilizing of the West, instead it is an amoral blank landscape of brutality and bloodshed.

The violence is introduced early and rapidly, with the Kid’s gratuitous murder of a bartender who fails to serve him a drink. The Kid smashed a “bottle across the barman’s skull and [cramming] the jagged remnant into his eye” (BM 27) and the next morning the Kid awakens in the nave of a ruined church “and along the back wall lay the remains of several bodies, one a child.” (BM 28) In a juxtaposition to the vignettes of *The Orchard Keeper* and *Suttree*, *Blood Meridian* follows the direction of *Outer Dark*, with the Kid’s wanderings similar to Culla’s meandering journey through a hostile landscape. But this landscape is even more forsaken than *Outer Dark*’s “spectral waste... a landscape of the damned” (OD 242)

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87 Turner 1893, 32
rather it is one populated by “a legion of horribles... wardrobed out of a fevered dream” (BM 54), of scalp hunters that parade down adulating streets holding trophies of “desiccated heads of the enemy [celebrated] through that fantasy of music and flowers,” (BM 172) and ultimately the Judge, who preaches his own religion: “war was always here. Before man was, war waited for him. The ultimate trade awaiting its ultimate practitioner.” (BM 248)

McCarthys Southern works anticipate the questions that arise from Blood Meridian. In a landscape dominated by limitless violence, that is both the absolute extreme of the human experience and a horror that for some is inaccessible, how should one interpret “the random violence that imposes a repetitive structure on its plot and relentlessly drives it forward.” 88 Like the influences charted in Suttree, in Blood Meridian there is an undercurrent of each of McCartyhs preceding Southern works.

From The Orchard Keeper comes the resurgence of a McCarthyian Frederick Jackson Turner frontier thesis. The westward movement of the frontier manifests in the first wave of the Glanton Gang, but they are no frontiersman or pathfinders. Rather they are the first wave of violence and conquest, the forces of a barbaric civilization that manifest in the filibuster Captain White. Accompanying these agents are the unavoidable forces of modernity found in the Judge’s rationalism, the progress of the epilogue’s telegraph lines, and the absence of the Christian. In contrast to John Wesley’s search for authenticity in the dogged remnants of rural agrarianism, the Kid is a silent interloper whose single deviation from the Judge’s course condemns him to death.

The grotesque and gratuitous violence of Outer Dark anticipates the sustained violence of Blood Meridian. In a mirror of the Gnostic waste land from the rural Tennessee countryside is the apocalyptic and amoral red wilderness of Blood Meridian populated by

88 Dorson, 2016, 151
seeming endless incarnations of *Outer Dark’s* Gnostic triune. However, *Blood Meridian’s* desert is vacant. Instead of Tennessee farmsteads in grotesque decline, the desert is marked by slaughter and desolation. The landscape is evocative of Margaret Kean’s “wilderness setting employed not merely as a geographical or scriptural detail but as a means of constructing an internalized landscape of the mind.”\(^8^9\) This culminates in the Judge, an orator who espouses his justification for violence through his own religion, that of the archon’s Gnostic theology. To realize the influence of *Outer Dark* upon *Blood Meridian* merits a quick digression to outline Leo Daugherty’s article “Gravers False and True: Blood Meridian as Gnostic Tragedy” (1993) that introduced McCarthy scholarship to Gnostic theology and its influence.

Daugherty outlines the case that *Blood Meridian* is a waste land of Gnosticism. The “secular mysticism” and “nihilism” that Vereen Bell was unable to define through a Christian lens in both *Outer Dark* and *Blood Meridian* is explained by the Gnostic. Daugherty’s reading is useful for its synopsis of Gnosticism, however his application unto *Blood Meridian* is exclusive to the Judge. Daugherty neglects to apply Gnosticism to the ex-priest Tobin or onto the landscape itself. *Gravers False and True* begins by outlining the theology of Gnosticism from Han Jonas’s *The Gnostic Religion* that was similarly introduced and summarized in this thesis’s *Outer Dark* chapter. For Daugherty, Judge Holden is a Gnostic archon, the demonic wardens “that collectively rule over the world... the warders of the cosmic prison. [In] tyrannical world rule.”\(^9^0\) If Judge Holden is an archon, then the Glanton Gang’s exploits are orchestrated by his will. Like the demiurge, the first archon that created the earthly prison, “he [the Judge] is jealous, he is vengeful, he is wrathful, he is powerful and- most centrally-
he possesses, and is possessed by, a will. And he is enraged by any existence or any act outside that will."\textsuperscript{91} Returning to the relationship between the Christian and the Gnostic, the Judge's violent wanderings, articulated by the Judge's belief that “if war is not holy man is nothing but antic clay” (BM 250) is the manifestation of “the difference between Christian and Gnostic philosophical theology seems to lie in their attitudes toward the world. For any Gnostic the world is really hell.”\textsuperscript{92}

*Outer Dark*'s influence is seen through a comparison of the triune and the Judge as marauding archons. However, an alternative interpretation for the Judge not discussed in the literary criticism is that he represents the practice of Gnostic libertinism. Jonas notes that “the law of ‘Thou shalt’ and ‘Thou shalt not’ promulgated by the Creator is just one more form of the ‘cosmic tyranny.’”\textsuperscript{93} A reading that will be explored later in the coda will apply a reading of Flannery O'Connor onto Gnostic libertinism. Instead of acting as a violent archon that seeks to implement his will, the Judge’s violence could be “the intentional violation of the demiurgical norms the pneumatic thwarts the design of the Archons and paradoxically contributes to the work of salvation. This antinomian libertinism exhibits more forcefully that than the ascetic version the nihilistic element contained in gnostic acosmism.”\textsuperscript{94}

The influence of *Suttree* manifests in a comparison of the nightmarish fevered hallucinations of Suttree and the incarnation of *Blood Meridian*’s hellscape. The two novels represent McCarthy’s crossing from the South to the West. Underlying this shift is the juxtaposition of Suttree’s search for redemption and *Blood Meridian*’s lack thereof. Lydia Cooper notes that “*Suttree* and *Blood Meridian* both emphasize the critical role of genuine

\textsuperscript{91} Daugherty, 1999, 160  
\textsuperscript{92} Grant, 1959, 150  
\textsuperscript{93} Jonas, 1958, 46  
\textsuperscript{94} Jonas, 1958, 46
penitence in permitting even the slightest possibility of redemption.\textsuperscript{95} For Suttree, his search for redemption leads him to wander Knoxville searching for, finding, and losing authenticity in the hidden vagrant margins of humanity. For the Kid, it arises from the desensitization of transgression and the violence of the frontier. But the kid’s transgressions are not absolute, and his failure to execute wounded Dick Shelby is his resistance to the Judge that condemns the kid to death.

\textit{Blood Meridian’s} hallucinatory episodes underscore this point. Upon joining the Manifest Destiny filibusters, the kid and Captain White attempt to ambush the Comanches. But “from the offside of those ponies there rose a fabled horde of mounted lancers and archers bearing shields bedight with bits of broken mirrorglass that cast a thousand unpieced suns against the eyes of their enemies. A legion of horribles, hundreds in number, half naked or clad in costumes attic or biblical or wardrobed out of a fevered dream with the skins of animals and silk finery and pieces of uniform still tracked with the blood of prior owners, coats of slain dragoons, frogged and braided cavalry jackets, one in a stovepipe hat and one with an umbrella and one in white stockings and a bloodstained wedding veil and some in headgear or crane feathers or rawhide helmets that bore the horns of bull or buffalo and one in a pigeontailed coat worn backwards and otherwise naked and one in the armor of a Spanish conquistador, the breastplate and pauldrons deeply dented with old blows of mace or sabre done in another country by men whose very bones were dust and many with their braids spliced up with the hair of other beasts until they trailed upon the ground and their horses' ears and tails worked with bits of brightly colored cloth and one whose horse's whole head was painted crimson red and all the horsemen's faces gaudy and grotesque with daubings like a company of mounted clowns, death hilarious, all howling in a barbarous tongue and

\textsuperscript{95} Cooper, 2011, 53
riding down upon them like a horde from a hell more horrible yet than the brimstone land of Christian reckoning, screeching and yammering and clothed in smoke like those vaporous beings in regions beyond right knowing where the eye wanders and the lip jerks and drools. Oh my god, said the sergeant. (BM 54-55) The Comanche ambush represents the totality of Blood Meridian’s violence. There is “the fabled horde” and the “legion of horribles” that underscore the destruction and violence that is as ancient and primordial as humanity. In a series of images evoking Eliot, there is a vast assortment of uniform, from “calvary jackets,” “coats from slain dragoons,” “armor of a Spanish conquistador,” or a “wedding veil” that represents the American conquest and settlement of the frontier. The disparate collection of the Comanche’s clothing is the undercurrent of violence found in the annals of history. Like Outer Dark that sees the expectation of redemption met with the reality of an absent Gnostic Deity, so the Kid and the filibusters meet the fabled horde.

McCarthy’s final influence from O’Connor arises from the Judge’s murder and sodomizing of the kid in the outhouse. In a conclusion that is the appropriation and subversion of the The Violent Bear It Away’s conclusion, that sees Young Tarwater sodomized by his Friend, Satan. Yet in an act of grotesque salvation that inspires a spiritual awakening and revelation to go into the secular city, a spiritual waste land, “to warn the children of God of the terrible speed of mercy.” (TVBIA 242) Like the Kid, Young Tarwater is a “stranger from the violent country where the silence is never broken except to the truth.” (TVBIA 242) yet like Barth, the mysterious grotesque, whether it be the cataclysm of World War I or the friend’s sodomy are the opportunities for salvation. For the Kid, Barth’s negative theology is once again inverted. Young Tarwater uses the grotesque to break out of savage influence but in this same moment the Kid is destroyed.
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